

Great Book Discussion Questions – *Love in the Time of Cholera*

Love in the Time of Cholera traces the lives of several characters through the course of fifty years, and from the nineteenth century into the beginning of the twentieth century in Colombia.

1. Several times in the book, Florentino Ariza states that he loves Fermina Daza exclusively. Does this seem realistic, given the many love affairs he carries out during the fifty plus years that he is separated from Fermina Daza? How does this reconcile with his avowal that he can love more than one person at a time?
 - Page 48 – He had spent a great deal of money, ingenuity, and willpower to disguise the seventy-six years he had completed in March, and he was convinced in the solitude of his soul that he had loved in silence for a much longer time than anyone else in the world ever had.
 - Page 50 – “Fermina,” he said, “I have waited for this opportunity for more than half a century, to repeat to you once again my vow of fidelity and everlasting love.”
 - Page 53 – Florentino Ariza, on the other hand, had not stopped thinking of her for a single moment since Fermina Daza had rejected him out of hand after a long and troubled love affair fifty-one years, nine months, and four days ago.
 - Page 61 – Florentino Ariza had intended to give her the seventy sheets he could recite from memory after reading them so often, but then he decided on a sober and explicit half page in which he promised only what was essential: his perfect fidelity and his everlasting love.
 - Page 82 – Florentino Ariza to Fermina’s father – “Shoot me,” he said, with his hand on his chest. “There is no greater glory than to die for love.”
 - Page 146 – Florentino Ariza’s dream after Fermina Daza married Juvenal Urbino, - Once his revenge was consummated, however, he repented of his own wickedness, and then he saw Fermina Daza rising from the ground, her spirit intact, distant but alive, because it was not possible for him to imagine the world without her.
 - Page 148 - . . . and the idea of substituting one lover for another carried him along surprising paths.
 - Page 152 – Fifty years later, when Fermina Daza was freed from her sacramental sentence, he had some twenty-five notebooks, with six hundred twenty-two

entries of long-term liaisons, apart from countless fleeting adventures that did not even deserve a charitable note.

- Page 165 . . .he made a fierce decision to win fame and fortune in order to deserve her. He did not even stop to think about the obstacle of her being married, because at the same time he decided, as if it depended on himself alone, that Dr. Juvenal Urbino had to die. He did not know when or how, but he considered it an ineluctable event that he was resolved to wait for without impatience or violence, even till the end of time.
- Page 169 – Florentino Ariza on finding his father’s notebook – The other was finding a sentence that he thought he had composed but that his father had written in the notebook long before he was born: *The only regret I will have in dying is if it is not for love.* See page 82.
- Page 198 – Like the countless other women who loved him, and even those who gave and received pleasure without loving him, she accepted him for what he really was: a man passing through.
- Page 299 – They were, rather, the words of a man who, in the opinion of Aunt Escolastica, was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and this thought astounded her now as much as it had the first time.
- Page 339 – She had never heard of his having a woman, not even one, in that city where everything was known even before it happened. She spoke in a casual manner, and he replied without hesitation in a steady voice: “I’ve remained a virgin for you.”

2. Fermina Daza breaks off her engagement to Florentino Ariza after she discovers that he is a “shadow.” She later marries Juvenal Urbino, even though she does not love him initially. What are her motives in leaving Florentino Ariza and marrying Juvenal Urbino?

- Stability
- Respectability
- Money
- Page 204 - . . . they were all sure they had seen him many times, and had even had dealings with him, but no one could remember what he was like. It was then that Fermina Daza experienced the revelation of the unconscious motives that had kept her from loving him. She said “It is as if he were not a person but only a shadow.” That is what he was: the shadow of someone whom no one had ever known.

3. Juvenal Urbino is portrayed as a wise, intelligent and urbane man in the book, and yet his treatment by Garcia Marquez is not completely flattering. There seems to be an underlying message that he is “missing something” in his character. What is the “something” that he lacks?

- Courage
- Willingness to stand up for his beliefs
- Fear of his mother
- Conformity
- Page 205 – The truth is that Juvenal Urbino’s suit had never been undertaken in the name of love, and it was curious, to say the least, that a militant Catholic like him would offer her only worldly goods: security, order, happiness, contiguous numbers that, once they were added together, might resemble love, almost be love. But they were not love, and these doubts increased her confusion, because she was also not convinced that love was really what she most needed to live.

