

I Lived on Butterfly Hill Study Guide

I Lived on Butterfly Hill by Marjorie Agosin

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

I Lived on Butterfly Hill Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1: I Lived on Butterfly Hill, Celeste Like the Sky – Before, I Only Feared Earthquakes.....	5
Part 1: I Lived on Butterfly Hill, A Horrible Trick – Part II: In the North, Soaps.....	10
Part II, A Winter Birthday – Part III, Traveling Light.....	16
Part III, Let Your Voice Be Heard – Part III, The Alphabet in My Hands.....	22
Part III, Her Bare Feet Make No Sound – Epilogue: The Ship Called Hope.....	27
Characters.....	32
Symbols and Symbolism.....	36
Settings.....	39
Themes and Motifs.....	41
Styles.....	46
Quotes.....	48



Plot Summary

“I Lived on Butterfly Hill” is a young adult historical novel by Marjorie Agosin which recounts several years in the life of Celeste Marconi as her homeland of Chile falls to fascism, and later rises against it. When the novel begins, Celeste is eleven years old, and a resident of Butterfly Hill, in the city of Valparaiso. Celeste lives with her family. Her parents are well-known doctors who tend to the poor. Her grandmother, Abuela Frida, survived the Nazis. Delfina, a woman originally hired by Frida to do housework years before, has become family.

Celeste has three very good friends who attend school with her, including Cristobal, Lucila, Marison, and Gloria. They spend their days traveling the city and hanging out at Café Iris. Despite enjoying life, Celeste is also very serious. The amount of poverty in the city hits her deeply and breaks her heart. She is glad to learn of the election of President Alarcon, a man who has promised to combat poverty and make life better for those most vulnerable.

However, many Chileans—including much of the military—believes Alarcon’s changes are dangerous or too fast. Alarcon is overthrown, and all of those who supported him, including Celeste’s parents, are targeted. Thousands go into hiding, or are arrested, imprisoned, and/or executed by the new government under a man known only as the Dictator General. Celeste is terrified as even her own friends, such as Gloria, turn against her, or when friends such as Lucila go missing. Celeste is further heartbroken when her parents decide to go into hiding themselves.

Celeste remains behind with Abuela Frida and Delfina. Eventually, Celeste stops going to school because it is too sad for her. The school is now under military guard, and most of Celeste’s class is missing. Frida and Delfina come to decide that it is simply too dangerous for Celeste to remain in Valparaiso, for as the daughter of two fugitives, Celeste herself may be targeted by the government and supporters of the General. Celeste is sent to live with her Aunt Graciela in Juliette Cove, Maine, in the United States of America.

Juliette Cove is a strange and unusual place at first. Celeste arrives in the winter, and everything is gray. She knows very little English, so she feels out of place. Most of the kids at school make fun of Celeste for being foreign. Nevertheless, Celeste becomes good friends with a girl named Kim, whose family has fled political difficulties in Korea. Together, Celeste and Kim learn better English and learn about one another’s homelands. At school, their teacher Miss Rose has the girls teach the class about their homelands.

As the year goes on, the American kids soften and become friendly toward Celeste and Kim. Celeste develops a crush on Kim’s older brother, Tom. When Kim and her family simply pick up and leave one day, Celeste is devastated. However, it is the American kids—including Meg, Valerie, and Charlie—who are there for Celeste, becoming good friends with her over the next year. During that time, Celeste learns that the General has



been killed and Chile will be returning to democracy. She decides it is time to head back to Chile.

Back in Chile, Celeste is thrilled to see her grandmother and Delfina, as well as Cristobal and Marisol. Cristobal even helps Celeste to track down her father, who has been hiding on an old whaling ship off the country's coast. Celeste's mother later comes home on her own. New elections are held in which Monica Espinoza is elected. She promises to help heal the country and invites the youth of Chile to write about their dreams for Chile's future.

Celeste writes in, talking about how she wishes all Chileans could read and write, making communication better. Celeste wins first place, including a full scholarship to college. Celeste requests to use some of the money on a traveling library, and the president agrees. A party is held in Celeste's honor on Butterfly Hill. She dances with Cristobal, and later writes a letter of hope and love to Kim and Tom.



Part 1: I Lived on Butterfly Hill, Celeste Like the Sky – Before, I Only Feared Earthquakes

Summary

Part 1, Celeste Like the Sky – Eleven year-old Celeste Marconi and her friends, Lucila, Marisol, and Gloria, are thrilled to be out of Juana Ross School for the weekend even though it is foggy and raining. Cristobal Williams catches up with them as they leave. The friends go to grab a bite to eat at Café Iris on Cerro Baron (Baron Hill). Their city in Chile, Valparaiso, is composed of forty-two hills on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Celeste and the others notice more ships than usual out on the ocean. Something seems wrong about it all to Celeste.

At Café Iris, they all eat sopapillas—fried pumpkin bread—and watch the café’s magician perform. Cristobal is especially interested in the magician, for he himself has a pendulum he uses to find things, made for him by his mother after his father died. While eating, it is revealed that Gloria has a crush on the new boy in eighth grade, Juan Carlos. After the café, the rain, wind, and fog have increased. A headless doll hits Celeste. She is unnerved by how Lucila disappears in the fog when they part ways. It makes Celeste uneasy.

Part 1, Humitas are like Heaven – Celeste returns to her old, slanted home on the top of Butterfly Hill, where she lives with her mother Esmerelda, father Andres, and Abuela Frida. The housekeeper, Delfina, gently teases Celeste about having a crush on Cristobal. Celeste looks out at the harbor, but the fog is now thick enough to hide all the ships. When Celeste asks about the ships, Papa refuses to answer. Papa and Mama are both doctors who tend to the poor. Celeste loves the humitas (ground corn cakes) that Delfina makes. She and Delfina also love to eat lemons.

Part 1, The Rain Gives – Celeste loves the view from her blue bedroom. She can see her family’s beautiful garden, and much of the city. Papa invites Celeste to come with him and Mama to tend to the poor the following morning. Celeste agrees, having always helped out. Papa says he didn’t talk about the ships earlier because he was tired after a long day of work and will look at the ships.

Part 1, ...And the Rain Takes Away – In the morning, the rain has cleared but the wind keeps up. Celeste loves the pelicans that fly overhead. Celeste goes with her parents to poor neighborhoods that have been affected by flooding. It makes Celeste nauseous to see so many lives ruined. While Mama hands out food, Papa tends to injuries. Papa encourages Celeste to keep helping quickly, because there are so many people to tend to. Celeste wonders why others don’t help the poor. Papa says that there is new hope



for the poor now that President Alarcon has been elected. Alarcon has promised to help the poor.

Part 1, The Smell of Sundays – Celeste's family makes empanadas, half-moon-shaped meat pies. It makes Celeste reflect on all she has that the poor do not. She writes in her notebook how there are two kinds of rain in Chile: the kind that Celeste watches with friends, and the kind that destroys lives.

Part 1, Abulea Frida – Celeste's grandmother, Frida, make sure Celeste has chores to do, such a washing dishes. She does not want any of the members of her family to be opposed to hard work. Abuela Frida gives herself the chore of knitting, including knitting things for the poor. She loves to knit in her favorite rocking chair in the parlor. She and Celeste go to get ice cream. Celeste confesses she feels uneasy lately, especially after seeing ships in the harbor. Frida is worried, for it reminds her of her own days in Vienna in 1938, where as a young Jew, she witnessed the brutality of the Nazis firsthand. While fleeing for Chile, she met Jose, the man who would become her husband.

Part 1, Mornings with Delfina – Celeste wakes up Monday morning to prepare for school. Delfina helps Celeste to get ready, always worrying about Celeste being late. Celeste's favorite thing to learn in school is poetry, with her favorite poems being the Odes of Pablo Neruda because they are about ordinary, everyday things.

Part 1, Earthquakes of the Soul – There are two ways for Celeste to get to school: by cable car or by foot on winding steps and paths. Earthquakes are common. Mama says the earthquakes to worry about are not those of the ground, but those of the soul. Souls, like houses, can be destroyed. She explains that rumors abound about the military wanting to end free healthcare for the poor, and that the military might try to overthrow Alarcon if they had foreign aid.

Part 1, Rose Petals on the Pavement – An earthquake is felt which makes Celeste want to run home. In school, Senorita Alvarado teaches the class about Chilean independence. Celeste and her friends like to see Senorita Alvarado's boyfriend when he picks Alvarado up on a motorbike. Marisol calls it romantic. Celeste wants to ride a motorbike one day, with her hair free behind her.

Part 1, Beneath a Black Umbrella – In an essay for school, Celeste recounts Delfina's arrival at the house. She carried a black umbrella for protection from the elements, for it was the only shelter that she had. Frida hired her on the spot to be a nanny and housekeeper. Papa approves of Celeste's hard work, and how Senorita Alvarado pushes her hard to do better.

Part 1, A Dark Cloud Opens – At lunch, Celeste and Cristobal talk about how quiet Senora Espindola, the lunch lady, has been all week. Marisol reports that there is a rumor about Espindola's son and pregnant wife disappearing in the middle of the night. Cristobal's pendulum has been acting strangely, spinning in circles as though lost, and whispers about the military are now common in the marketplace. Celeste has a nightmare that night of ships full of dead fish.



Part 1, The Time of Fear – In class, Senorita Alvarado looks pale and shaken and cries. Celeste tells Lucila that something is very wrong. Mama reveals to Celeste that opposition to Alarcon’s government has been growing. She, and some friends, will be meeting to discuss how to keep peace and order should something happen. Celeste listens in, and hears a woman named Clara wonder how anyone could be opposed to healthcare, education, food, and shelter for all. Celeste wonders this, too.

Part 1, Teatime Aflame – Smelling smoke, Celeste rushes to her roof where she is met by Cristobal. Down in Butterfly Square, soldiers are feeding a bonfire with books. Cristobal reports that this is happening all over the city. It reminds them of the Nazis burning books in Vienna. Cristobal returns home so his mother will not be alone. Celeste cries, and Papa holds her. Mama says it has been an earthquake of the soul.

Part 1, The Subversives - Lucila’s father, a journalist and supporter of Alarcon, tells Lucila not to speak about what is going on. Marisol’s father tells Marisol the same. Celeste wonders why no one will talk about what is happening. Within a few days, the number of kids in Celeste’s class drops from thirty-one to fifteen. Gloria treats Celeste coldly, and Cristobal says his mother has told him to stop using his pendulum. Gloria says she wants to know if Senorita Alvarado is a subversive.

Subversives, Gloria impatiently explains, are weakening and undermining Chile. They are people that range from writers and artists to singers and journalists, who think they can change Chile. Celeste decides to leave, and Gloria says it is better for Celeste to get home to practice witchcraft with her crazy grandmother. Celeste is deeply hurt by Gloria’s words. Cristobal walks Celeste all the way home.

Part 1, Blot Out the Horizon – There are now so many ships in the harbor that Celeste can no longer count them all. Mama confirms these are naval warships, and that military marches have begun in the city. Papa receives a call from his friend, Bernardo, who reports that the military has besieged President Alarcon in the capital city of Santiago, and that anyone considered a friend of Alarcon is being taken. Celeste, horrified, rushes away to try to think things through in her room.

Part 1, Waiting for You – Lucila and Javier are now no longer in school. Other kids tell Celeste to head home, and to be careful about to whom she asks questions. Celeste and Cristobal are trying to make sense of it all, but cannot. Cristobal reveals that his pendulum predicts the death of President Alarcon. Celeste runs home, crying.

Part 1, Before It’s Too Late – Celeste and Papa listen to the radio. It is reported that President Alarcon has been killed in a fiery explosion at the Presidential Palace. Papa cries. The Vergaras, a married couple, visit. They report their twin sons, who live in Santiago, say Alarcon was killed by a rifle, but do not know who fired the shot.

