

Incantation

by Alice Hoffman

Little, Brown and Company

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Prepared by Ardis Francoeur
Watertown Public Library, Watertown, MA

**Massachusetts
Award Winner
2007**



SUMMARY:

Estrella's family is a close one, with special names they use for each other in private, and special family traditions they hold dear. Estrella is in awe of her beautiful mother who is a healer, proud of her brother who is training to be a priest, and respectful of her wise grandfather and stern grandmother. They're just like any other family in their small Spanish town of Encaleflora.

Bit by bit, however, Estrella realizes that the deMadrigal family isn't quite like their neighbors: they don't eat the traditional pork sausage, chorizo; they don't go to the same church; and they speak a different language at home, Ladino, a mix of Spanish and Hebrew.

Not everyone treasures these differences as Estrella does: her grandfather is accused of sorcery and her mother of witchcraft. As her family becomes a target of hate and abuse, Estrella must decide if she can trust those she loves.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. One theme in this book is the concept of never getting attached to one place and being able to flee in the event of danger. The deMadrigal family had lived in Encaleflora for more than five hundred years, yet still, Estrella and her grandmother were forced to leave in the end. The pilgrims (also forced to flee home countries because of religious persecution) came to America in 1620, less than 400 years ago. Do you think that what happened to the Jewish families in Encaleflora could happen here? Do you think it's possible for the Jewish people to ever truly escape persecution?
2. On that same theme of religious persecution and transience, can you think of any similar modern events that mirror those events in the book?
3. Estrella's family hid their true religious beliefs from her for years, do you agree that keeping this secret was the right thing to do?
4. Do you think that Catalina will ever feel remorse for betraying the deMadrigal family?

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