4. The book begins with an outbreak of cholera, and ends with an outbreak of cholera. Similarly, the river plays a major role in the beginning and ending of the book. Are the cholera outbreak and the river symbols of something greater? If so, what are they symbols of?

- Cholera associated with unrequited love = Dr Juvenal Urbino finds his friend Jeremiah de Saint Amour (saint of love) dead from a dose of cyanide. Pages 2-5; Urbino initially thinks that Saint Amour has killed himself for reasons other than love (page 5 “There is bound to be someone driven mad by love who will give you the chance one of these days.” And only after he said it did he realize that among the countless suicides he could remember, this was the first with cyanide that had not been caused by the sufferings of love). Urbino later finds out that Saint Amour had a mistress and did commit suicide for love.
- The scent of burnt almonds is associated with unrequited love and cholera
 - Page 2 (Saint Amour)
 - Page 4 (Saint Amour)
 - Page 56 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
 - Page 59 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
 - Page 60 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
 - Page 64 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)

- Page 66 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
- Page 212 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
- Page 252 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
- Page 282 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza)
- Page 315 (Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza) – last mention of almonds; love is now requited

- Page 203 – love immunized against contagion
- The river represents freedom (Fermina Daza travelling downriver to her cousin's house; Florentino Ariza travelling downriver to escape the memory of Fermina Daza), and a journey away from cholera (and by implication, at the end, away from unrequited love).
- Page 343 – If such things were done for so many immoral, even contemptible reasons, Florentino Ariza could not see why it would not be legitimate to do them for love.

5. What ultimately leads Fermina Daza and Florentino to reconcile and finally become lovers? Is it fate, or something else?

6. The book is concerned with the concept of love. How do the three main characters (Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza and Juvenal Urbino) each view love? Is there a movement by any of the three characters toward adopting the view of love held by another character?

- Page 203 about widows - . . .with one love for everyday use which would become, more and more, a miracle of being alive, and the other love that belonged to her alone, the love immunized by death against all contagion.
- Page 222 – He was the perfect husband: he never picked up anything from the floor, or turned out a light, or closed a door. In the morning darkness, when he found a button missing from his clothes, she would hear him say: “A man should have two wives: one to love, and one to sew on his buttons.”
- Page 284 – That is why she was so taken aback by his dramatic reiteration of a love that for her had never existed, at an age when Florentino Ariza and she could expect nothing more from life.

- Page 293 – It had to be a mad dream, one that would give her the courage she would need to discard the prejudices of a class that had not always been hers but had become hers more than anyone’s. It had to teach her to think of love as a state of grace: not the means to anything but the alpha and the omega, as an end in itself.
- Page 299 – The purified memory of her husband, no longer an obstacle in her daily actions, in her private thoughts, in her simplest intentions, became a watchful presence that guided but did not hinder her – see page 203, above.
- Page 329 - . . . and Florentino Ariza knew then that for her, too, the time had come to ask herself with dignity, with majesty, with an irrepressible desire to live, what she should do with the love that had been left behind without a master. See pages 203, 299.

7. Is Florentino Ariza serious when he says that the boat will keep sailing the river under a flag of cholera for forever? Does it matter if he is serious?

- Page 314 – “What I would like is to walk out of this house, and keep going, going, going, and never come back,” she said.
- Page 345 – The dream of other voyages with Florentino Ariza appeared on the horizon: mad voyages, free of trunks, free of social commitments: voyages of love.
- Page 345 – They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life, beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion: beyond love> For they had lived together long enough to know that love was always love, anytime and anyplace, but it was more solid the closer it came to death.
- Page 348 – “Let us keep going, going, going, back to La Dorada.”

Fermina Daza shuddered because she recognized his former voice, illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and she looked at the Captain: he was their destiny. . .

. . . Then he looked at Florentino Ariza, his invincible power, his intrepid love, and he was overwhelmed by the belated suspicion that it is life, more than death, that has no limits. . . .

. . . Florentino Ariza had kept his answer ready for nearly fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and night.

“Forever,” he said.