Part 1, Lines Tied or Cut – The next morning, Valparaiso is silent. It unnerves Celeste. She tries to call Cristobal, but his line is always busy. Mama says the lines are either all tied up or have been cut. Celeste cannot understand why such bad things are



happening. A man referred to as the General has now taken power, and promises to cleanse the country. Celeste suddenly worries for her parents.

Part 1, Before, I Only Feared Earthquakes – Celeste has never felt fear before the way she now feels fear for her family. The school is now under military guard. Nineteen students from Celeste's class are now gone. Senorita Alvarado announces that Principal Castellano is no longer in charge. School uniforms, with skirts for girls, will be enforced. At home, the radio announces that all changes now being made are to restore order to the country.

Analysis

"I Lived on Butterfly Hill" is a young adult historical novel by Marjorie Agosin which recounts several years in the life of Celeste Marconi as her homeland of Chile falls to fascism and later rises against it. When the novel begins, Celeste appears to be much like any other eleven-year-old girl anywhere in the world. She has loving family, including wonderful parents, a stable home life, and the promise of a future wide open to her. However, the constancy and stability of Celeste's life is tenuous at best.

The reader should note that this is demonstrated by two ominous events early on. Both bring to bear the fear of theme which will be found consistently throughout the novel. The first event that occurs is greatly symbolic. Valparaiso is covered in a fog, which is itself symbolic of coming danger and confusion –soon to come to fruition through the assassination of Alarcon and the overthrowing of his administration. The fog portends confused and difficult times for Chile. Additionally, the fear that Celeste feels on seeing Lucila walk away into the fog foreshadows Lucile's own real disappearance.

The second event that causes Celeste great fear is the arrival of warships in the harbor. Warships, she knows, are only ever used in war –so that warships should arrive for use in a peaceful city is a terrifying prospect. The presence of the warships put fear into the hearts of everyone. This, coupled with book burnings, military marches, the idea of subversion, and the lines of telephones being cut all add great confusion, and a foreboding sense of danger that strikes fear into the hearts of citizens. Valparaiso, once a vibrant city of life, is now silent and in fear.

The arrival of warships, military units, and the imposition of martial law are all effects of revolution, which becomes an important theme in the novel. Alarcon is clearly a reformist president whose policies to help the poor, as well as to reform various other parts of the country are either seen as moving too fast or too dangerous (or both) by many people, including in the military. As a result, their opposition to Alarcon becomes open violence and revolution.

The revolution brings a great many changes to Chile. Here, change becomes an incredibly important theme in conjunction with revolution. The changes that Alarcon was seeking to implement were clearly opposed by a large number of Chileans, both citizens and in the military. As a response to these changes, the General and his revolutionaries



institute their own changes –including the abolishment of democracy and the imposition of harsh new laws and cruel measures.

Citizens are turning against other citizens based on their political beliefs. Gloria presents a noted change, going from good friend to suspicious acquaintance where Celeste, Cristobal Lucila, and Marisol are concerned. Even the revolution-sponsored concept of subversion is something entirely new to the people of Valparaiso. The burning of books occurs using books that are considered subversive by the government.

No place in Valparaiso is safe anymore. Large numbers of students stop attending school as change from the revolution brings about fear –and even darker change. Rumors abound of mass arrests, imprisonment, and even executions. The school even comes under military guard. Celeste begins to fear for her parents as she has never feared for them in her young life.

Family has also emerged as an incredibly important theme in the early part of the novel. It is clear that family means everything to Celeste, and that her grandmother and Delfina are every bit as important to her as her parents. Celeste spends time with each member of her family, including Delfina. She learns much from them, loves them deeply, and thinks of them before even herself. This is why it is easy to see how much Celeste worries for her family against the backdrop of so much bad change, and the revolution.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is Celeste's childhood very normal prior to the revolution? In what ways is Celeste's life different prior to the revolution, especially with respect to poverty? How does this orient her thinking towards her parents and President Alarcon? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the General seize power in Chile? What changes does he institute? How do these changes affect the people of Chile?

Discussion Question 3

What things do Celeste and her family come to fear after the revolution that they did not fear before? Choose three things, and explain how these things have changed. Why do Celeste and her family now fear these changes?

Vocabulary

Sopaipillas, flustered, trilling, humita, diurnal, reverie, putrefied, vestiges, interject, mischievously, amiss, vehemently, subversives, forbade, aghast, furtively



Part 1: I Lived on Butterfly Hill, A Horrible Trick – Part II: In the North, Soaps

Summary

Part 1, A Horrible Trick – Celeste is no longer allowed to be out and about in the city. Her parents want her to stay at home. So do the parents of all other children. Marisol reports that Lucila and her family have been taken away by the soldiers. Celeste hopes they have escaped, as numerous other people have done by crossing the Andes Mountains. Celeste and Marisol are terrified that they, too, may disappear. Gloria stops speaking to anyone.

Part 1, She is So Like You –Papa opposes Celeste continuing to attend school, finding it dangerous. Mama finds it important for the sake of normalcy. Chile will never be free unless the children are free, she explains. Celeste herself refuses to stop attending Juana Ross. Papa says Celeste is very like her mother. Celeste’s parents now bring her to school, riding with her on the trolley.

At school, Cristobal shows Celeste how his pendulum no longer works. A guard sees this, and smashes Cristobal with a club as he calls the pendulum “voodoo.” He tries to break it underfoot, but the pendulum will not shatter. He tells Cristobal never to bring it to school again. Cristobal, though hurt, insists he is fine. In class, Gloria tells Celeste that Celeste has just failed a class. At home, Papa tells Celeste she can continue to attend school if she wants, but Celeste isn’t so sure anymore.

Part 1, Even the Sea has Stopped – Delfina tells Celeste to stop looking out the windows. At school, Admiral Retamales, the school guard, has put up pictures of the sunglasses-wearing General in every classroom. Cristobal tells Celeste that even the sea has stopped moving.

Part 1, Curfew – Curfews—times at which everyone must be home in the evenings—are put into effect. Celeste overhears her parents debating whether or not they should leave. Papa hopes for a quick end to military rule. After school, Celeste is surprised to find her parents home early. She sees a stack of books and maps on the desk in her father’s study.

Part 1, Love is that Powerful – Frida brings out candles meant for religious occasions, which worries Celeste. At dinner, Papa explains that the everyone in the city is aware of his, and Mama’s, support for Alarcon and their tending to the poor. They have received threats, and their clinic has been vandalized. They will be going into hiding. Celeste is stunned. She becomes sick to her stomach. Papa and Mama will not reveal where they



are going so that Celeste can answer truthfully when she tells others she does not know what has become of her parents.

Part 1, I Can't Bear to Say the Word – Marisol thinks she may stop attending school. Cristobal says he will continue to attend. On the way home from school, Celeste discovers that the home of the Vegas has been broken into, the Vegas are gone, and their dog is dead. At home, Celeste realizes that her parents have also gone. Celeste no longer wants to go to school. Her grandmother explains that she learned early in life that sometimes it is best to just walk away.

Part 1, The Empty Calendar – Weeks pass. Celeste becomes very depressed and tired. Even eating takes tremendous effort. Yet she becomes very appreciative of Delfina and wonders who takes care of her. Delfina says that God and her ancestors watch out for her.

Part 1, The Sign – Abuela Frida tells Celeste to pray, and to seek a sign from Heaven. Peeking through her window, she discovers a messenger pelican with a note from her parents. They write that they are safe and are staying by the ocean. They also send their love. Celeste brings the note so Frida can also see it.

Part 1, Uncertainty Crackles in Each Corner – More time passes. Celeste has come to feel like a prisoner in her own house. Celeste's grandmother tells her not to climb up on the roof anymore, as it is no longer safe to do even that. She may be shot. Neighbor has turned against neighbor, Frida explains. They are living under a dictator, and intolerance is the rule of the day. It is what Frida fled in Nazi Germany.

Part 1, Cuchufli and Abuelo Jose – Celeste and Frida decide to go down into the city the next day to buy cuchufli, which Abuelo Jose loved. Frida misses her husband terribly.

Part 1, Dreaming Runs in the Family – Don Alejandro, the taxi driver, comes to pick up Frida and Celeste. Delfina whispers prayers to protect them. Celeste waves out through the window, but Frida reminds her this is not the past anymore, and she cannot risk any such behavior. Frida is not surprised, however, for she says dreaming runs in the family. She asks Alejandro to bring them down to the beach after seeing how empty the city now seems.

Part 1, With Abuela on the Shore – At the beach, Frida tells Celeste the country is only continuing to get worse. Celeste will have to go and live with Aunt Graciela for a while. It is no longer safe for Celeste to remain living in the place her parents have fled. The city is not a place for a young girl to grow up anymore. Frida says she knows this from personal experience. Her entire family was butchered by the Nazis. Celeste is horrified. Frida has faith things will one day return to normal.

Part 1, A Seashell and a Green Shawl – Celeste is full of fear about leaving the only home she has ever known, and is full of fear for her country. She will have to learn English to live with Graciela. Frida explains that Graciela will help Celeste learn English. Celeste will be safe in the United States. She hopes that Gloria will not figure out where she has gone, and if Gloria does, that she will not report it to her father. Delfina gives



Celeste her green shawl to bring. Celeste also packs photos of Frida and her parents on their wedding day. She tries not to cry, remembering her grandmother has always told her that tears are for happiness.

Part 1, There Are No Good-byes, Only Returns – Delfina gives Celeste seeds to plant in America the morning that Celeste leaves. She prays that God will protect Celeste. Celeste then says goodbye to Delfina and Frida, and leaves in Alejandro's taxi.

Part 1, The Road to Santiago – Celeste is sad leaving so much behind her. Alejandro tells Celeste to look forward, not behind. He stops to buy her a alfajor, a caramel between two shortbread cookies covered with powdered sugar. Celeste wonders if she will meet anyone as kind as Alejandro in Juliette Cove.

Part 1, Tio Bernardo – Celeste meets her father's best friend, Bernardo, at the airport. She thanks Alejandro for everything. Alejandro reminds her that God is everywhere. Bernardo then walks Celeste to the gate for her plane, reminding her to only say she is going on vacation because there are informants everywhere. He tells her she will have a good trip, flying in a steel pelican.

Part 1, Steel Pelican – Celeste is amazed by the view from the air. She begins to cry. A kind, blonde man pats her on the shoulder and she falls asleep. When she awakens, the man beside her is writing in a notebook. Celeste vows she will never forget her homeland and its good memories.

Part II: In the North

Part II, Welcome to the USA – Celeste's plane arrives in Boston, Massachusetts, where a police officer tells her to have a good vacation. Graciela is waiting and welcomes Celeste to America. It is January. Celeste is stunned by the cold.

Part II, The Gray of the North – Celeste sees few people out and about. Graciela explains that people in New England mostly keep to themselves. The silence can be enjoyed, Graciela explains. She is happy to have Celeste with her and explains it will take a while to get used to things. Graciela left Chile years before to be with a dancer named Guillermo Garela in Montreal before leaving for America. Celeste loves the smell of Juliette Cove, which is of sea air and pine forest. Graciela lives in a small, lovely house on River Road. Wild turkeys appear, and Graciela tells Celeste they will become good friends.

Part II, A Blue Room in the North – Celeste is amazed to see her bedroom is the same color blue as her room in Chile and that it has a skylight. Graciela explains that she simply knew it was time to leave Montreal, and so she headed to Juliette Cove because it reminded her of Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet," with love lasting beyond death.

Part II, Juliette Cove, Maine – Her first morning in Juliette Cove, Celeste feels sad and alone. Graciela brings Celeste along the coast, through the small town which has a pizzeria and some other small stores. There is also Saints' Harbor and its lighthouse



that guides sailors into safety during dangerous times. It reminds Celeste of the lighthouse at home. She says she will try to be happy in Juliette Cove.

