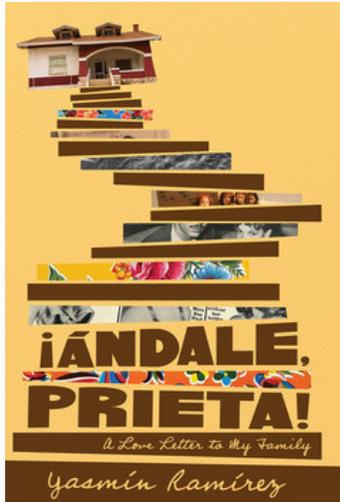




Discussion Guide



¡Ándale, Prieta!

by Yasmín Ramírez

About the Book

Genre: Fiction

Interest Level: Adult

Ordering Information

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SYNOPSIS

When I tell people who don't speak Spanish what prieta means--dark or the dark one--their eyes pop open and a small gasp escapes . . . How do I tell them that now, even after the cruelty of children, Prieta means love? That each time Prieta fell from Ita's lips, I learned to love my dark skin.

No one calls me that anymore. I miss how her words sounded out loud.

My Ita called me Prieta. When she died, she took the name with her.

Anchored by the tough grandmother who taught her how to stand firm and throw a punch, debut author Yasmín Ramírez writes about the punches life's thrown her non-traditional family of tough Mexican American women.

Having spent years of her twenties feeling lost--working an intensely taxing retail job and turning to bars for comfort--the blow of her grandmother's death pushes Yasmín to unravel. So she comes home to El Paso, Texas, where people know how to spell her accented name and her mother helps her figure out what to do with her life. Once she finally starts pursuing her passion for writing, Yasmín finds herself processing her grief by painting a portrait of her Ita, a resilient matriarch who was far from being a stereotypical abuelita. She remembers coming along to watch boxing matches at a dive bar as a child, Ita wistfully singing old Mexican classics, her mastectomy scar, and of course, her lesson on how to properly ball your fist for a good punch. Interviewing her mom and older sister, Yasmín learns even more about why her Ita was so tough--the abusive men, the toil of almost-literally back-breaking jobs, and the guilt of abortions that went against her culture.

Expertly blending the lyrical prose of a gifted author with the down-to-earth, conversational remarks of a close friend, this debut memoir marks Ramírez as a talented new author to watch. Her honesty in self-reflection, especially about periods where she felt directionless, and her vivid depictions of a mother and grandmother that persevered through a lot of hard knocks, offers vulnerable solidarity to readers who've had hard knocks of their own.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yasmín Ramírez is a 2021 Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing Author Fellow as well as a 2020 recipient of the Woody and Gayle Hunt-Aspen Institute Fellowship Award. Her fiction and creative nonfiction works have appeared in *Cream City Review* and *Huizache* among others. She is an Assistant Professor of English, Creative Writing, and Chicana Literature at El Paso Community College. She stays active in the Borderplex arts community and serves on the advisory board of BorderSenses, a literary non-profit. *¡Ándale, Prieta!* is her first book. For more information about Yasmín, visit her website at yasmiramirez.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Yasmín's childhood? How did her grandmother, Ita, play a role in her upbringing? What about Yasmín's mother? How did her grandmother and mother influence her, both similarly and differently?
2. What is Yasmín's relationship with her father like? What happens with her relationship with her father over time? How does Yasmín cope with her emotions surrounding her relationship with her father?
3. Yasmín's mother says, "The only person I can rely on is me." How does this reflect Yasmín's childhood and her relationship with the people in her family?
4. How do scars play a role in the story? What do scars symbolize in *¡Ándale, Prieta!*
5. What does it mean to be a woman in *¡Ándale, Prieta!* What do mothers represent? How does *¡Ándale, Prieta!* showcase the wonders of motherhood? What about the challenges?
6. Unpack Ita's relationships with her husbands. What were some of the characteristics of Ita's relationships? How did she advocate for herself in her marriages?
7. Ita saw Tío as "man of the house." Yasmín writes, "This Mexican tradition makes me cringe. It makes me wrinkle my nose at Ita because, as much as she went against the grain, she clung to this business about men." What do you think she means by this? How does Ita dispel stereotypes throughout the book, but also continue perpetuating antiquated customs and beliefs?
8. What does the nickname, "Prieta," mean to Yasmín? How does it make other people feel when she describes it to them? How does the nickname symbolize Yasmín and Ita's dynamic?
9. Both Ita and Yasmín's mother worked multiple jobs throughout their lives to support their families. How do you think this represents what women go through to take care of their families and children, both in their immediate community and across the world?
10. What does Angie represent in *¡Ándale, Prieta!* What is Yasmín's relationship like with Angie? How does Angie support, and also criticize, Yasmín throughout the story?
11. How does colorism and racism play a role in the story? Ita, as in many Latinx families, gives family members nicknames based on the tone of their skin. How does this reflect colorism as a whole? When Yasmín moves to Dallas, she experiences racism and prejudice. How does Yasmín describe what she has to go through?
12. The story is divided into two parts: "Finding Ita" and "Finding Yasmín." How did this impact your reading of the story? Why do you think Yasmín decided to separate them into parts as an author?
13. Ita's death impacts Yasmín in many ways. What does Yasmín go through after Ita dies? How does she process her death, and cope with her grief?
14. Compare Yasmín's life in El Paso versus Dallas. What do both places represent to Yasmín? How does Yasmín feel when she moves to Dallas?
15. What kind of role does expectations about appearance play in the story? What are Ita's expectations surrounding beauty? What about Yasmín's?
16. The novel ends with Yasmín writing Ita's story, with encouragement from her mother. How does this culmination represent Yasmín change and develop throughout the book?
17. Yasmín writes, "I think that many writers and storytellers believe that the stories that don't want to be told—the ones that hurt down in the deep recesses of one's soul or bring a wave of embarrassment and regret—are the ones that need to be shared." Talk about what you think she means by this statement.