

Incantation Study Guide

Incantation by Alice Hoffman

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Plot Summary

"Incantation" is a young adult novel written by Alice Hoffman that details the life and experiences of sixteen year-old Estrella di Madrigal during the Spanish Inquisition.

When the novel begins, Estrella is like any ordinary teenage girl: she has a best friend named Catalina, loves her family, and loves the peaceful town and countryside where she lives. She dreams of being lifelong friends with Catalina, and looks forward to raising a family of her own. But one day, all of that changes. In the town plaza, a fire rages, fed by the burning books of Jews, now forbidden by law. Estrella's mother, Abra, reminds Estrella that all people are in the end, the same, and will all go to the same green garden.

As the novel progresses, Estrella's friendship with Catalina becomes strained over Andres, Catalina's cousin, whom she intends to marry. Andres, however, only has eyes for Estrella. At the same time, the government sends out a call for citizens to report false Christians. Catalina and her mother turn in their neighbors, and later loot their home. This causes severe shock in Estrella, who grows ever more distant from Catalina.

At the same time, Estrella discovers that her family is Jewish, protecting themselves with a mask of being Christian. When Catalina discovers that Estrella and Andres are indeed seeing one another, she reports Estrella and her family to the courts. Estrella's grandfather, mother, and brother are all ultimately arrested and put to death. Estrella curses Catalina for her betrayal. Estrella and her grandmother, along with Andres's help, decide to leave Spain once and for all.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

In Chapter 1, sixteen year-old Estrella de Madrigal lives in the town of Encaleflora, a tiny village in the region of Aragon in Spain. Her family has lived there for five hundred years. One day, Estrella and her best friend, sixteen year-old Catalina, see something is burning in the town plaza, and decide to go and see what it is. Estrella and Catalina have grown up together, having been best friends since being babies. Soldiers are burning books in the square, books belonging to a Jew. There has been a law banning Jewish, medical, and magic books. Estrella explains that she and Catalina are Christians themselves, but while Catalina applauds the burning, Estrella does not. She thinks instead of her mother, Abra, who has taught her that all people are from the same dust. Abra makes beautiful yarn, and is on her way back from dying wool when she comes across Estrella. Abra then brings Estrella home, angry and unhappy that Estrella was in the square.

In Chapter 2, the Jewish section of town is vandalized. Other residents blame the Jews for their misfortunes and poverty, though the Jewish section of town is just as bad, if not worse. Jose di Madrigal, Estrella's grandfather, is a highly-respected teacher, and many in the village come to seek his thoughts on what is happening. Jose is helping Luis, Estrella's older brother, through seminary. But Estrella finds Jose annoying, because he is very traditional: he believes girls should bake bread, and not be educated. Yet, he holds a special place for Abra, happy that she is well-informed and understanding. Abra's husband -Estrella's father- has been dead for years, having died from black fever. Jose informs those seeking his advice to stay away from what is going on in town. Estrella's grandmother, Carmen, is a strict, no-nonsense woman.

Estrella has a pet pig named Dini, who is frightened by the town commotion, and will not come out from under the porch. Catalina's father is a cobbler, and Catalina's mother is always happy to have Estrella visit next door. Catalina's cousin, Andres, has been living with Catalina's family since the death of his parents. On the night of the burning, to counter the fire, Estrella's grandparents present her with a pearl necklace, purchased for her at birth. While sleeping, Estrella dreams of entering a gate made of bones, to go into a wonderful green garden.

The next morning, Estrella and Abra go shopping in the Muslim quarter, and visit the wife of a doctor who always buys yarn from Abra. She purchases blue yarn, so that if her husband ever needs to flee the town, he can fly away and blend into the sky. The Muslims fear persecution as well. Estrella's mother is also a healer, who is steeped in traditional methods such as using amulets. When asked to read the fate of the doctor's wife in her cards, the fate makes her put away her cards for a long time.



In Chapter 3, Estrella goes with her mother into the hills to collect plants and flowers, for healing. It is on these trips, and late at night, that Abra teaches her daughter different things, such as having the right to say, "No, I disagree".

In Chapter 4, Estrella and Catalina enjoy sitting under the shade of Catalina's family's olive trees. Estrella shows Catalina the pearls her grandparents have given her. Estrella is becoming attracted to Andres, and realizes she is at the same age as her mother when Abra promised herself to her father.