Part II, I Call Them Friends – Graciela works as a tarot card reader. Celeste asks if Graciela can read the cards to see how her parents are doing. Graciela explains there is no such thing as real magic, and that she tells people what they want to hear when she does readings. She explains she has no true friends in Maine but has elderly clients who are sad and lonely. Celeste sees that Graciela's bedroom is full of conch shells. She explains she began collecting them as a child and never stopped.

Part II, Nostalgia – Graciela often becomes distracted when making toast, causing the firemen to rush to the house when her fire alarm goes off. Celeste notes how Graciela is more depressed than she remembers her years ago in Valparaiso. Graciela explains it is simply nostalgia for the past. Celeste wonders how everyone at home is getting along. She puts a map of Chile on the wall and realizes she has not seen her parents for sixty-five days.

Part II, Juliette Cove Middle School – On Sunday evening, Graciela brings Celeste out for dinner at Sal's Pizza. Hearing everyone speaks English makes Celeste feel scared and alone because she can't understand anything. Celeste is likewise unhappy that she must begin school. She is amazed that none of the students wear uniforms, and they all chew gum. A Korean-American girl, Kim, offers Celeste some gum. The two become friends, speaking broken English. Some kids make fun of Celeste, including a boy named Charlie. Mr. Turner, the teacher, is kind but drones on. Mr. Kendall, the English teacher, is very old and impatient teaching Kim and Celeste English.

Part II, Soaps – Celeste begins to learn better English by watching lots of television. Graciela learned English by watching soap operas like "General Hospital." It makes Celeste think about how her father said people should always learn new things, or else why be alive.

Analysis

As the novel continues, things go from bad to worse in Chile. The General's revolution has only just begun in earnest. Rumors of people being taken out of their homes in the middle of the night are confirmed as true as time passes. Indeed, Lucila and her family apparently fall victim to the General's efforts to purge enemies of the state. Attention also turns to Mama and Papa, who must shut down their medical clinics in the face of vandalism and death threats. But even this is not enough to placate their enemies.

Mama and Papa fear not only for their own lives, but for the lives of their loved ones, especially Celeste. They realize that if an entire family can go missing because of the parents, their family, too, is at risk. As a result, Mama and Papa decide to go into hiding. This is horrifying to Celeste and is almost as bad as losing them for good. It is clear just how much family means to Celeste, and just how much fear Celeste has for them when they make themselves disappear.



Fear continues to be a dominant theme in conjunction with the theme of Revolution. More and more kids are going missing from school. The General's portrait adorns the walls of each classroom. Cristobal is beaten by a soldier for having a pendulum. Pendulums are considered part of the old ways, now deemed subversive. The soldier's attempt to smash the pendulum can be seen as symbolic of the crushing effect of the revolution, but the pendulum, like the good people of Chile, is unable to be smashed apart. They endure.

Endurance is critical in this section of the novel, made possible by faith. Faith here becomes an essential theme to events as they unfold. Celeste's parents remind her to always have faith. It is a lesson repeated by Abuela Frida. Faith in God, and faith in hope for a better future are invaluable in times of great trial and distress. Abuelea Frida relied on her faith in God and in hopes of a better time in order to endure her darkest days and persevere. Celeste must even stop attending school as a result of how dark things have become. Frida is reminded of her own youth again and again because of this.

Celeste keeps faith in God and faith in hopes of a better time as time passes and things change. The leaving of Mama and Papa presents only one major change that personally confronts Celeste. The second is that things are no longer safe even for her, and she must move to the United States of America until things are better in Chile. The changes Celeste has to face in Chile are already monumental, but the changes she will have to face in America are downright daunting.

When Celeste arrives in the United States, it is winter. Everything is cold and gray, a landscape that reflects Celeste's mood. She has, more or less, lost everything she has ever loved, from her family to her homeland. Celeste must learn how to get along in a new country, and must learn a new language in order to navigate America. She worries about fitting in, and fears that she might never see Chile again with so many changes.

However, family shines through for Celeste in her time of darkness. It is revealed that Graciela, like Celeste, longs for the past, and longs for home. Celeste and Graciela take comfort in one another, and give one another the loyalty, love, and companionship that they feel they have been without, Graciela for years, Celeste for days.

There signs that not all changes are bad, however. Apart from Celeste reuniting with Graciela after years, Celeste sees that Graciela has painted her new bedroom the same hue of blue as her bedroom in Valparaiso. This makes Celeste feel comfortable to some degree and helps to instill a sense of hope in her.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Celeste ultimately relocate to the United States of America? How does Celeste feel about relocating? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Mama and Papa decide to go into hiding. Why do they decide to do this? What effect does it have on Celeste? How does she attempt to cope without her parents?

Discussion Question 3

How does Celeste come to rely on Abuela Frida and Delfina while Mama and Papa are in hiding? How does family change for Celeste with her mother and father gone? How does it remain the same?

Vocabulary

Sympathies, bludgeoned, curfews, intolerance, alfajor, nostalgia, equation



Part II, A Winter Birthday – Part III, Traveling Light

Summary

Part II, A Winter Birthday – February 28th rolls around. It is Celeste's twelfth birthday. In the Southern hemisphere, it would be summer, but Maine is still cold and snowy. In Valparaiso, birthdays were neighborhood events celebrated by friends and family, but in Maine, there is only Graciela. Graciela wishes Celeste a happy birthday, bringing her breakfast in bed, a carrot cake which Celeste thoroughly enjoys.

Part II, I Search for Myself in Spanish – Celeste's English improves. Mr. Turner asks Celeste to write an essay about her family and life in Chile to read aloud to the class. Charlie, who bullies everyone, asks if Chile has refrigerators and if Celeste's family lives in a hut. Celeste responds that Chile is a very advanced country. Spanish words comfort Celeste, but the stand she makes in English against Charlie makes her smile. On the way home, she sees a daffodil bulb in the earth.

Part II, A Basket of Blueberries – Summer finally comes on. Celeste does her best to learn ten new English words a day. Graciela decides Celeste will have chores like American kids, and will learn things like American kids such as baking pies. Celeste will also be allowed to plant whatever she wants in the garden outside, including parsley and basil. Celeste's first baking project is a blueberry pie, and it comes out delicious. That night, they watch "Gone With the Wind," Abuela Frida's all-time favorite movie.

Part II, Year of the Tiger – Celeste takes to her chores well, tending the garden and learning more things to cook. At Sal's Pizza before school begins, Celeste places the order herself. Graciela is impressed and compliments Celeste on how she has grown and matured in confidence. Miss Rose, Celeste's seventh grade teacher, is very kind and patient and takes extra time to help Celeste and Kim when they have difficulties. She allows Celeste to teach the class some Spanish words. Many of the kids in class enjoy this, except for the popular girls and Charlie. Kim also gives lessons about Korea and the Korean New Year.

Part II, Kim's House – Over time, Celeste and Kim become very good friends. While Charlie warms up to Celeste a little bit, and while other girls may be friendly with Celeste and Kim, none of them ever invite the girls to sleepovers or to hang out together. Celeste decides to visit Kim's house, a small, cramped trailer. Her mother, Sae Jin, welcomes Celeste. Kim's father has left for Korea. Her brother, Tom, is now the man of the family. Poverty in Chile did not affect Celeste the way it does now because Kim's family's poverty is one of loneliness. Celeste and Kim's family have rice for dinner. Kim tells Celeste she is her best friend forever.



Part II, Watching the Sky – Celeste and Kim like to lay on the ground and watch the sky. Sometimes Tom joins them. Celeste realizes that the sky has no borders and that everyone sees the same sky. Kim tells Celeste to bring her notebook because the sky speaks to her. She thinks Celeste will be a writer who will make many people happy one day. Celeste says she'll have to show Kim and Tom Chile one day. Celeste, Kim, and Tom realize they have left their homelands for political reasons.

Part II, Dreaming in English – Celeste dreams of bringing Kim and Tom to Chile. The entire dream occurs in English. Celeste is overjoyed by this and tells Graciela so.

Part II, Daydreaming – Miss Rose teaches the class about Colonial America and the lead-up to the Revolutionary War. Celeste finds it hard to concentrate because she has a crush on Tom.

Part II, The Empty Seat – Charlie, who has now become friendly with Celeste, wants to know if she is coming to the beach with everyone. She is not sure why he is being this friendly. He tells her everything will be all right. But she realizes that it must be because Kim and her family have left. It hurts Celeste deeply.

Part II, “No More Pencils, No More Books” – It is the last day of school, and Celeste has now been in America for nearly two years. She is sad that Miss Rose will no longer be her teacher. She goes to school early to see Miss Rose. Miss Rose gives her a butternut doughnut. Miss Rose confirms Celeste's worst fears: Kim and her family must have moved on. Miss Rose reminds Celeste to always have faith, even in faith itself, and to always hold her head up high.

Part II, Solidarity – When school lets out, Charlie asks Celeste to come to the beach once more, but she promises him another time. Celeste runs home and asks Graciela to help her look for Kim. Graciela agrees, saying she is from the generation of Chileans called the “Generation of Solidarity.” She explains that during an earlier military takeover, Chileans began to help one another by helping others, even when their own lives were in danger. At the trailer park, no trace of Kim or her family can be found. Celeste wonders if being an exile means being invisible to the world. Graciela says that they will one day return to Chile.

Part II, Somewhere to Keep Her Sorrow – Graciela orders hamburger-and-onion pizza for dinner. Celeste wonders why Graciela did not return to Chile after she and Guillermo broke up. She explains that she wanted to be in a place where she could be free because nobody knew her. Freedom, Graciela explains, brings loneliness. Whereas Celeste knows who she is, it has taken Graciela far longer to figure herself out. Additionally, the poverty and heartache in Chile were overwhelming. But no matter where one lives, there are challenges of some kind to be overcome. Celeste realizes that Graciela collects conch shells to keep her sorrow in them.

Part II, Maybe They're Smiling Together – Celeste watches a crescent moon from her window and wonders if her parents are not only seeing the same moon, but smiling together. She asks Graciela about first loves, about Tom. But love is also about letting



someone go. If the person returns, it is a gift from Heaven. If not, one's life is richer for having loved anyone at all.

Part II, At the Lighthouse – Celeste reads the book “Little Women,” a gift from Miss Rose. Celeste loves it. She and Graciela have a picnic at the beach, where the lighthouse can be seen. Celeste sees lighthouses as welcoming, and Graciela says she hopes Celeste is writing down all her thoughts in the notebook.

Valerie, one of the popular girls, sees Celeste dancing in the waves, comes over to talk, and asks if Celeste takes dancing lessons. Valerie explains she takes ballet because she wants to dance in “The Nutcracker” someday. It is a show her mother took her to see each Christmas before she got sick with cancer. Valerie confides this in Celeste because Celeste knows what it is like to be looked at differently. Valerie worries how others will react to her mother's cancer. She apologizes for being unkind to Celeste. Meg, the most popular and meanest girl also appears and apologizes as well. Charlie also appears, and they all decide to play hide-and-seek. Graciela invites them all over for empanadas, and they all agree to go.

Part II, Dinner Party – The dinner goes so well, Celeste asks to invite Charlie, Meg, and Valerie over again. Graciela happily consents. Celeste decides to make spaghetti with pesto sauce. She also makes small homemade gifts for each of her friends: a whale-shaped stone to be used as a paperweight for Charlie and pink shell necklaces for Valerie and Meg. They love their gifts. All three apologize again for the way they treated Celeste in the past. Valerie asks Celeste to read from her notebook. She agrees. She reads a poem about walking barefoot and discovering herself. Everyone is amazed. They are also thrilled with dinner. Celeste tells them about life in Chile.

