



Maya's Notebook

By Isabel Allende
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Questions for Discussion

1. Describe Maya. What are her greatest strengths and her worst flaws? How are these characteristics reflected in the choices she makes, and how do those choices complicate her life? What does she do to make things better?
2. Why does Maya keep her notebook? Do you think that recording the events of her life offers her insight about her life and her world? Do you think she sees herself—the person she is—clearly?
3. Maya went to a good public school in Berkeley. Why do you think she didn't feel like she fit in? What draws her to her schoolmates, Sarah and Debbie? Why are adolescents easily swayed by their peers? Can adults protect them from negative influences—and if so, how? Counselors try to reach Maya, but she rejects them. Why?

4. What is Maya's relationship with her grandparents like? What ultimately separates her from them? Might events have turned out differently for Maya if her parents had raised her? She claims that of her two grandparents, Popo is the most influential person in her life. Would you agree? In her darkest time, why didn't Maya reach out to her grandmother, Nini? Why doesn't Nini ever lose hope for Maya? Is it ever okay to let go of someone who engages in terrible and self-destructive behavior? How might things have turned out for Maya if her grandmother had turned her back on her?
5. Think about the adults in Maya's life: her grandparents, Nini and Popo, Manuel Arias, Mike O'Kelly, her stepmother Susan, Roy Fedgerwick, Brandon Leeman, Officer Arana, Daniel Goodrich. Choose a few of these adults and analyze their relationships with the teenager. What do adults do to help or hinder her? Do you think they understand her? Talk about how their choices and actions affected Maya.
6. Compare and contrast Maya's worlds in San Francisco, in Las Vegas, and in Chiloé. What adjectives would Maya use to describe each of them? What does each mean to her? How well does she adjust to life in Las Vegas and in Chile? What does living on a small island in a foreign country offer her? Do you think she misses anything about her old life in America? Would you be able to change the way you live easily or would it be difficult?
7. Think about the arc of Maya's journey. What is she like at the beginning of the story and at the end? How much responsibility does she bear for what happens to her, and how much is it the fault of others? Do you think she feels any guilt or remorse? What did she learn from all that happened to her? What do you think she will do with her life going forward?
8. If you are a younger reader, how do your own experiences color your opinion of Maya? Do you have a favorite character, and if so, what draws you to this particular figure? Imagine Maya from an adult perspective. Do your impressions of her change? Would you be friends with a girl like Maya? What drives teens to acts of self-destruction? What would you, as a young person, want an adult to do to help troubled adolescents like Maya?
9. When she is sixteen, Maya's father sends her to an academy for "unmanageable teenagers" in Oregon. The academy focused on three questions: Who are you? What do you want to do with your life? And how are you going to achieve it? What would Maya's answers be when she first arrives there, and how would she answer those questions after a few months in Chiloé?
10. Think about what Maya learns about her family's past and the military dictatorship in Chile that transformed her grandparents' lives. How do events that occurred long before her birth touch Maya's life? Do you think her own experiences allow her to better appreciate the pain and terror that they endured?
11. The story is told in sequential chunks that interweave past and present. How does this plot structure impact your reading experience?
12. Why did you or your group choose to read *Maya's Notebook*? Did it meet your initial expectations? What was most memorable for you in reading the story?