Luis returns from the seminary for a one-week visit. Friar de Leon even comes over for dinner with the di Madrigal family. Luis spends most of his time sleeping and studying. Catalina is jealous and put off because Luis is home, and she isn't allowed to visit, and it causes division between the best friends. Luis and Estrella take Dini for a walk in the hills after dinner. Estrella wonders if her brother is happy in seminary, and he says that it is his duty to protect his people. Families with connections to the church usually did better than others.

Estrella comes across Andres in the fields while she is attempting to turn a hawk into a pet. They both feel Catalina is growing distant. Estrella realizes she is in love with Andres.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Alice Hoffman sets the stage for the course of her novel in the very first chapter of the book. There are no second-guesses about what is on the horizon. Encaleflora seems to be a bucolic, idyllic Spanish town, full of people who go about their lives. But antipathy and distrust simmer beneath the surface. The burning of books in the plaza of the town calls to mind modern images of Nazism and Socialist state control -and the victims are the same in the form of the Jewish people. While the one Jewish man's books are being burned, no one is stepping in to help or to argue his case against the soldiers; instead, people are cheering on his misfortune. Even in the most idyllic places, there is bigotry and hatred. Despite the excitement, Estrella cannot bring herself to feel excited -most notably because of the morals and ethics her mother, especially, has instilled in her.

The illegalization of the owning of certain types of books by the Jews leads to an outbreak of anti-Jewish sentiment and antisemitic actions, from rumor-mongering to vandalism to looting. Despite everything going on, many in the town try to go about their lives as normal, Abra among them. Abra serves as a wonderful role model to her daughter, in terms of both how to treat others (as evidenced by her interactions with the Muslim doctor and his wife), and Abra's assurances that it is alright to disagree, and to believe in oneself (as Abra teaches Estrella while they are collecting plants and flowers up in the hills outside of town).

The reader is also given access to Estrella's family and relationships in the first four chapters. Estrella's relationship with her best friends seems sure and solid, and there appears to be something of an attraction between Andres and Estrella. While Estrella



doesn't exactly appear to get along with her grandparents, she certainly loves them, and they her. Estrella also has a close relationship with her brother, whose position in the seminary, and the respect he commands as a student there are envied by Estrella. Despite the violence in town, it doesn't appear to have affected Estrella, or her world, in any way, shape, or form yet. Indeed, the bonfire in the square appears to be a blip on the radar -but the reader knows better.

Indeed, the act of the bonfire is so out of place that it becomes a non-event in and of itself. It is soon apparently forgotten by most. The same is true for Estrella, whose mind shifts from the fire to her friendship, and the awakenings of a romance between herself and Andres.



Chapters 5 - 8

Chapters 5 - 8 Summary

In Chapter 5, arrests follow soon after the burning. The Arrias family is arrested. Their family had converted to Christianity a century before, when Jews were expelled; but they have been accused of practicing Judaism secretly. They are accused of being "Marranos" - secret Jews. The arrests make Estrella sick to her stomach. All it takes, Estrella reveals, is for someone to accuse, and that means the accused is guilty. The townspeople are humming with rumors about the Arriases. The trial finds them guilty; the children will be sent to live and raised by true Christians, while the adults will be put to death.

Estrella discovers Catalina and her mother breaking into the Arrias house, to steal linen and silverware. Catalina's mother has been among those to denounce the Arriases at their trial. Estrella cancels her needlepoint lessons with Catalina's mother and Catalina, and Catalina convinces Estrella to lend her the pearl necklace to prove they are still friends.

A decree goes out, prompting citizens to report anyone suspected of being a false Christian. There is a list of things, including not eating pork, wearing clean clothes on Saturday, and talking about Esther -all of which Estrella's family does. Estrella runs to the hills to be alone and to think. When Estrella returns to town, she feels as if she has never been there before.

In Chapter 6, back in town, violence has erupted, as many are accusing each other of being false Christians. Estrella rushes to confront her grandmother, who admits the truth: their family was once Jewish, but still secretly carry on the old ways. They must pretend to be something else to survive. Estrella is beside herself with sadness. Luis' position in the church will help assure their safety, says Estrella's grandmother. Estrella has never been told, because the family didn't want her to have to carry the burden of knowing the truth.