Part II, Questions – Valerie, Meg, and Charlie ask about Celeste's parents. She tearfully explains that they are in hiding, explains about the revolution, and wonders in her mind why her parents didn't just leave for America as well. Celeste says it is important to have faith and that she has faith she will see her parents again.

Part II, Eighth Grade – Celeste imagines that she will one day have a book of published poetry in a bookstore in Valparaiso. Seeing fireflies along the shore, Celeste takes comfort in knowing that although the General may rule Chile, he cannot stop nature. At school Celeste ends up liking Mr. Gary, the eighth grade teacher, but continues to visit Miss Rose. Miss Rose has found a piece of paper in Kim's old desk on which Kim has written, “Celeste is my forever friend.” Celeste promises Miss Rose she will do her best to have the best year ever in honor of Kim.

Part II, Scraps of a Life – Letters come in from Chile, revealing worsening conditions. Celeste is horrified by it all. For example, the government denied a father permission to throw a birthday party for his seven year-old son. In Spain, protestors are picketing, calling for the removal of the General and holding signs saying “Donde estan” for “Where are they?” in reference to exiles, those in hiding, and those who have disappeared. Graciela hopes this will soon mean change. Celeste asks Graciela to get



rid of her calendar. She doesn't want to be reminded of the days since she has last seen Chile.

Part II, The Mailman Mr. John Carter – Graciela loves when the mailman, John Carter, comes to visit. He always brings many letters, which Graciela loves to answer. Graciela and John have themselves become good friends, and Graciela always looks forward to his visits for that reason as well.

Part II, An Entire Sky Inside – In the night, a storm comes on. It awakens Celeste. She goes to find Graciela, who has just received a call that the General is dead. Celeste and Graciela will be going home.

Part III: Only Returns

Part III, The Refuge Against Oppression – The news confirms that Chile will begin a peaceful transition to democracy. Graciela thanks God. No one knows how the General has died, but most people are glad that he is gone. However, Celeste and many others have bittersweet feelings. They wonder how many people will return to Valparaiso and how many are gone forever. Celeste wonders sadly what it will be like to leave America.

Part III, Traveling Light – Graciela considers not returning to Chile, having abandoned home for a man. This angers Celeste tremendously to the point that she runs outside, but she calms down when Graciela apologizes to her about this and Celeste forgives her.

Analysis

Changes continue for Celeste while she is in America. Many things are different. She does her best to learn English so that she may better fit in. In Chile, Celeste had many friends. In America, at first, most kids make fun of her, and Celeste has no friends. It is only through Kim that Celeste gains some degree of normalcy in her time as a student. Indeed, Celeste and Kim become very good friends, having both had to endure similar kinds of change.

Over time, the challenging changes Kim and Celeste face diminish. The kids at school become friendlier toward Celeste and Kim, slowly but surely. This is very important for Celeste, as one day Kim and her family simply leave. It is a change that Celeste is not prepared for and not expecting. She is devastated with the loss of Kim. It almost seems like the events in Chile all over again. But unlike in Chile, Kim's family's disappearance is not a result of national instability. Likewise, Celeste's new friends rally around Celeste in her greatest hour of need.

With a core group of friends in America, and with the love of her aunt, Celeste comes to fully enjoy her time in America. The changes end up being very good things for her. For example, she is thrilled when she has a dream entirely in English and comes to even enjoy the winter months of New England.



However, not all changes are good, for example the changes in Chile. Letters come in, revealing these worsening conditions. Arrests, imprisonments, and executions continue left and right. Simple, everyday celebrations of life are denied, such as a seventh birthday party. However, these worsening conditions come to a cessation when the General is killed. This change comes as a welcome relief—a positive change—for the people of Chile. With the General dead and with a peaceful democratic revolution underway Celeste can now return home to Chile.

However, leaving America is not a fond thing for Celeste to consider. She has unexpectedly fallen in love with the country and with its people, not to mention that she has grown close with her aunt, and she is sad about leaving. These sad feelings of leaving America will haunt Celeste through the rest of the novel.

Celeste's time with Graciela has also been eye-opening. Not only has family been instrumental in Celeste managing to not only weather but to enjoy her time in America, but Graciela has taught and confirmed many important things to Celeste. One such thing is that family, no matter where one is, or how long it has been since last seeing family, still remains. Another is that Celeste has the ability to handle anything life throws at her with the love of family and with faith.

Faith itself proves to be invaluable to Celeste through these trying times. On lonely nights when Celeste thinks of home and her parents, she prays to God for the safety of her parents for the future of Chile. Indeed, Celeste looks forward to the future of Chile now that the dictator is dead. Democracy means that the future of the country will be securely in the hands of the people, and Celeste has already demonstrated tremendous faith in the people of her country.

The reader should also pay careful attention to the symbolic imagery contained through the final chapters of this section. The darkest times come just before the storm breaks and clear skies return. A tremendous storm sweeps through Juliette Cove the night that the General is killed and his government is shattered. The storm wakes Celeste up, and as the storm passes, she learns of the changes that have taken place in Chile. The storm itself comes to symbolize the breaking of evil, and the revealing of better skies. The future is one that is again wide open.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Celeste and Kim become friends so quickly when no one else will befriend them? How do that attitudes of the American kids at school change over time toward Celeste and Kim? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the disappearance of Kim and her family so difficult for Celeste to deal with? How does Celeste manage to handle this new change?



Discussion Question 3

Although Mama and Papa are in hiding, and although Abuela Frida and Delfina are half a world away in Chile, Celeste still has tremendous love and security in family through Graciela. How? What is family like between Celeste and Graciela? Is it different, similar, or both compared to what Celeste knew of family before? Explain.

Vocabulary

euphoria, mesmerized, celestial, colony, coaxing, solidarity, exile, complicated



Part III, Let Your Voice Be Heard – Part III, The Alphabet in My Hands

Summary

Part III, Let Your Voice Be Heard – Though Celeste is happy to be returning home, she will miss her second home in America very badly. She goes around to say her goodbyes, including to Mr. Carter who tells her to let her voice be heard when she returns to Chile.

Part III, I'll Be Seeing You With My Heart – At school, Celeste reveals to Miss Rose that she will be returning to Chile. Miss Rose tells Celeste she is courageous. At the lighthouse, Celeste tells Meg, Valerie, and Charlie that she will be returning to Chile. They are happy for Celeste but very sad to be losing her. She tells them that they might not be physically seeing one another anymore, but they will see one another with their hearts.

Part III, Of Flights and Faith – Celeste nervously braids and rebraids her hair on the way to the airport. Graciela gives Celeste the first conch shell she ever found in Juliette Cove so she can carry the sound of the Atlantic Ocean with her. On the plane, Celeste falls asleep. When she awakens, the plane is descending into Chile.

Part III, The Road to Butterfly Hill – Celeste is surprised to find that it is Alejandro rather than Delfina and Abuela Frida that have met her at the airport. Celeste learns that her grandmother is not doing as well physically anymore, but her spirit is strong. Celeste is thrilled to see Valparaiso once again and to see her house and the pelicans. Frida and Celeste embrace outside, overjoyed to see one another. Frida says that faith is what helped guide her through, along with Delfina's company. Celeste then goes inside to see Delfina.

Part III, Like Old Times – Delfina and Celeste are thrilled to see one another again. Celeste is also thrilled to see her old blue room once more. Delfina makes stew – Celeste's favorite – for dinner. Cristobal also comes for dinner, bearing a gift of flowers for Celeste. Cristobal and Celeste go for a walk, during which time Celeste asks about everything that has gone on. Lucila and her family have still not been heard from. Ana and her family have moved to Mexico. Gloria's father became a powerful member of the Department of Justice and is feared even now that the General is gone. Gloria now attends a private school.

Part III, This Crumbling Wall – Delfina cautions Celeste not to venture beyond Butterfly Hill. Though the General is gone, his soldiers and his henchmen still remain, and there is widespread violence and danger between the people and the military. Valparaiso has not returned to normal. Celeste goes to visit Marisol, who is thrilled to see her. She appears much older than her fourteen years, aged prematurely by the strife in Chile.



Part III, Perched on Invisible Things – Celeste wonders what has become of her parents. Abuela Frida refuses to allow Celeste to return to school until her parents return home. Senora Atkinson comes to visit.

Part III, Two Roads on the Map of My Heart – Celeste begins to feel stir-crazy from not being able to go out without Cristobal and from worrying about her parents. Cristobal has been reading palms since Celeste left, under the guise of buying roses from his mother. He tells Celeste her palm is a map of her heart. He tells her that her heart holds all the answers that she needs. Celeste is deeply moved. She asks for Cristobal's help in finding her parents. He reads her palm and agrees to help, telling her that her parents aren't living together anymore. She must choose one, and she chooses her father. Cristobal's pendulum will lead the way.

Part III, The Squash of Gold – Celeste asks her grandmother's permission to travel south with Cristobal to look for Mama and Papa. Abuela Frida consents with worry, giving Celeste her old hat adorned with three screech owl feathers for wisdom and hearing.

Part III, The Long and Narrow Search for Papa – Cristobal and Celeste begin their journey south by bus. They learn of a town whose residents comb through the sand on their beach for the remains of dead loved ones. The bus stops in the small fishing town of Quinchamali. They overhear a middle-aged couple speaking to a fisherman, Senior Oviedo, who says many people fled to hide on the uninhabited islands off the coast. Others were imprisoned on them.

Part III, The Sea Like the Heart of Man – Celeste decides to talk to Oviedo. She and Cristobal help the elderly Oviedo with his fishing nets. All of Oviedo's sons are dead. Oviedo agrees to help Celeste try to find her father. He allows them to stay with him. He says all things take patience. Before going to sleep, Celeste says a prayer.

Part III, Patience – Oviedo wakes up early and goes out to fish. He explains he has tried to reach the islands many times, but must always turn back because of a dangerous current that leads to a jagged island of rocks. He himself is trying to reach the islands to find his daughter-in-law, Javiera. All three of his sons are dead, one being a painter whose works were deemed subversive. Javiera was carrying Oviedo's grandchild.

Part III, Fergus Bacon – Sir Fergus Bacon, a strange old English-speaking Scottish-Australian sailor who speaks little Spanish, comes to town. He only comes in with the fog. Oviedo believes Fergus will be able to help find Celeste's parents. Fergus is thrilled to talk to Celeste in English. He says that Celeste looks familiar and that he wants to take her out in his boat at once. Celeste agrees, but only Celeste can go as Fergus's boat is laden down with supplies. Celeste kisses Cristobal on the cheek before she leaves.

Part III, Unshakable Faith – Though Fergus knows where he is going, he wants Celeste to guide the way as proof that she is who she says she is. She decides to listen to her heart and try to sense where her father is. She begins to direct Fergus. They pass



prison islands where some prisoners are still being kept. Fergus relates stories of other prisoners being thrown from planes into the sea to get rid of them. Fergus explains he found Papa in the water, half-alive after Papa escaped from prison. Fergus then brings Celeste to his home, an old whaling ship called the “Pirate Queen,” moored to a tiny island. There, she is thrilled to embrace Papa.

Part III, Our Country is Blue – Celeste thanks Fergus for saving her father as they return to the mainland. Papa thanks Oviedo for his help, as well. There are many questions Celeste now wants answered, such as why Papa was still living on the island after the General died and why he ever separated from Mama. Celeste holds Papa the entire drive home.

Part III, Of Ships and Secrets – Safe at home, Papa reveals the past. He explains he was imprisoned and kept in a small cell where he lost track of time. As rumors of dissent against the General rose, the General became crueler, cutting food rations in half for prisoners. Pretending to be dead, Papa was thrown into the sea where Fergus found him.

