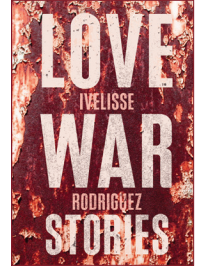


READING GROUP GUIDE

LOVE WAR STORIES by Ivelisse Rodriguez
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1. *Love War Stories* explores the lives and loves of Puerto Rican people living in New York, Massachusetts, and Puerto Rico itself. What roles do place, community, and family play in shaping these characters' experiences?
2. How does the title of the collection connect with the stories' overarching themes? In what ways is love shown to be like and unlike war? Who is at war in these stories?
3. The stories in this collection include a number of Spanish words mixed into the English text. How does this bilingualism affect your reading experience? What is its effect on the narrative?
4. In the first short story, "El Qué Dirán," Noelia's quinceañera takes place in the shadow of Tía Lola's heartbreak. How does Tía Lola's trauma inform Noelia's burgeoning womanhood? Why doesn't she want Noelia to "be a woman" (27)?
5. In "Holyoke, Mass.: An Ethnography," *The Boys and Girls of Holyoke* is a book showcasing the young people of Holyoke. The narrator knows the ethnographer's work is incomplete, saying that "his photos, notes, observations, would be all that he was able to unearth about Holyoke, Massachusetts. Not like me, I know the ins and outs of these streets, of these people" (30). What does the narrator know about the people of Holyoke that the ethnographer cannot access? Why doesn't Veronica share her dream with the ethnographer?
6. Jimmy and Nene share an unspoken bond and intimacy in "Summer of Nene." What does Jimmy mean when he says "with Nene, I know who I am" (68)? What is different for Jimmy about being with Nene as opposed to being with Jessica?
7. When recounting the last day of an unnamed girl, the narrator in "Some Springs Girls Do Die" interweaves the girl's daily schedule with her own. Why does the narrator speculate about the girl's feelings and actions? What is the relationship between the two? By the end, who is "ready to die" (80)?

8. Belinda employs many different coping mechanisms and forms different personas throughout “The Belindas.” How does Belinda cope with her relationship with David? Is she a different Belinda at the beginning versus the end of the story? How does she come into herself—or does she?
9. In “La Hija de Changó,” Xaviera looks to the Santeria tradition for help with her love life. What lessons do the stories of Changó and Oshún offer her? How do the romantic histories of Xaviera and her mother mirror these stories?
10. The final piece, “Love War Stories,” anchors the collection’s ongoing discussion of love’s tragic forms. Carmencita’s tragedy is used as a cautionary tale for Rosie and her friends: “She comes to girls and women who believe in love when they shouldn’t” (140). Why is it so important for the girls to rewrite Carmencita’s story in their poems? How is this rewriting—and their loyalty toward love—an act of war against their mothers?

For review copy requests or to arrange for an interview, contact Jisu Kim at jisu@feministpress.org