



# Where There Was Fire

## Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Where There Was Fire*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Where There Was Fire*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. The fictional American Fruit company plays a large role in the novel, and in the lives of the Cepeda Valverde family for generations to come. What are some of the challenges Tácito and José María face while working at the American Fruit Company?
2. What did you know about how bananas were grown and the pesticide Nemagon before reading this novel? Has it changed how you feel about the fruits you consume and how they're produced?
3. There are a lot of secrets in this book, from corporate cover ups to deeply hidden family secrets. What resonated the most with you and why?
4. The novel explores family members in three different generations, and the impact of their decisions on future generations. What are the decisions your ancestors made that still have an impact on you today?
5. Despite loving each other deeply, the Cepeda Valverde family hides a lot of things from each other. Why do you think that is? How has it helped or hindered their family?
6. Lyra keeps Gabriel away from his grandmother, Teresa, for many years. How do you feel about her decision to do so?
7. Fertility is an issue for several of the characters in the novel. How does it affect them and the decisions they make?
8. Part of the novel takes place in 1968, and Teresa bears witness to a changing political landscape, including the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Apollo moon landing. How do these events affect Teresa?
9. Throughout the book we see touches of magical realism. What are some of the magical realist elements you noticed? And why do you think the author included them?

10. The title of the novel is *Where There Was Fire*. What do you think fire signifies in the novel? To different characters?
11. How does Gabriel's coming-of-age story inform the novel? Why does he focus on his matrilineal heritage rather than patrilineal?
12. The name 'María' and the image/idea of the Virgin Mary pop up throughout the novel. Does the Virgin Mary reflect the expectations put on the women in the novel? Who establishes these expectations and how do the different generations of women handle these expectations?
13. Most of the motives of the American Fruit Company are shown through discovered memos. Why do you think the author chose to present it this way?
14. Ghosts and the dead make several appearances—some reveal themselves, others watch from the shadows. Have you ever seen a ghost? Why do you think they visit the living?
15. In the epilogue, Lyra presents her findings and the memos to the International Court of Human Rights. Do you think her testimony will be successful? Do you think the American Fruit Company will pay for its crimes?