



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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UCF Alumni Book Club

Ordinary Girls by Jaquira Diaz

Book Discussion Guide

Book Description

While growing up in housing projects in Puerto Rico and Miami Beach, Díaz found herself caught between extremes. As her family split apart and her mother battled schizophrenia, she was supported by the love of her friends. As she longed for a family and home, her life was upended by violence. As she celebrated her Puerto Rican culture, she couldn't find support for her burgeoning sexual identity. From her own struggles with depression and sexual assault to Puerto Rico's history of colonialism, every page of *Ordinary Girls* vibrates with music and lyricism. Díaz writes with raw and refreshing honesty, triumphantly mapping a way out of despair toward love and hope to become her version of the girl she always wanted to be.

Reminiscent of Tara Westover's *Educated*, Kiese Laymon's *Heavy*, Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club*, and Terese Marie Mailhot's *Heart Berries*, Jaquira Díaz's memoir provides a vivid portrait of a life lived in (and beyond) the borders of Puerto Rico and its complicated history—and reads as electrically as a novel.

About the Author

Jaquira Díaz was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Miami. She is the author of *Ordinary Girls: A Memoir*, winner of a Whiting Award, a Florida Book Awards Gold Medal, and a Lambda Literary Awards finalist. *Ordinary Girls* was an Indies Introduce Selection, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Notable Selection, an Indie Next Pick, and a Library Reads pick. Díaz's work has been published in *The Guardian*, *Time Magazine*, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, and *The Best American Essays 2016*, among other publications. She is the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, an Elizabeth George Foundation grant, and fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the Kenyon Review, and the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing. A former Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's MFA Program in Creative Writing, and Consulting Editor at the Kenyon Review, she splits her time between Montréal, Miami Beach, and the UK with her spouse, the writer Lars Horn.

General Questions

- What were your initial thoughts of the book?
- What's your UCF Orientation story?
- What did you like best about this book?
- What did you like least about this book?
- What aspects of the author's story could you most relate to?
- What gaps do you wish the author had filled in? Were there points where you thought she shared too much?
- Are there any people in the book whose perspective you wanted?
- Why do you think the author chose to tell this story?
- Which scene has stuck with you the most?
- What did you think of the author's voice and style?
- What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?

Book-Specific Questions

- Share your thoughts on Jaquira's relationship with her father and how she sees him changes drastically at various points throughout the novel.
- At the beginning of the memoir, Diaz grapples with the question of whether home is a place. Do you think she sees Miami Beach as a place she can call home, or not, why?
- Let's talk about some of the 'monster stories' told in the memoir, both in her life and in the media she consumes. Share your thoughts on the story about La Llorona and how she weaves this story into her stories throughout the memoir.
- What is an ordinary girl? Whom is Diaz addressing and what message do you think she wants to send to them?
- Share your thoughts on Jaquira's actual family vs. found family (friends)
 - Abuela/Grandma Mercy
 - Mother/Father
 - Brother/Sister
- Quote for discussion: "I adored my father. He was the center of my universe, and I wanted, more than anything else, to be the center of his." Pg. 13

- “Even when we were poor, as long as we had some rice and beans, Abuela could perform miracles in her kitchen.” Pg. 52

Share your thoughts on how the author, Jaquira Diaz, used food in her storytelling! A large portion of the beginning of the memoir has moments where Jaquira is cooking with her Abuela. Did you notice a change in the tone in those stories?

- Abuela and Grandma Mercy are set in contrast to each other throughout Díaz’s account of her childhood and young adult life. In what ways do each of her grandmothers inform Díaz’s perception of herself, her heritage, and her worth?
- Most of the memoir is centralized in the spaces where Jaquira is with her family or her friends. When she joins the navy, she is uprooted from this sense of place. In what ways was this time a turning point for her?

Resources

Discussion Questions

<https://bookclubz.com/discussion-guides/ordinary-girls-a-memoir>

<https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a31047508/book-club-questions/>

Author Reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrFYFssgrqg>

Book Review

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/books/review/ordinary-girls-jaquira-diaz.html>

Author Interview

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/either-hyper-visible-or-invisible-an-interview-with-jaquira-diaz/>