That night, Estrella is awoken by her mother, and they go up into the hills and woods, and swim in a pool of water. Her mother explains that they have had centuries of history in Spain, and would not leave.

In Chapter 7, looters ransack the town. Jose adds an extra lock to the door, and nails the windows shut. Estrella and Catalina go out for a walk one evening. She tells Estrella to stay away from Andres.

One night, the Madrigal house is broken into. Only food has been stolen. Estrella's grandmother wants her to wear the pearls for dinner, so Estrella goes to see Catalina to get them back. Catalina doesn't want to give them up, but Andres gets them back for Estrella, and walks her home. They kiss. All the while, Catalina watches. Eventually, the



riots in town stop and things slowly get back to normal. Abra reads her cards, and is horrified to discover something bad is about to happen. Estrella's mother ties red thread around both of their arms, beneath their clothes, for good luck.

The Muslim doctor's wife has died, and he sends word to Abra. In the middle of the night, Estrella is awakened by a cry in her grandfather's study. Friar de Leon's father, and a wounded man, are both present. Estrella's grandfather is fixing up the wounded man, and they leave. Jose is startled to find his granddaughter out of bed. They talk while he cleans up. She wonders why they haven't all run away. Jose explains it would be endless, from one place to the next. Jose agrees to teach his daughter about Judaism. He is pleased with her.

They study every day. But one day, Jose, red-eyed, explains that if someone is to go, it will be Estrella. A man in Amsterdam can help her get onto a boat. Estrella doesn't quite understand. She also communicates in a coded message with her brother at seminary, who is proud of her. Catalina has found a new friend named Rosa, and Catalina makes a point to tell Estrella that she isn't better than her, and that she doesn't even cross herself normally before prayers and meals.

Estrella feels she must be honest with Andres, so she tells him the truth. He tells her that it doesn't matter to him who she is. They promise themselves to one another.

In Chapter 8, Andres and Estrella continue their secret meetings, until Catalina confronts them. She wants to know what else Estrella has lied to her about. Catalina then goes to the courts to accuse the Madrigals. Friar de Leon tells the Madrigals to leave town, but the soldiers arrive and ransack everything. Jose is arrested. Friar de Leon tells the family that if they do not leave, then they must remain where they are, and not go to the courthouse. But Estrella sneaks into her grandfather's trial anyway. Jose is accused of everything from heresy to practicing magic. Dini, also having been taken, is turned into sausage, and this sickens Estrella. The guards try to force-feed Jose the sausage, but he spits it out again and again, inviting his death. When he refuses to speak, Abra is arrested to make him talk. Catalina's mother is now also denouncing the Madrigals at court.

Abra unknowingly explains her abilities to heal using plants, and the trap has been sprung. Andres tells Estrella and Carmen they must leave at once. Estrella's grandmother refuses. They decide to spend the night in the woods. Andres vows to protect them. That night, Jose is beaten to death with stones. Estrella tells Andres not to return anymore, that it is too dangerous for him.

A bonfire is constructed in town, to burn the heretics in prison. Estrella goes to see the Muslim doctor, who gives her two white pills for her mother to take. In the plaza, a still-friendly woman tells Estrella to run away with her brother, for the soldiers are looking for them both. When Estrella returns to the woods, she finds Andres there, and is happy to see him. Andres agrees to smuggle the pills, wrapped in an onion, to Abra. Andres accomplishes his mission. He also reports he has gone to see Friar de Leon, who wants



to help smuggle Estrella and her grandmother to Amsterdam. And Andres is going, too. He takes an emerald ring to sell.

Chapters 5 - 8 Analysis

The burning is not just a blip on the radar, as events confirm to the reader. Mass arrests soon follow, and the tranquility of the town and countryside are thrown into an uproar as citizens begin accusing one another of practicing Judaism secretly, while professing to be a Christian outwardly. Alice Hoffman makes sure to underscore the point here that evidence of guilt consists mainly of an accusation. This sort of information springs to life once again the fascistic states of the past, and the witch hunts in Salem, Massachusetts, where an accusation seemed to be the best possible evidence for trial.