Unable to speak much Spanish, Fergus could not communicate well with Papa to let him know the General had died. Even then, Papa remained, refusing to take chances while there were still so many supporters of the General. He says they must have patience in searching for Mama because of this. He explains he and Mama split up in case something would happen to the other one. Papa has sent out a letter by way of friends seeking Mama.

Part III, The Alphabet in My Hands – Papa warns Celeste that being too rash in searching for Mama might inspire revenge attacks for the General. Yet Papa knows Mama is on her way back. Papa then gifts Celeste with a brand new little blue notebook. She uses it to write about Valparaiso Harbor.

Analysis

Celeste’s return to Valparaiso is bittersweet. While she has longed to return to Chile, and to attempt to return to normalcy, she has indeed come to fall in love with America and its people and is saddened to have to leave them behind. Nevertheless, even her return to Valparaiso is not what she originally expected it to be.

So much has changed because of the revolution, it is almost unbearable. Many of the changes are permanent. The city now is eerily quiet even though the General is gone and his regime overthrown. Having lived under oppression and brutal violence for years, the people of the city are still holed up in their homes. It is as if they are afraid to live again for fear that the General will suddenly return. The silence is very noticeable to Celeste.

Other changes have also manifested themselves in the time that Celeste has been gone. Abuela Frida’s health has rapidly declined, a physical manifestation of brutality of the General’s regime and the amount of worrying that has plagued Frida since the



departure of Celeste to the United States. Delfina, too, looks older. Celeste's father, older already, looks even older and more disheveled when she finds him off the coast of Chile.

Things are entirely too painful for Celeste to consider returning to school. Her conversations with Cristobal and Marisol reveal that a large number of people have gone missing. Few have come back. The whereabouts of Lucila and her family are still unknown. Mama's whereabouts are still unknown. It is as if only some semblance of a half-life has returned to Valparaiso and especially to Celeste. Not until Mama is home will Celeste consider returning to school.

In the search for Papa, and in the desire to see Mama again, Celeste is reminded to keep faith in God and in the future. Through faith and through Cristobal's help, Celeste is able to track down her father. Celeste's return to Chile and the finding of her father are evidence that faith pays off, and that faith is monumental in human survival. Celeste's faith only grows as a result.

Family remains a crucial theme in the novel, as a love of family is what drives Celeste to seek out her father. She is overjoyed that Frida and Delfina have managed to handle the storm that was the General, though she is saddened to see the toll that it has taken on their health. Indeed, Celeste's journey to find her father is a demonstration of just how much she loves her father. While it is true that the General is gone, support for him and his policies has not died with him. Supporters still exist, and are still targeting opponents. Celeste, in effect, risks her life to find her father. This is confirmed by the fact that island prisons still exist, controlled by the General's henchmen.

Likewise, Celeste's journey reminds her that human tragedy and suffering due to the revolution has not been limited to her, or the city of Valparaiso. The General's heinous policies have infected all corners of the country. Such is the case of the elderly fisherman, Oviedo, whose three sons were slaughtered by the General's thugs. Oviedo himself is searching for his only remaining family, a daughter-in-law pregnant with his grandson. The fate of the woman and her baby is never revealed.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Celeste risk her life trying to find her father? Why does Papa caution Celeste about acting too rashly in trying to find Mama? Is Papa justified in his concerns? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Celeste's return to Chile is bittersweet, comprising both happy and sad feelings. What are some of these conflicting feelings that Celeste has returning to Chile? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Celeste's return to Chile causes her to confront that everything has not returned to normal. What changes have occurred since Celeste's departure? Are there any signs of these things returning to normal? Is it even possible for these things to return to normal? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

confusedly, pained, cadence, writhing, impenetrable, raucous, jibe, moored, dissent, somber,



Part III, Her Bare Feet Make No Sound – Epilogue: The Ship Called Hope

Summary

Part III, Her Bare Feet Make No Sound – At breakfast, Mama returns. Celeste and the entire family are overjoyed to see her. She knows how much her mother has suffered, but is thrilled her mother is home.

Part III, All I Wanted Was to Talk to Her – Mama tucks Celeste into bed that night. She tells her mother all about the past few years, and all that she has experienced. She begins to cry when speaking about Kim and Tom, and Mama holds and soothes Celeste.

Part III, So Strange Here, Sometimes – Celeste writes a letter to Graciela. She explains how Mama and Papa do not want to talk about their past few years, and how they always hold hands. She wants to know how Graciela and John Carter are getting along now.

Part III, There Will Always Be a Young Person Who Remembers a Poem – Mama finally talks about what happened to her. She explains that she moved from place to place frequently, never staying anywhere for long. She relied on the kindness of friends and strangers, reaching the fisherman's cove of Isla Negra. There, she finds the poet Neruda's house, which had been vandalized by soldiers. Young people would arrive and carve his poems into the wood of the house because poetry cannot be destroyed. She ends up staying in Neruda's house. Mama then wants to hear more about Tom.

Part III, I Knew There Would Be Changes – Celeste is worried about returning to school after what she has been through in the past. Mama promises to reopen the clinic if Celeste returns to school.

Part III, Julepe at Juana Ross – As Celeste dresses for school, she realizes she is not a little girl anymore. She brings Graciela's conch shell along to school for good luck. Senorita Alvarado is thrilled to see Celeste again. Principal Castellanos has returned from exile in Spain. Marisol is thrilled to see Celeste in school. She encourages Celeste to come play hopscotch with the little girls for old time's sake.

Part III, Tremors – Being back at school is difficult because not everything is back to normal. So many old friends are gone or missing. Celeste is glad to see Cristobal, however. They are now all in high school, a change in and of itself. Old memories continue to flood back, causing Celeste to seek a break in the nurse's office.

Part III, Love Among Empty Spaces – Senor Castellano and Senorita Alvarado visit Celeste at the end of the day, worried about her. They explain they know how many different things Celeste is feeling right now. Celeste wants to know where everyone has



gone. Castellano and Alvarado explain that not everyone knows or is willing to tell. They then invite Celeste to have coffee with them, but Celeste declines. She is interested to know, though, that Castellano and Alvarado are now a couple.

Part III, The Elections – Celeste writes to Miss Rose about the first round of elections being held after the fall of the General. Mama has backed Monica Espinoza for office, for Monica was imprisoned and now wants to help Chile's wounds heal, as well as the poor. Along with the restoring of democracy, the pelicans have returned. Espinoza wins the election and all of Butterfly Hill celebrates. Celeste and Cristobal dance happily together.

Part III, I Should Still Continue to Be – Mama and Papa reopen their clinic. They listen to stories of heartache as well as tending to sickness and injuries. Delfina sees how sad Celeste has been and knows Celeste needs a purpose in life. She asks Celeste to teach her to read. Celeste happily agrees.

Part III, Donde Estan? – Marisol calls Celeste to invite her to the demonstration with Cristobal. The demonstration is to demand information on where the disappeared have gone. Celeste rushes out to join them, along with thousands of other people who carry signs and photos of their missing loved ones. Among those assembled is Senor Castellano and Senorita Alvarado, who tells Celeste she is a part of history now.

Part III, She Used to Have All the Answers – That night, Celeste sits down on her mother's lap. Celeste is upset that so many are missing, and she feels embarrassed about how lucky she is to have her whole family still. She wonders why President Espinoza doesn't search for the missing and arrest all the bad members of the military and the General's administration. But Celeste knows Mama doesn't have the answers. All she can say is that perhaps Celeste will one day be one of the people to make a difference.

Part III, The Assignment – President Espinoza has contacted all the schools, encouraging the students to write letters about what they want to see in Chile as the country is reconstructed. The contest is called "Dreams for my Homeland." The prize includes publication in the country's most important newspaper, El Mercurio, and a college scholarship. Senor Castellano encourages Celeste to enter.

Part III, My Dream for Chile – Celeste writes her letter on the rooftop on Saturday evening. She talks about her family's stories and her own while the Dictator General was in power. Her dream, she explains, is for all Chileans to be able to read, and to have access to free literacy classes. This will help people to communicate with each other and provide the basis for a better future.

Part III, Fireworks Over the Harbor – It is New Year's. Celeste wears an old dress of her mother's (blue with yellow flowers) which prompts her mother to remark that Celeste looks beautiful. Celeste goes to meet Cristobal and Marisol at Vergara Pier. The entire city is out celebrating. Celeste is stunned to find Gloria with Cristobal and Marisol. She



is angry and wants to yell, but settles on peace and reuniting instead. Everyone is thrilled when the clock strikes midnight.

Part III, The Secret Library – Abuela Frida’s health is rapidly deteriorating. Celeste spends hours with her grandmother, looking out the window. Frida reveals that while Celeste was away, many people came to the house with books to be hidden so they weren’t burned. Frida kept these banned books hidden behind the door of a secret compartment under the stairs behind the wallpaper. Cristobal always helped. While Celeste was gone, soldiers ransacked the house but did not find the room. Frida gives Celeste the task of using the books to begin a traveling library for the good of all the people of the city. Celeste readily agrees.

Part III, Treasures – Celeste is amazed by all of the books in the hideaway. She goes back to tell her grandmother this, but her grandmother has fallen asleep.

Part III, The Skin of an Onion – Celeste wears her grandmother’s shawl, which reminds her of the skin of an onion, as she sorts through the books. Celeste calls Cristobal to thank him for always helping Abuela Frida. Cristobal then agrees to help Celeste with distributing books to places like Café Iris and the harbor. The next morning, a representative from the office of President Espinoza calls to congratulate Celeste on winning the contest.

Part III, Most of All, Be Happy – Celeste and Cristobal go to the clinic to tell Mama and Papa about Celeste’s first place prize. Mama and Papa are overjoyed. That night, on the roof, Mama trims Celeste’s hair by moonlight to ensure beauty and abundance. She tells Celeste that Celeste is now a young woman. Celeste then writes a letter of thanks to the president, asking to use some of the scholarship money to begin a traveling library.

Part III, A Great Thing – The president personally responds by mail, giving Celeste permission to use some of the money for a traveling library. Delfina tells Celeste to go and tell her parents at the clinic. Delfina says she will be skipping her reading lesson as she is coming down with a flu.

Part III, Serendipity – Mama and Papa send Celeste out for empanadas. Don Alejandro then gives Celeste a ride home. Upon returning home, Celeste discovers the house has been decorated for a celebration for her.

Part III, La Gran Fiesta – Celeste is overjoyed and deeply grateful for the party. Many people she knows and loves are there. Delfina’s flu was faked in order to go around and invite people over. Abuela Frida is well enough to be active and to participate. Among those present are Bernardo and his beautiful new Argentine wife, Ingrid. Cristobal then dances with Celeste.

Epilogue: The Ship Called Hope – Delfina hurries Celeste off to school, worried that she will be late. Celeste says good morning to the pelicans she sees. Celeste spends much time with Cristobal and Marisol, and with Cristobal alone. There is still no word about Lucila and her family. Celeste is on friendly terms with Gloria, but the two do not hang



out anymore. Celeste also practices with the typewriter given to her by her friends and family at the celebration. She uses it to write a letter to John Carter and to Kim and Tom. She tells Kim and Tom she hopes she will see them soon, and wishes them love.

Analysis

The return of Mama in the final section of the novel is a good and positive change for Celeste, who has been without her mother for years now. Indeed, Mama seeing how Celeste has grown makes Mama happy. It is clear just how deeply Mama as well as Papa and the others value family. Mama is likewise thrilled to be at home, the place where family is its strongest and most powerful.

Indeed, Celeste notes how the changes wrought by the revolution have affected the members of her own family. Her parents are quieter now, and are often seen holding hands. This makes sense given that holding hands is an incredibly intimate and touching physical act and Mama and Papa had no physical contact for years. Abuela Frida's health continues to decline. She is not bedridden, but is not as active as she once was.

