

Further Reading

The Hummingbird's Daughter
Luis Alberto Urrea (2005)
URREA

When sixteen-year-old Teresita, the illegitimate daughter of a late-nineteenth-century rancher, arises from death possessing the power to heal, she is declared a saint and finds her faith tested by the impending Mexican civil war.

The Color Purple
Alice Walker (1982)
CLASSIC WALKER

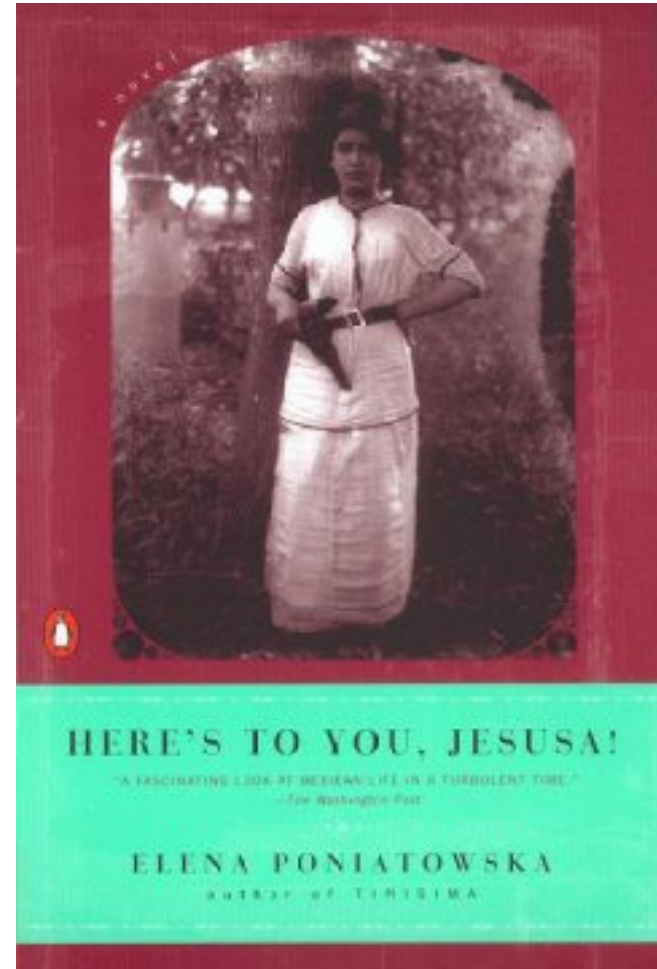
The lives of two sisters - Nettie, a missionary in Africa, and Celie, a southern woman married to a man she hates - are revealed in a series of letters exchanged over thirty years.

My Antonia
Willa Cather (1918)
CATHER

After the death of her immigrant father, Antonia works as a servant for neighbors in the farmlands of Nebraska. She leaves for an unfortunate affair with an Irish railway conductor, but returns home, eventually marries and raises a large family in true pioneer style.

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Book Discussion Guide



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About the Book

Jesusa is a tough, fiery character based on a real working-class Mexican woman whose life spanned some of the seminal events of early twentieth-century Mexican history. Having joined a cavalry unit during the Mexican Revolution, she finds herself at the Revolution's end in Mexico City, far from her native Oaxaca, abandoned by her husband and working menial jobs. So begins Jesusa's long history of encounters with the police and struggles against authority. Mystical yet practical, undaunted by hardship, Jesusa faces the obstacles in her path with gritty determination.

Discussion Questions

1. Elena Poniatowska comes from a very affluent and privileged background, while Jesusa is extremely poor and illiterate. Despite their differences, they develop a true affection for one another. What do you think about their unlikely friendship?
2. Jesusa is a soldier in the revolution, but she never offers much of an opinion on Mexican politics or the goals of the revolution, and she never explains why she's fighting. Why do you think that is? Do you think she knows why she's fighting?
3. One of the primary goals of the revolution was to create a nation that offered social and economic mobility and legal equality. Do you think Jesusa and her fellow citizens benefited from the revolution, or do you think that it failed them?
4. When the Cristero Rebellion broke out in 1926, Jesusa immediately took up arms and joined the fight. Why do you think she was so eager to do that?
5. The book is based on a real person, and Elena Poniatowska interviewed Jesusa weekly over the course of several years. Why do you think the author chose to publish the book as a novel?
6. Despite the fact that Mexico is a predominantly Catholic country, Jesusa prefers to attend the Mexican Patriarchal Elias Church, a spiritualist temple. Why do you think she prefers spiritualism over the Catholic Church?
7. Jesusa states repeatedly that she doesn't like people and that she doesn't like children. In light of all that she does to help out those who are even less fortunate than she is, what do you think about her statements?
8. Jesusa spends a great deal of time drinking and getting into fights. What do you think about her behavior and the choices that she makes?
9. Were you surprised when Jesusa adopted Perico? What do you think about their relationship? How did you feel when Perico returned?
10. Jesusa is rough, rebellious, and cantankerous. What do you think she's really like? What do you think of the author's portrayal of Jesusa?
11. The author has come under a great deal of criticism for what some feel is an appropriation of Jesusa's story. Do you think this is a fair assessment? Do you think her story would have been conveyed differently if it had been written today, rather than in 1969?

Courtesy of Mark Dunham