Interestingly enough, the edicts and decrees from the government seeking out false Christians leads to the interesting juxtaposition that "true" Christians are exhibiting patently un-Christian behavior -such as Catalina and her mother looting the house of someone they have publicly denounced as being secretly-practicing Judaism. An argument can be made here, in the pursuit of irony, that the true false Christians are those condemning and looting. Catalina and her mother would certainly fall under this category.

Estrella's discovery of the activities of Catalina and her mother help to cement a rift between the best friends. The similarities between Estrella and Catalina -mostly described as being physical (matching dark hair, etc.)- are now coming undone. Indeed, even Estrella's physical beauty appears to outdo that of Catalina's, and Estrella's morals and ethics have already far outpaced Catalina's. Indeed, Catalina's character emerges as vindictive and manipulative. Catalina even goes to the lengths of forbidding Estrella to see Andres ever again -but Andres and Estrella continue seeing one another anyway, because they are in love with each other.

Catalina's vindictive nature come in full view as she strikes out at Estrella and her entire family for the romance between Estrella and Andres. The results are devastating: Estrella's grandfather is arrested, followed soon after by her mother and her brother. Orders for the arrest of Estrella and her grandmother are given out as well to the soldiers, whom Estrella and Carmen elude by going to hide in the hills and the forest. The betrayal of Estrella by Catalina is hideous, but it is somewhat lessened by the kindness and love meted out by Andres, who resolves to protect Estrella and her grandmother. If anything, Catalina's betrayal has steeled Andre's resolution to commit to a life with Estrella.



Chapters 9 - 10

Chapters 9 - 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, a few days pass, Estrella's grandmother believe Andres has run off with the emerald ring. Estrella does not believe this. She and Carmen go home so that Carmen can say goodbye, but Estrella cannot bring herself to go inside. Instead, she throws a rock through Catalina's window. Catalina says she only did what she did because Estrella stole Andres from her. Estrella realizes that Catalina believes love and hatred are equal. Estrella says a curse on Catalina, so that she may know another's suffering until she understands what she has done.

A friendly neighbor reveals that Luis will be arrested by the soldiers. Carmen then leaves the house, carrying her husband's old notebook. In the square, the bonfire is prepared. Estrella tells the friar he is too much of a coward to fight and protect his people. As Estrella watches her mother and brother, she realizes her mother has given Luis the tablets. The fires are lit, and fifty people are burned to death.

In Chapter 10, Estrella leads her grandmother through the Muslim quarter. They spend the night in the Muslim doctor's stable. Estrella has time to think of everything she has lost. Estrella's grandmother is beside herself with grief, but Estrella knows they have to survive. When they return to the woods, Andres is waiting with two mules. They then bathe in the pool of water, and prepare to head to Amsterdam.

Chapters 9 - 10 Analysis

The love that Estrella and Andres share she believes is strong enough to weather the storm that has been brought on to Spain by the monarchy. Indeed, it comes shining through as Andres arranges to help Estrella and her grandmother flee the country. He will be going with them as well, which is a testament itself to his love for Estrella.

After going into hiding, it is revealed that Estrella's mother, brother, and grandfather have all been put to death one way or another -and each instance being absolutely horrifying. Estrella's grandmother appears to have broken down, leading Estrella to have to make the choices for both of them. She decides that they will leave Spain. What is heartbreaking and beautiful is that Abra, who could not spare her son pain in life, will spare her son pain in death as he is burned. Abra has her neck broken by garrote so she will not feel the pain of being consumed by the fire.

Before Estrella leaves, she does two important things. First, she curses Catalina for her betrayal, that Catalina may feel pain until she comes to understand just what it is that she has done. Second, Estrella condemns Friar de Leon for not doing more to protect their people, accusing him of cowardice. Certainly, there are brave Christians who have helped, and will continue to help the persecuted in Spain -but Estrella contends that de Leon is not one of them.



Estrella's decision to leave Spain is one of absolute courage, and one of absolute tragedy. It takes tremendous courage to leave the home that a family has been rooted to for half a millennia; and it also takes courage to deal with the tragedy of reality -that no matter where her people may go, they will be persecuted one way or another, everywhere, because they have no homeland. No matter where Estrella and her grandmother journey, they will face some sort of opposition.