While nothing will ever be the same again, Celeste, her family, and the remaining citizens of Valparaiso and Butterfly Hill do everything they can to seek out normalcy amidst the aftermath of such tragedy. But no return to normalcy is possible without either a reminder, or an absence, of the past. These are heartbreaking changes that will never be able to be overcome.

When Celeste returns to school, she hopes that it will be the first step in return to true normalcy. It is the opposite. Celeste herself says that school never stops being strange. So many people no longer attend. Lucila is among those who do not return. Her absence is deeply felt, and is physical proof of the revolution's terror.

Indeed, it takes months for people to begin to come out of their shells. Only for the New Year do the people of Valparaiso turn out en-masse as a whole. Other public events such as the Donde Estan rally bring out thousands, but not everyone. It is clear that the people will live with the changes wrought by the revolution for years to come in the best circumstances, and forever in the worst cases. For example, the fate of many, such as Lucila and her family, will never truly be known.

The Donde Estan rally is itself a mark of revolutionary history that concentrates on the peaceful democratic revolutionary history. There is no advocacy for violence, revenge, or overthrowing anyone, but a search for answers and for the missing. The revolution occurs in the return of power to the will of the people and their ability to press their case without bloodshed or cruelty.

Even as things continue to get better for Celeste and the people of Chile, Celeste is constantly reminded that faith even in better times is essential. She continues to pray for her family and for her country, and to keep faith in God, the future, and herself. This is apparent in her dream for the future of Chile, in that literacy and the ability to write will



mean communication and an avoidance of violence. Her faith in the future, and in the people for the future, is unshakable. This is to Celeste's credit, because it earns her first place in the president's contest.

The novel's ending is in and of itself a testament to faith, and to Celeste's faith in faith. The final chapter includes a letter to Kim and Tom, which she has faith will one day end up in their possession. The letter itself speaks about hope for the future and wishes love to Kim and Tom. It is a fitting end to the novel in that Celeste expresses such faith for things to come.

Discussion Question 1

Celeste hopes that the return of her mother, as well as returning to school, will bring about a sense of normalcy once more. Is Celeste correct in her belief? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How have Celeste's parents changed since the revolution, and since going into hiding? What does she notice that is different about them now? What does she notice is still the same? What do Celeste's parents notice that is different about her?

Discussion Question 3

What is Celeste's dream for the future of Chile? Why is this her dream? Do you believe this is a good dream? Why or why not? What is your dream for the future of your own country? Why?

Vocabulary

jumble, philosophy, sophisticated, elegant, restored, perished, annihilated, impishly, serendipity, sacred



Characters

Celeste

Celeste Marconi is the main character and narrator of the novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill.” Celeste is the daughter of Papa and Mama, the granddaughter of Abuela Frida, and something of a niece to Delfina. When the novel begins, Celeste is eleven years old. She spends her free time with her closest friends, Cristobal, Marisol, Gloria, and Lucila, and spends her weekends helping her doctor parents tend to the poor. Poverty touches Celeste deeply, and she is thrilled when a reformist, President Alarcon, is elected. Alarcon has many enemies, however, who overthrow and kill him. The General, a dictator, comes to power, and all of Alarcon’s supporters become targets of the state. This includes Celeste’s parents, who go into hiding.

Celeste’s world changes rapidly. Some of her friends, like Lucila, go missing. Others, like Gloria, turn against her for having backed Alarcon. Celeste is ultimately sent to the United States to live with her Aunt Graciela when things become too dangerous for her to remain in Chile. Celeste feels very out of place in America at first, because she doesn’t know English, and many of her new classmates make fun of her. However, Celeste quickly befriends a Korean girl named Kim, and the two become inseparable. They learn better English together and get to teach their class about their homelands. The American students all come around, and begin to warm up to Celeste and Kim. Celeste develops her first real crush on Kim’s older brother, Tom.

When Kim’s family suddenly leaves one day, it is Celeste’s American friends, including Valerie, Meg, and Charlie, who are there for her. She becomes very good friend with them, and they spend much time together over the next year until word comes that the General is dead, and democracy is returning to Chile. Celeste then decides to return home. Back in Chile, she is thrilled to see her grandmother, Delfina, and her friends. Cristobal agrees to help Celeste when she decides to find her still-missing parents. They manage to track down Papa, and return home with him. Papa sends out a letter through trusted friends, which Mama receives and then makes her way home.

Newly-elected reform president Monica Espinoza hosts a contest for the youth of Chile to write about their dreams for the future. Celeste enters the contest, and writes about how she hopes all Chileans will be able to read and write so that better communication may be possible. Celeste wins the contest, and receives permission to use part of the prize—college scholarship money—to fund a traveling library. As the novel ends, a party is held for Celeste’s victory in the contest, and New Year’s comes on. She dances with Cristobal and writes a letter of hope and love to Kim and Tom.



Papa

Papa is the father of Celeste, the husband of Mama, and the son-in-law of Abuela Frida. Many years older than Mama, Papa is kind, gentle, patient, and unfailingly dedicated to his family and to his work as a doctor tending to the poor. He and Mama support reformist President Alarcon. When Alarcon is killed, Mama and Papa become political targets, and decide to go into hiding. Papa is captured and imprisoned, but escapes. Assisted by Fergus Bacon, a Scottish-Australian fisherman who lives in an old whaling boat off the coast of Chile, Papa waits and prays for the bad times to end, and for his family to be all right. He is thrilled when Celeste tracks him down, and he returns home with her. He later sends word through trusted friends to Mama, telling her it is alright to come home.

Mama

Mama is the mother of Celeste, the wife of Papa, and the daughter of Abuela Frida. Many years younger than Papa, Mama is sweet, gentle, patient, and devoted to her family and to her work with Papa as a doctor tending to the poor. As reformers, Mama and Papa support President Alarcon. When Alarcon is killed, Mama and Papa become political targets and go into hiding. It takes two years for things to become safe enough for Papa and Mama to return home and reunited. Mama is especially glad to be with Papa and Celeste again. As the novel ends, Mama is delighted to see Celeste growing into a young woman.

Abuela Frida

Abuela Frida is the mother of Mama and Graciela, the mother-in-law of Papa, the grandmother of Celeste, and the original employer of Delfina. Frida is an Austrian Jew who fled Vienna after the Nazis came to power. While sailing to Chile, she met and fell in love with Jose, and began a family with him. Now a widow, Frida cares greatly for her family. She is well-loved, and loves to knit and read. She is full of much good wisdom, and proves to be a rock for Celeste when Mama and Papa go into hiding. Frida ultimately decides to send Celeste to America to live with Graciela when things get too dangerous in Chile. While Celeste is gone, Frida hides banned books in the house, and Frida's health declines. When Celeste returns, Frida gets Celeste to agree to begin a traveling library using the hidden books.

Delfina

Delfina is the Marconis' housekeeper by profession but is considered a member of the family by extension. She has been with the Marconis for decades, and is a source of hope, optimism, and great wisdom. She has become a best friend to the point of being like a sister to Abuela Frida.



Graciela

Graciela is the daughter of Abulea Frida, the sister of Mama, the sister-in-law of Papa, and the aunt of Celeste. Graciela left Chile years before to follow her boyfriend to Montreal, Canada. When he broke up with her, Graciela was too embarrassed to return to Chile, so she settled in Juliette Cove, Maine, because the name of the place reminded her of Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet". She keeps a large collection of conch shells which she began as a child and uses the conch shells to symbolically hide her sadness. Graciela is lonely but thrilled to have Celeste come and stay with her. She helps Celeste adjust to life in America, and becomes incredibly close with Celeste over the two years Celeste is with her. When Celeste returns to Chile, Graciela is sad to see her go. After Celeste leaves, Graciela begins a romantic relationship with single mailman John Carter, and finds happiness again.

Kim

Kim is a girl of Celeste's age who has come to America with her family to avoid persecution in Korea. Kim is shy, gentle, and kind, and she and Celeste become fast friends due to their immigration to America and their similar backgrounds in why they left their homelands. Kim tells Celeste that Celeste is her "forever friend." Kim's family is poor, but they are very warm and welcoming to Celeste. Kim's father has since returned to Korea, leaving her, her brother Tom, and her mother on their own. Kim and her family suddenly pick up and leave one day with no idea of where they are going.

Cristobal

Cristobal is a friend and classmate of Celeste's. He lives alone with his mother after the death of his father, and he has become proficient in traditional divinatory practices, such as using pendulums and reading palms. For this, he is targeted during the General's reign and even beaten for it. When the General is killed and Celeste returns home, he helps Celeste to track down her father. He later consents to helping Celeste begin a traveling library, and dances with her at her celebration. It appears that Cristobal and Celeste are growing closer romantically by the end of the novel.

Marisol

Marisol is a friend and classmate of Celeste's. She is the cousin of Lucila, who goes missing when the General comes to power. Marisol remains in Chile through its darkest days and never learns what becomes of Lucila and Lucila's family. When the General falls, Marisol is both sad for everything she has lost, and happy for better days. She is especially thrilled when Celeste returns home and then returns to school.

Gloria

Gloria is a friend of Celeste, Marisol, Lucila, and Cristobal. Her family supports the General, and her father becomes a prominent member of the Department of Justice under the General. As a result, Gloria turns against her friends whose families supported Alarcon. After the General falls, Gloria becomes friendly with Celeste and the others again but no longer spends time with them.



Symbols and Symbolism

Notebook

A notebook is kept by Celeste throughout the novel. Her notebook functions as a place for Celeste to write down her thoughts, feelings, poetry, and other writings. She carries the notebook with her from Chile to America, and back to Chile again. While in America, Celeste's American friends encourage her to read aloud what she has written and believe she will one day be a famous writer. As the novel draws to a close, Papa gives Celeste a new notebook, and the writings in this new notebook are much more optimistic and hopeful than those of the last.

Pendulum

A pendulum made from glass is created and given to Cristobal by his mother after the death of his father. The pendulum is used over maps to find the locations of people, places, and things that are needed. The pendulum is seen as voodoo nonsense by the General's soldiers, one of whom beats Cristobal for having a pendulum. The soldier attempts to crush the pendulum, but is unable to do so. The soldier's attempt to smash the pendulum can be seen as symbolic of the crushing effect of the revolution, but the pendulum, like the good people of Chile, is unable to be smashed apart. The people of Chile and the pendulum both endure. Cristobal later uses the pendulum to help track down Papa with Celeste.

Green Shawl

A green shawl is given to Celeste by Abuela Frida when Celeste travels to the United States. It is a touching gift meant to remind Celeste of home and love. Celeste keeps the shawl close while she is in America, often wrapping herself up in the shawl. She sometimes wraps the shawl around Graciela as well.

Conch Shells

Conch shells are collected by the hundreds by Graciela beginning from the time she is a child. The hobby becomes incredibly important to her, as the shells serve not only as memories of the past but as a symbolic place for Graciela to hide her sadness and her pain as well. When Celeste leaves to return to Chile, Graciela gives Celeste her first conch shell so that Celeste too may hide her pain and sorrows.



Empanadas

Empanadas are crescent-shaped, meat-filled baked pastries that are a staple in Chilean cuisine and are served regularly in the Marconi household. When in the United States, Celeste invites her American friends, Charlie, Meg, and Valerie over to eat a dinner of empanadas. The empanadas are a hit, and the meal serves as yet another step forward for friendship.

Letter for the Future

A letter detailing Celeste's hopes for the future of Chile is written by Celeste and mailed to President Monica Espinoza in conjunction with a contest soliciting such letters from youth across the country. Celeste's letter details how she wants all Chileans to be able to read and write, thus making communication easier and more effective. The letter wins Celeste the contest, granting her a college scholarship.

