



Discussion Questions: ***The Black Madonna*** by Louisa Ermelino

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1. Is the community portrayed in this novel male dominated or do women actually hold more power in the neighborhood?
2. Why does Teresa choose to stay married to Angelo, a man who has not been around for years? Consider the time and setting of the story.
3. Why are marriage and childbirth so significant to each of the characters in this novel?
4. From the start of the novel there is tension between Antoinette and Teresa. What is the source of their tension? How does it affect their children? Is Antoinette a sympathetic character? How does her character evolve over the course of the novel?
5. Discuss the author's detailed descriptions of food throughout and the importance of cooking and of family dinner gatherings. How does food signify a close family? How does it make a woman such as Antoinette feel needed by her children?
6. The mothers in the novel are determined to protect their beloved sons from harm. In what ways does their determination prove to be problematic?
7. What brings the 3 boys central to the novel, Jumbo, Salvatore and Nicky together as friends? In what ways are they alike? How do they differ?
8. Among the Italian families described in the novel it is a tradition that when the children become adults they will still care for their parents. The children in the novel feel a strong sense of responsibility to their families. How does each boy respond to this tradition? How does it affect the paths they choose in life?
9. One of the themes the novel deals with is assimilation. Why do you think the families of this New York neighborhood are so resistant to and suspicious of the customs of their adopted country? Why does assimilation have a slightly negative connotation for them? Some characters assimilate to American ways more than others. Are they viewed as heroes, traitors to their roots or a little of both?