Characters

Estrella de Madrigal

Estrella de Madrigal is the main character and principle protagonist in Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation." Estrella de Madrigal is described as being beautiful and having long, black hair. At sixteen, Estrella dreams of growing old with her best friend, Catalina, and raising their families beside one another. Estrella is very close with her mother, Abra; and they live with Estrella's grandparents. Estrella loves them as well, but doesn't like that her grandmother seems so cold and removed, and her grandfather believes she should be learning how to bake bread instead of pursuing an academic education at all.

As the Spanish Inquisition rages, however, Estrella's world comes crashing down around her. An edict from the government, asking for the help of citizens to root out false Christians leads Estrella to realize that she is herself Jewish (a fact which her family confirms); and that Catalina is not the sweet girl she appears to be. Indeed, she and her mother have denounced a neighbor to subsequently loot their house after their arrest. When Catalina's plans to marry her cousin, Andres, go awry because Andres and Estrella develop feelings for one another, Catalina is beside herself with anger and jealousy. Because of this, she turns Estrella and her family into the authorities.

Ultimately, Estrella's mother, grandfather, and brother are all put to death. Estrella and her grandmother decide it will be best to flee the country. Before they leave, Estrella curses Catalina to feel the pains of others until she realizes what she has done. Furthermore, Andres abandons his family to help Estrella and her grandmother, and to leave Spain with them.

Abra de Madrigal

Abra de Madrigal is the mother of Estrella de Madrigal, and lives with Estrella's grandparents, Jose and Carmen. They are a close-knit family, and Abra and her daughter are more like friends than relatives. Abra is kind, caring, considerate, selfless, and compassionate. She is an expert yarn-making, and well-known for her craft. Among her friends are two Muslims, a doctor and his wife. Abra is skilled with using plants and flowers to heal the sick and infirmed. She imparts all of her wisdom and a strong set of ethics to her daughter, who absorbs all of it. Abra is arrested as part of the Inquisition after the Madrigals are betrayed by Catalina. Abra's selflessness is further demonstrated when two pills are smuggled into prison for her to take so that she will die and not feel the pain of being burned alive -which she instead gives to her son, determined to take the pain for him.



Catalina

Catalina is the sixteen year-old antagonist in the novel "Incantation" by Alice Hoffman, though she starts out as Estrella's best friend. Catalina is, on the surface, a sweet and simple girl, yet she has ulterior motives and an inferiority complex which leads her to believe that Estrella thinks she is better than everyone else. Ultimately, Catalina and Estrella grow apart, including after Catalina and her mother denounce a neighbor in court, only later to raid the neighbor's house of goods. Catalina has plans to marry her cousin, Andres, but Andres falls in love with Estrella. Out of jealousy and anger, Catalina turns in Estrella and her family to the authorities. The last Catalina sees of Estrella, Estrella places a curse on her to feel the pain of others until Catalina understands what she has done.

Jose De Madrigal

Jose de Madrigal is the grandfather of Estrella, husband of Carmen, and father-in-law of Abra. He is very traditional, and believes that girls should be breaking bread, and not learning. He is a well-respected teacher whose advice and thoughts are sought far and wide. When Estrella discovers they are Jewish, he begins teaching her everything he can about the Jewish faith. Ultimately, he is arrested by soldiers when his family is betrayed by Catalina. He signs his own death warrant by refusing to eat sausage in court, and is killed by being stoned.

Carmen De Madrigal

Carmen de Madrigal is the grandmother of Estrella, husband of Jose, and mother-in-law of Abra. She is thoughtful and kind, but appears cold and distant. She has a fear of something bad happening all the time, and so wants everything to be perfect. The destruction of her family appears as though it is too much for Carmen to handle, so Estrella takes charge of them both, determined that they will leave Spain.

Luis De Madrigal

Luis di Madrigal is the brother of Estrella, son of Abra, and grandson of Jose and Carmen. He is away for most of the novel, studying at seminary, hoping to secure the safety of his family and his people. When Catalina betrays his family, he is arrested and put to death.

Friar De Leon

Friar De Leon is a local priest who does his best to help many of those whom have been persecuted to escape. Yet this is not enough for Estrella, who calls him a coward for not standing up for his people.