Books

Books that have been deemed unsuitable for reading by the General are burned in great piles in the streets across Chile. It is eerily reminiscent of the Nazis and terrifies all good Chileans. When Celeste leaves for America, Abuela Frida begins hiding away banned books brought to her by citizens across Valparaiso. She keeps them locked away in a hidden room. When Celeste returns, Frida reveals the books to Celeste and gets Celeste to agree to use them to create a traveling library.

Signs

Signs are carried and held by protestors at rallies in the city of Valparaiso after the death of the General. The signs are principally of two kinds: photographs of loved ones gone missing during the General's reign, and signs with the words "Donde Estan?" meaning "Where did they go?" in reference to disappeared loved ones.

Blue Bedroom

Celeste's blue bedroom in her house on Butterfly Hill is one of her favorite places to be, both for the view that it offers, and for the beautiful, peaceful blue the room is colored. The blue bedroom becomes symbolic of home, safety, and warmth to Celeste. When Celeste must leave Chile, she is heartbroken. She feels much better when she finds her new American bedroom is the exact same color blue as her old bedroom. It gives her a sense of peace, home, safety, and warmth as a result.



Calendars

Celeste stops using calendars after she travels to the United States. She comes to realize that instead of using them to look ahead to future times and dates like most people do, she is using them to look at the past. She has been using them to keep track of the number of days since she has left Chile and since she last saw her parents.

Fog

Valparaiso is often host to fog. One such very heavy fog obscures the city at the beginning of the novel that it unnerves and even scares Celeste. It makes it difficult to keep a track of her friends. She is further unnerved when she parts ways with Lucila, and watches Lucila disappear into the fog. This foreshadows Lucila's later literal disappearance under the reign of the General. The fog itself comes to symbolize future uncertainty, loss, and confusion which will be manifested by the rise of the General and his cohorts.



Settings

Butterfly Hill

Butterfly Hill is one of forty-two hills that make up the city of Valparaiso on Chile's coast. Butterfly Hill is a warm, friendly neighborhood with houses across the top of the hill, and with businesses and shops at the bottom of the hill. Residents ascend and descend the hill on a trolley car, by roads, or by a series of steps and curving sidewalks. Butterfly is uniquely situated to have a beautiful view of most of the city, the harbor, and the Pacific Ocean. Butterfly Hill is the home of Celeste and her family, where the home they live in has been in the family for generations. Celeste loves living on Butterfly Hill, for its warmth, beauty, views, for the pelicans that always fly overhead, and for the fact that it is her home.

Valparaiso

Valparaiso is a city on the coast of Chile. Composed of forty-two hills and a harbor, Valparaiso is a large and mostly beautiful city. It is full of shops and homes, and is noted for the trolley cars that run on each of its hills. There are, however, areas of the city where the poor live and which are prone to floods during heavy rains. Celeste and her parents tend to the poor on a regular basis, especially during bad weather. When the General comes to power, Valparaiso's peaceful harbor becomes host to dozens of warships. The city itself falls under martial law, becoming the site of book-burnings, a large military presence, and with even the schools coming under guard by soldiers. As supporters of assassinated President Alarcon, Mama and Papa must go into hiding. As the daughter of Alarcon supporters, Celeste must leave Valparaiso for the United States.

Chile

Chile is a long, thin country on the western coast of South America. It borders the Pacific Ocean, and is a country of great beauty, faith, and tradition. Chile is a democratic country that is home to the capital city of Santiago and the port city of Valparaiso. When reformist President Alarcon is elected, many, including in the military, become concerned about the nature and speed of his policies. As a result, they overthrow Alarcon and replace his presidency with a military dictatorship under the General. Chile remains under the grip of the General's totalitarian government for some three years before the General is killed.

Juliette Cove

Juliette Cove is a small, coastal fishing town in Maine in the United States where Graciela has made her home. The town is comprised of numerous homes, a handful of



shops, a beach, a lighthouse, and a harbor. Following a failed romance, Graciela moved to Juliette Cove due to the fact that the name of the town reminded her of Shakespeare's novel "Romeo and Juliet." Celeste feels out of place in Juliette Cove at first because she can't speak English and because many of the local kids make fun of her. However, she befriends Kim, a Korean girl who has come to Juliette Cove with her family, which helps to give her a sense of belonging. Over time, the other American kids come around and become good friends with Celeste. When it comes time for Celeste to leave Juliette Cove, she is sad to go.

The Pirate Queen

The Pirate Queen is an old whaling ship moored to a small island far off the coast of Chile. It is the home of Scottish-Australian immigrant and fisherman Fergus Bacon. It becomes home to Papa when Fergus Bacon rescues Papa from the ocean. Papa spends years living on the Pirate Queen, passing the time as best as he can by praying, helping to keep ship, and playing cards with Fergus. Celeste ultimately comes to the Pirate Queen with Fergus to bring her father back home.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” by Marjorie Agosin. Family, thematically, involves love, compassion, loyalty, encouragement, and support of others who may or may not be blood-related, but who still function and behave in the way of the traditional family unit. In the novel, Celeste’s family means everything to her, and they help her through incredibly difficult and trying times.

From the start, it is clear that Celeste loves her family deeply. She looks up with great admiration to Mama and Papa, both doctors; to her grandmother, Frida, a source of great wisdom; and to Delfina, who is more like an aunt than merely a housekeeper. Celeste spends as much time as she can with each of the members of her family, whether it is cooking with Delfina or tending to the poor with her parents. Her world is secure because it is anchored in the love of her family.

When Mama and Papa decide they must go into hiding following the killing of Alarcon and the overthrow of his government, Celeste is devastated. It feels as if part of her heart has been taken away because her parents have been such a core part of her life. She does her best to take comfort in her grandmother and Delfina, who offer her refuge when things get bad at school. With friends disappearing and turning on one another, the only truly safe place Celeste has is at home with family.

However, things grow dangerous even there for Celeste. As a result, she is sent to live in the United States with her Aunt Graciela. She and Graciela bond instantly not only because they are family, but because they are both deeply saddened by the past and take comfort in their mutual love and loyalty. Graciela helps Celeste to adjust to life in America, while Celeste offers Graciela the warmth of family that Graciela has been without for so long.

When Celeste is able to return to Chile, she is thrilled to see her grandmother and Delfina once more, but her thoughts and heart are still with her parents who have not yet come back. As weeks pass, Celeste determines to find her parents. With Cristobal’s company and help, she sets out down the coast of Chile to find her father. In the past, her parents have cared for Celeste; now, Celeste sets out to care for her parents by bringing them back. She successfully finds her father, but she must wait for her mother to come home to Butterfly Hill on her own.

As the novel ends, Celeste is sad even though she still has her family. She sees how much her parents hold hands, recognizing how dearly they have missed one another when they were separated by events beyond their control. Celeste also spends much time in the arms of her mother and father, having missed out on years of closeness with them. Given the tragedy which first separated them, Celeste feels both lucky and



embarrassed to still have her entire family when so many others have lost their entire families.

Faith

Faith is an important theme in the novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” by Marjorie Agosin. Faith in the novel comprises two very important kinds—faith in God and faith in the future—both of which are heavily influential in Celeste’s life. Both become incredibly important to Celeste and to her family when the General rises to power.

Celeste has been brought up with a healthy respect, love for, and belief in faith. Her family admires and frequently prays to God in a unique blend of Frida’s Jewish heritage and Catholicism. The family can be seen to celebrate both Jewish and Catholic holidays as a result, often blending the two together such as when Frida’s religious candles come out for all religious celebrations.

Celeste has also been brought up with a healthy respect, love for, and belief in faith in and of itself, especially when it comes to the future. This stems in large part from Frida’s own past fleeing the Nazis. Her faith in God, and her faith in better times, kept her hope alive when she left Vienna. While crossing to Chile, she met her future husband, Jose. Jose paved the way to an even better life for her, all because she had faith in God and in hope.

When times get tough in Chile as the General rises to power, Celeste’s family reminds her to keep faith in God and in hope of better times. Papa himself hopes that things won’t be dark for too long and that common sense and decency will soon return. However, this turns out not to be the case. Papa and Mama must go into hiding. As they go into hiding, Celeste’s family reminds her to keep faith. It is something she is constantly reminded about through the next few years. Faith is hard to hold onto sometimes for Celeste, but she never loses her faith in God or in better times.

When word comes that the General has fallen, Celeste realizes how truly important faith has been in helping her through such difficult times. She learns that faith also helped sustain Papa and Mama through their darkest times as well. As she also learns, faith was very important to Frida and Delfina while Celeste was in America. They kept faith in God and faith in hope for better times.

Change

Change is an important theme in the novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” by Marjorie Agosin. Change is central not only to the events of the novel, but to the life of Celeste as she must deal with circumstances and situations beyond her control. Change helps Celeste to grow as a person, and to more deeply appreciate what she has in life.

When the novel begins, Celeste’s life appears relatively normal, not unlike the lives of many other children around the world. She has a loving family, a beautiful home, and a



solid upbringing. However, Celeste's life is also measured in reality, as her parents are doctors that tend to the poor and as Celeste herself sometimes helps to care for the impoverished. Nevertheless, Celeste's life is what it is, and she is very happy with it.

However, nothing stays the same for long. Recently-elected President Alarcon promises to bring good changes to Chile, combatting poverty. However, Alarcon's changes are either too fast or too much for many, including much of Chile's military. Alarcon is killed and his administration is overthrown. The military assumes power with the Dictator General in his place. The rise of the General means terrifying changes in Chile, including in Valparaiso.

Book burnings occurring in streets are one such change. Before, literature and poetry was freely shared and read; now, works considered harmful to Chile are being burned. This reminds Frida of the Nazis. Murals and paintings around the city, including those in the school, are covered over with white paint. The school itself comes under military guard, and portraits of the General are put up in every classroom. Folk customs and superstitions, such as using pendulums, are written off as voodoo and their practice suppressed, such as when the soldier at the school beats Cristobal over having a pendulum. As the days pass, more and more people begin to disappear from the city, including good friends and their families, such as Lucila. Other good friends, like Gloria, turn on Celeste, Cristobal, and Marisol, for their support of Alarcon.

The biggest changes of all for Celeste come in two forms. The first has to do with her parents deciding to go into hiding to be safe, and to protect the rest of their family. This is heartbreaking to Celeste, for she will be without a core part of her life. However, things grow dangerous even for Celeste. She is sent to live in the United States for two years in order to be safe from the reaches of the General.

In the United States, the changes continue. Celeste feels out of place and unwelcome as she cannot speak English, and as many of the kids at school make fun of her for being different. However, Celeste becomes best friends with Kim, a Korean student, whose family fled their homeland due to political unrest. Over time, the kids at school begin to warm to Celeste and Kim. A startling change comes for Celeste when Kim and her family simply leave one day, and Celeste's American friends—especially Charlie, Meg, and Valerie—come to her side and see her through the next year.

Change continues to occur in Chile. Celeste returns when the General is killed, democracy is restored, and new elections are held. A new president, Monica Espinoza, comes to power and seeks reforms and healing. Celeste's family is reunited, but it is clear the dictatorship has taken its toll on them: they are all a little quieter and a little older. Celeste herself is now fourteen, and her mother proudly says that Celeste has now changed into a young woman based on not only her looks, but everything she has had to endure.

Despite much returning to normal, there are still changes that Celeste knows may never get back to normal. Gloria is now only friendly and does not hang out with Celeste and the others anymore. Most of the kids in school are still missing. Lucila and her entire



family are still missing. Most of all, Celeste will forever have the memories of how things have changed, and how they will never be the same again because of those few years of terror. However, Celeste comes to feel both embarrassed and grateful for the fact that she still has her entire family, and came through the General's reign with comparatively so much intact.

