

## **Book Club Questions for *Gringa: A Contradictory Girlhood*, by Melissa Hart**

1. Explain the title. Why is Hart's a "contradictory girlhood"?
2. What is culture? How does Hart ignore her own culture, and why is the Latino culture more appealing to her?
3. What role do the recipes play in *Gringa*? Is it possible to make each recipe despite the narrative, tongue-in-cheek writing style?
4. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders removed homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973. Hart's mother came out as a lesbian and lost custody of her children in the late 1970s. How do you think the era contributed to the judge's decision to place Hart and her siblings with their father?
5. How did the lifestyles of Hart's parents differ? Why might her mother's lifestyle be more appealing than that of her father?
6. Hart writes with sympathy about her stepmother, who takes a parenting role for three young children and withstands her husband's temper. What type of person is Elsa, and how does she influence the narrator?
7. Hart's mother falls in love with Annie, and Hart herself struggles with resentment. What causes this resentment, and how might the adults in her life address it?
8. Annie and her friends represent an enviable lifestyle for the narrator, who laments her own sexual preference and tries to be attracted to young women. What determines sexual preference? Why is one more appealing than the other for Hart?
9. Hart's younger brother has Down syndrome. She writes of the improbability of their bond, as someone with a higher-than-average IQ. To what do you attribute that bond?
10. Throughout high school in multicultural Los Angeles, Hart feels shame about her ethnicity. Why does this occur, and how does she attempt to "compensate"?
11. Many Queerspawns—children of same-sex parents—who came of age in the 1980s note that they kept their families a secret and believed themselves to be the only young people with two mothers or fathers. As Hart moves through her teen years, what role does her mother play in her life and that of her peers?
12. Hart's mother is absent for much of her children's early lives. How do you think she feels knowing that another woman is parenting her children throughout their adolescence?
13. Readers' reactions to Hart's father vary widely. One reader referred to him merely as "kind of a hard-ass," while another labeled him abusive. With the examples Hart provides, are you able to come to a conclusion about his character and how he interacts with his family?
14. Hart goes to college, where her perceived inadequacies as a "gringa" follow her. What motivates her to begin dating Tony in spite of discovering their differences?
15. How does Hart attempt to assimilate into Tony's Latino culture as a young woman, and how do he and his family react?

16. Hart's grandmother and great-grandmother appear throughout the memoir. What roles do they play, and how do they offer a unique culture to the narrator?
17. Hart's younger brother has Down syndrome. She writes of the improbability of their bond, as someone with a higher-than-average IQ. To what do you attribute that bond?
18. Hart chooses to end the memoir with an account of her trip to Spain with her mother. What significance does she place on the trip, and how is she affected by the realities of traveling through a foreign country with her mother?
19. On the last page of the memoir, Hart writes, "It wasn't the vacation we'd hoped for, nothing close to ideal. Men stole from us. We lost our way. We made mistakes and argued and misjudged and wept in frustration over how the most meticulously-planned itinerary can go awry. But we traveled." How does this description of her time in Spain correspond to the life she's shared thus far with her mother?
20. How has your opinion of children with same-sex parents changed since reading *Gringa*? Do you feel that today, a judge would still be justified in removing children from their mother or father because that parent has come out as homosexual?