Andres

Andres is the cousin of Catalina, and nephew of Catalina's parents, who has come to live with them after the death of his parents. He is kind and hardworking, and catches the eye of both Estrella and Catalina, the latter of whom wants to marry Andres. Andres, however, falls in love with Estrella, causing Catalina to react in vengeance. She reports the Madrigals to the authorities. Andres, however, does not care about who Estrella is, only her heart. He helps to hide Estrella and her grandmother, and helps arrange passage for them to all leave Spain.

The Muslim Doctor

The Muslim doctor lives in the Muslim quarter of town, and is sought by members of all faiths for his abilities to heal and help. His wife dies throughout the course of the book, and in response for Abra's kindness toward her, supplies Estrella with two white pills for Abra to take when she is put to death. He allows Estrella and her grandmother to spend the night in his stable to avoid the soldiers as well.

The Muslim Doctor's Wife

The Muslim Doctor's wife is a friend and confidante to Abra. She ultimately dies, an event that deeply affects Abra.



Objects/Places

Spain

During the time of the Inquisition, Spain is a Catholic nation. Spain is the main setting for the novel. Estrella, Andres, and Carmen seek to escape from Spain.

Aragon

Aragon is a region in Spain where the town of Encaleflora is located.

Encaleflora

Encaleflora is the town where Estrella, her family, and Catalina and her family live and work. It is a town that Estrella says no longer exists, but at the time, appears to be like any typical town surrounded by farmland. It is especially impacted by the Inquisition, as its normally placid residents are ready to tear one another apart.

The Plaza

The Plaza is at the heart of the town of Encaleflora. It is where the books of Jews are burned, and later, where Estrella's grandfather, mother, brother, and fifty people are burned to death on charges of heresy.

The Hills

The hills exist outside of the town of Encaleflora, and are where Estrella and her mother go to pick plants and flowers for healing. It is also where Estrella escapes to think, spend time with Catalina, and flees after her family is arrested.

The Olive Grove

The olive grove is on farmland belonging to Catalina's family, and it is worked and tended by Andres. It is where Estrella and Catalina spend much of their time.

Books

Books are what are burned in the plaza of the town of Caleflora, after having been forbidden to be owned by Jews on the subjects of things like magic. Estrella later discovers that her grandfather has a secret space crammed with books.



Emerald Ring

Abra's emerald ring is considered to be her lucky charm, and is given to Estrella, who later gives it to Andres to use to buy donkeys to leave Caleflora.

Donkeys

Donkeys are what are purchased by Andres to bring Estrella and her grandmother away from Caleflora, and out of Spain.

Jose's Notebook

Jose's notebook is full of his thoughts, beliefs, and ideas. It is the only thing that Carmen takes of her husband's, and her home, when she and Estrella decide that leaving Spain is in their best interests. It can be viewed symbolically as love and knowledge being the only things that always advance through time.



Themes

Love

Love is a major and dominant theme in the novel "Incantation" by Alice Hoffman. It appears in every part of the book, and appears predominantly in two ways -romantic and familial. Both ways have serious impacts on the plot, and the main character, Estrella.

In the romantic sense, love appears primarily between the characters of Estrella and Andres. Their romance is innocent and tender, but fierce in strength and loyalty. This is especially true when Andres agrees to keep seeing Estrella, even after Catalina has forbade Estrella from seeing Andres anymore. Indeed, Andres risks his life for the love of Estrella, helping them to hide out in the woods, and later fleeing the country with them. He is the one, true ally that Estrella and her grandmother have, and it is due to Andres's love for Estrella.

Love also appears in the familial sense. Here, love occurs primarily between the members of the Madrigal family. They are a close-knit family, and do everything they can for one another. Especially telling is the love that passes between mother and daughter. Estrella's mother is kind and caring, and nurtures her daughter in ethics, morality, love, and religion. The greatest gift of loving another is, arguably, love -and that is what Abra leaves her daughter in legacy. This understanding of love -the love that passes between mother and daughter, and the love Abra has taught Estrella about -helps Estrella to better understand the world around her, and better understand her love for Andres.

Self-Discovery

Self-discovery is a major and dominant theme in Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation". Self-discovery is the process of learning more about oneself, and becoming a better and more capable person in the end. The theme of self-discovery concerns chiefly the character of Estrella, and involves self-discovery in two ways: her identity as a person, and her character as a person.