Revolution

Revolution is an important theme in the novel "I Lived on Butterfly Hill" by Marjorie Agosin. Revolution involves the overthrow of a ruler, a governing body, or a government by another power or party which supplants it. In the novel, the revolution of Pinochet in Chile in the 1970s is fictionalized for the purposes of the plot.

Chile is a beautiful country when the novel begins, but there are real problems that need to be addressed. One such problem is poverty. President Alarcon has promised to tackle issues like poverty head-on because so few people are trying to solve them. Two of those few people are Celeste's parents, both doctors, who tend to the poor. Celeste herself also helps out whenever she can. As a result, the Marconi family readily supports the reform movements of Alarcon.

However, not everyone supports Alarcon. Many citizens, and many in the military, oppose either the reforms or the speed at which they are being sought out (or both), and so begin to push back Alarcon's policies. Over time, this opposition becomes resistance, which ends up in outright revolution.

Celeste first notices the revolution through events in Valparaiso. It is eerily similar to the rise of the Nazis in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It begins with warships appearing in greater and greater numbers in the harbor, a show of force meant to intimidate. Military units arrive in the city and begin to hold marches and rallies. Eventually, open violence breaks around the country, as forces loyal to, and opposed to Alarcon wage battle. Alarcon is ultimately killed, and his government is overthrown.

His government is supplanted by a military dictatorship headed up by the General. The General's portrait is put into every classroom, and soldiers are stationed at the schools. Banned books are burned in public squares. Folk customs, traditions, and superstitious practices are suppressed, such as Cristobal's use of a pendulum and palm reading. In order to keep the people of the country in order, many citizens are made to disappear, especially those who supported Alarcon. These citizens are imprisoned, executed, and tortured, all to support the stability of the revolution.

However, a few years of this cruelty is too much for even many opponents of Alarcon to bear. The General is ultimately killed (most likely assassinated) and real democratic reform is undertaken. In the end, it is that revolution—of peaceful assembly, of peaceful voting—that turns the tide in Chile, sweeping Monica Espinoza into power.



Fear

Fear is an important theme in the novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” by Marjorie Agosin. Fear appears in many forms, and in response to many different causes in the novel. Each form of fear helps to drive the plot, especially where Celeste is concerned.

Early in the novel, fear emerges mildly and subtly. The amount of fog at the beginning of the novel unnerves Celeste. She and her friends nearly become lost in the fog, and Celeste herself is fearful of the way that Lucila ultimately does seem to disappear into the fog. This subtle form of fear foreshadows greater fears and changes to come, including Lucila’s actual disappearance later on.

The first outright form of fear that is felt in the novel occurs among the residents of the city, including Celeste and Abulea Frida, when they see that naval warships have drawn up in port. Over the next few days, the number of warships increases to the point that Celeste can no longer count them. Genuine fear follows in other forms as well, including the military marches held throughout the city, the burning of books, and the spread of animosity towards people and things considered subversive. Frida fearfully recalls her own youth as a girl when the Nazis came to power in Germany and later Austria.

Fear is further felt by Celeste and countless others when word comes that Alarcon and his diminishing forces are being besieged in Santiago. Fear becomes widespread when word comes that Alarcon has been killed, and his government has been overthrown. When supporters of Alarcon, and opponents of the General begin disappearing around the country, a fear more akin to terror takes hold. Among those that go missing are Lucila and her family, her fate foreshadowed by the fog.

Fear especially becomes prevalent like never before for Celeste when her mother and father decide they must go into hiding. Celeste worries about them on a daily basis, prays for them regularly, and always wonders about how they are getting along. When Celeste herself must leave the country, the fear she has is less for herself, and more for her parents and her homeland.

In America, Celeste experiences fear at being in a new country in a new hemisphere. She worries about not being able to speak English, and worries about fitting. However, as time goes on, Celeste conquers her fears of living in America, coming to enjoy it thoroughly. However, her fear for her parents, for her family, and for her homeland, does not go away. It remains with her even after her return to Chile, even after her mother and father return home safe and sound. Celeste knows how quickly things can change for the worst, and will always be fearful of such change. However, her fear also compels her courage and faith in hope for a better future without fear.

Styles

Point of View

Marjorie Agosin tells her novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of main character and narrator, Celeste Marconi. The events of the novel—including life before, during, and after the revolution of the General, as well as time in America—are experienced by Celeste firsthand. As a result, she comes to narrate her own story, including through the use of letters, poetry, and journal entries which are all written in the first-person. This allows the reader an intimate glimpse into her innermost thoughts and feelings, which are especially important given the tragic conditions she is forced to endure much of the time. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narration adds a sense of realism, drama, and suspense to the novel, as neither Celeste nor the reader know how things are truly going to turn out in the end.

Language and Meaning

Marjorie Agosin tells her novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” in language that is straightforward, reflective, and poetic. This is done for at least three reasons. First, the novel is geared toward an audience of young adults, and the language employed to tell the novel is geared toward that age group and its level of education. Second, the novel is being told by a young girl who begins the novel at the age of eleven, and ends the novel at the age of fourteen. The language matches both her age and her level of education. Third, the reflective and poetic aspect of the writing comes from the fact that Celeste herself is deeply creative, always writing down her thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and senses things on a far deeper level than those around her. As a result, the language takes on a poetic nature in her deeper understanding of things around her. This is reflected in her poem about finding her true home and putting down roots like a tree in a forest, for example.

Structure

Marjorie Agosin divides her novel “I Lived on Butterfly Hill” into three primary parts, with each part being further subdivided into unnumbered, titled chapters and vignettes broken up by illustrations. Each major part of the novel deals with a major sequence of the plot. Part I involves life before and during the time when the General comes to power. Part II involves Celeste’s time in America. Part III involves Celeste’s return to Chile, and the attempt to return to normalcy. Each chapter and vignette deals with a much smaller section of the overall sequence of the part in which they occur. For example, “Part II, Welcome to the USA” deals with Celeste’s arrival in America. The illustrations within the novel depict key scenes and emotional sequences of the novel.

For example, the illustration in “Part III, Unshakable Faith” depict Fergus Bacon bringing Celeste to his whaling ship home and Celeste reuniting in an embrace with her father.



Quotes

Mama, Papa, have you noticed more ships in the harbor lately?
-- Celeste (Part 1, Celeste Like the Sky paragraph 19)

Importance: The first sign that anything is truly amiss in Valparaiso is the presence of more ships than usual in the harbor. At first, Celeste's family does not want to talk about the ships, but later confirms to her that they are not just any kind of ships, but warships in specific. Their presence is an omen for dangerous times ahead.

I always leave the window open, even when its raining, because Valparaiso is full of life.
-- Celeste (Part 1, The Rain Gives paragraph 1)

Importance: Early in the novel, Celeste delights in how the city of Valparaiso is always constantly in motion, and is replete with beauty. It is among the things she loves most about the city. However, this serves as a harbinger for reversal in the future. Valparaiso will never be the same again once the General assumes power in future chapters. Everything that Celeste knows and loves is about to change.

I think there may be two kinds of rain in my country. It falls from the same sky, but then the rain changes depending on who it falls on.
-- Celeste (Part 1, ...And the Rain Takes Away paragraph 7)

Importance: In an example of Celeste's poetic writing and her ability to deeply understand things, Celeste talks about how rain is seen differently and falls differently. For someone like Celeste, who is secure and has a warm, stable existence, the rain is beautiful and lovely. For the poor in Valparaiso, rain is costly: it causes floods, destroys homes, and ruins what little they have.

Celeste, I am not worried about earthquakes that come from the ground as much as those that are born in the soul.
-- Mama (Part 1, Earthquakes of the Soul paragraph 8)

Importance: As more ships arrive in the harbor, and as the military increases its presence, Celeste's entire family begins to seriously worry. Mama explains to Celeste that natural disasters are not as worrisome as disasters brought on by other men. Natural disasters are terrible but unavoidable, while the disasters brought on by other men are personally cruel, destructive, and terrible. The General is the cause of such an earthquake.

How could someone kill the president? How could someone kill anyone? What is the General going to do to Chile? I heard on the radio that he wanted to 'clean the country.' Clean it of what?
-- Celeste (Part 1, Lines Tied or Cut paragraph 11)

Importance: Word comes that the General has succeeded in his revolution: Alarcon's



government has been overthrown, and Alarcon has been killed. Celeste is horrified at the turn of events. She cannot understand why anyone would want to kill anyone else, especially a president. Even more terrifying is the General's assertion that he will "clean" the country, a scary allusion to Nazi rhetoric. The "cleaning" that comes will be swift, dangerous, and even deadly.

Papa and I must leave you for a little while. We are going into hiding.
-- Mama (Part 1, Love is That Powerful paragraph 11)

Importance: After the General seizes power, people begin to disappear. For example, Lucila and her entire family suddenly vanish one day. It is clear the General and his soldiers are responsible. They are targeting enemies of the state and anyone perceived to be such an enemy. Those taken by the General's men are imprisoned at the very least. Some are tortured, and some are even murdered. Celeste's parents go into hiding in order to avoid this same fate.

We need, Celeste—we need to send you to live for a while with your Tia Graciela.
-- Abuela Frida (Part 1, With Abuela on the Shore paragraph 6)

Importance: While Mama and Papa hope to keep Celeste safe by going into hiding, it becomes common knowledge that even the families of enemies of the state are being targeted. It is not safe for Celeste anymore. As a result, Celeste will be sent to live in the United States with her Aunt Graciela until the General is overthrown or relinquishes power.

It's like being a baby again, not being able to express myself in a way that everyone will understand. It makes me feel trapped.
-- Celeste (Part II, Juliette Cove Middle School paragraph 1)

Importance: Celeste's time in America begins sadly, as she not only misses her parents, but feels out of place in a new country. She does not speak the language yet, and feels as if she is unable to communicate, just like a baby. Instead of feeling free in America, she feels trapped, but it is something she is determined to overcome.

In a few days, I leave for Chile. I don't know where to start. When I arrived here nearly two years ago, I never thought it would feel so hard to leave my second blue room and return to my first.
-- Celeste (Part III, Let Your Voice Be Heard paragraph 1)

Importance: After spending two years in America, Celeste learns that the General has been killed, and democracy is being restored in Chile. Celeste's return to Chile will be bittersweet for many reasons, but unexpectedly among them is that Celeste has come to love America and to view it as a second home. She is sad to leave this second home, even if it means going back to her first home.

And just like a heartbeat is followed by another, each answer leads to the next question, and then another answer.



-- Cristobal (Part III, Two Roads on the Map of My Heart paragraph 12)

Importance: Celeste and Cristobal speak about life after the General and about seeking Mama and Papa. Many people are still missing, and relationships with former friends, such as Gloria, are strained at best. Questions are being asked about these sorts of things, and where people have gone. Things will never be the same. Answers will be found to some questions, but may not be found to all questions. And even when some answers are found, there will always be more questions to be answered.

I feel happier than I ever have.

-- Celeste (Part III, Her Bare Feet Make No Sound paragraph 12)

Importance: After the safe return of her Papa, Celeste still worries about the return of Mama. But as things turn out, Papa sends out a letter to trusted friends to be delivered to Mama miles away. Mama returns home on her own. Reunited with Mama and Papa, Celeste has never been happier. Her family is whole once more.

School never stops being strange.

-- Celeste (Part III, I Should Still Continue to Be paragraph 6)

Importance: It takes a while for Celeste to return to school, but when she does, it no longer seems the same. School was one of the places where Celeste once felt most normal and comforted in routine. But after everything she has been through, in addition to what transpired at the school—from Cristobal being beaten to so many classmates still missing—school will never be the same again. It is proof that even in the attempt to return to normalcy, sadness and tragedy still remain.