In terms of Estrella's identity as a person, self-discovery is relatively straightforward. Estrella has been living as a Catholic, but has been raised to be sensitive to the Jewish tradition, because she and her family members are Jews. All along, she has believed she is a Christian. However, her discovery of her heritage launches her into heavy study of her history and her people and her faith. Her grandfather, Jose, serves as her teacher and guide. At long last, Estrella is able to understand and accept that she is Jewish.

In terms of her character, Estrella's self-discovery has to do with her evolution as a strong and independent young woman. At the beginning of the novel, Estrella seems to be meek and reserved. Her grandfather, for example, believes that girls should be



baking bread, and not educating themselves. Indeed, Estrella's dreams have to do with continuing her friendship with Catalina and raising a family beside hers. Estrella's mother, however, tells Estrella that she has the right to disagree and to say "no". When her peaceful world comes crashing down around her, Estrella is launched into womanhood, having to help hold her family together, to care for her mother in prison, and to care for her grandmother. Beyond that, she reveals her identity as a Jew to Andres, who is unfazed, because he loves her for her heart. Estrella also takes the bold step of confronting -and cursing- Catalina for her betrayal, something she never once could have imagined.

Hatred

Hatred is a strong and recurring theme in the novel "Incantation" by Alice Hoffman. Hatred's appearance in the plot focuses around the Inquisition and its consequences. Hatred arises in the novel due to the petty and cruel passions of human beings, and to the sting and anger from heartache and love lost.

An effort to purge Jews from Spain under the guise of rooting out false Christians brings out the true nature of the people in Estrella's town of Encaleflora. Hatred occurs among these people because their basest instincts and lowest passions have been inflamed. Looking for a way to blame their own misfortunes on others, they zero in on the Jews in their town, vandalizing and looting their homes. This is only given legal protection because of the orders of the government seeking out citizens to reveal false Christians. Avarice takes root, as can be seen from Catalina and Catalina's mother raiding the home of a secret Jewish family -once good friends.

Hatred also comes from the heartache of lost love. Catalina is determined to marry her cousin, Andres, and have a wildly successful olive grove. But when Andres falls for Estrella, and Estrella for Andres, Catalina's dreams are thrown off. Her love of her best friend and cousin turns to hatred from jealousy and bitterness. This compels her to turn in Estrella and her family without a second's hesitation, and has dire consequences for all.

Religion

Religion is a major and overarching theme in Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation". The theme of religion has to do with a clash between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, one orchestrated by the monarchy of Spain, but also finding sustained growth in the common hatred of the vast population.

Islam and Judaism are minority religions in the Catholic nation of Spain. While distrust and suspicion may be harbored between followers of all religions, the people of Estrella's town at least make the effort to get along with one another for various reasons. But their goodwill toward one another is mostly false, and holds on by a thread. Nevertheless, when a religion is genuinely practiced and followed, it is a good thing.



But when the government of Spain seeks to root out false Christians, the linchpin is tripped. People turn on one another in an instant -including friends like Estrella and Catalina. The legal persecution of Jews allows grudges, deeply-hidden bigotry, and evil to be unleashed. Indeed, the question is begged: who are the false Christians? The Jews who pretend to be Christian, or the Christians who declare they are Christian?



Style

Point of View

Since Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation" deals with the experiences of sixteen year-old Estrella di Madrigold during the Spanish Inquisition, Hoffman chooses to let Estrella narrate the story in the first-person perspective. Beyond the fact that this is Estrella's story, allowing the novel to be narrated in first-person allows the reader a much more intimate encounter with the events of the books, and gives the reader the intimate confidence of the narrator. In so doing, the reader is able to experience firsthand the horrors of both the Inquisition, and the terrible tragedy that Estrella must somehow manage to weather.

Setting

The setting of Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation" is that of the Encalfora, in the region of Aragon, in the nation of Spain. The setting of the novel works perfectly for the novel, especially with respect to the themes of the plot. Spain, at the time of the Inquisition and the novel, was a Catholic state with a Jewish and Muslim population. Spain, having once been conquered by invading Muslim armies, has a legacy of division between religions, so hatred is boiling just beneath the surface. The rooting out of false Christians in the novel allows this deep-seated hostility to be launched into the open.

Language and Meaning

Because Alice Hoffman allows her main character, and principle protagonist Estrella to narrate the novel, the language she uses is fitting to the character and the times of late fifteenth/early sixteenth-century Spain. Because Estrella is a sixteen year-old girl without formal education, her language is not especially formal or well-learned. Instead, she speaks with the humble, poetic prose common to sixteen year-old girls. Indeed, modern-day cliches, terms, and stereotypes are omitted in favor of late-Medieval language. Doing this allows the reader to step outside the modern era, to be transported back in time, and to relate with a character with similar dreams, hopes, and fears, but in many cases, dramatically different experiences.

Structure

Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation" is divided up into ten chronological chapters. Her chapters, however, are not numbered, but only given particular names -such as "Ashes", "Bones", "Earth", and "Sky". At first, the reader may posit that each of these chapters are named due to the events of each chapter, and this is partially true. Toward the middle and end of the novel, readers learn about the ten gates that must be walked through, with each gate being of a different source -such as ashes, bone, earth, and

sky. Each gate is seminal in a human life, and each chapter is a gate in the life of Estrella. And at the end of the novel, Estrella is able to look back at her story and realizes that she has indeed passed through each of the ten gates.



Quotes

"My mother, Abra, had taught me that all people are made from the same dust. When our days here are gone, all men and women enter the same garden" (Chapter 1, p. 8).

"That's the way love sounds, my mother told me. You think it should feel like honey, but instead it cuts like a knife" (Chapter 2, p. 22).

As we were walking home, my mother told me that love was the same in any language" (Chapter 2, p. 27).

"Always look carefully, she told me. Look with more than your eyes" (Chapter 3, p. 30).

"But most important of all, she explained that it was all right to say No. I disagree. That was a gift. I understood it was power. The power to think my own thoughts. The power to believe in myself" (Chapter 3, p. 33).

"But a book is a book. Pages are pages. Hawks are hawks. Doves are doves. Hatred is always hatred" (Chapter 6, Love, p. 57).

"Let your mother be, she said. In losing a friend, she is reminded of all she has lost and all she stands to lose again. There is nothing to be done to make it any easier. We all grieve alone" (Chapter 7, p. 101).

"I know you. I know your heart. That's the only thing that will ever matter to me" (Chapter 7, p. 115).

"Catalina was wearing my pearls. She had rewritten everything, our history together, our friendship. Now I was the girl who'd stolen Andres; the girl who'd lied to her about who I was. Therefore, she owed me nothing" (Chapter 8, p. 129).

"May you know another's suffering, may you know it all the days of your life, now and forever, until you understand what you have done" (Chapter 9, p. 150).

"Now we both have people we love who are like birds. They have flown far away from anything in this world that can hurt them. They're flying away still" (Chapter 10, p. 164).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "Incantation" by Alice Hoffman. How does love appear in the novel? What are its consequences, especially when it comes to the main character, Estrella?

What is the irony of the idea of false Christianity being rooted out by fellow Christians? Who are the real Christians, and false Christians? Can the Jews be blamed for wanting to pretend to be Christians? Why or why not?

Discuss the theme of religion in Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation." How is religion presented in the novel? Why are the various religions in conflict? What are the consequences of this conflict?

Why does Catalina betray her best friend, Estrella? What are her motives? What are the consequences of her motives?

Why do Estrella's family members refuse to tell her about her true history? How does Estrella react to the news? How does her family finally handle telling Estrella the truth? How does Estrella's grandfather react?

Discuss the theme of hatred in Alice Hoffman's novel "Incantation". What is hatred and why does it appear? Who does hatred appear between, and for what reasons? What are the consequences of hatred?

Discuss the theme of self-discovery in the novel "Incantation" by Alice Hoffman. What is self-discovery? Describe the process of self-discovery in relation to Estrella. What is her character like at the beginning of the novel? What is her character like at the end of the novel? Is this change a good thing? Why or why not?

Estrella condemns Friar de Leon for not doing more during the Inquisition, and accuses him of cowardice for not making a stand. Are Estrella's judgments against the friar right or wrong, or somewhere in between? Explain your answer.