



WITH THE FIRE ON HIGH

by Elizabeth Acevedo

Booktalk

Anyone who tastes Emoni's cooking calls it magic, and it just might be. However, the ingredients she has to work with are challenging: Emoni is a senior in high school with a two-year-old daughter, a part-time job, and no time for new friends or extracurricular activities like culinary class. She works hard to keep her head up and must make difficult decisions every day for her daughter and abuela. But there is a wild dream stirring inside her and the possibility of a lifetime in front of her. Will Emoni play it safe? Or will she take a leap of faith and make her dreams of becoming a professional chef come true?

Questions for Group Discussion

Duende. Describe Emoni's relationship with cooking. In what ways is Emoni "full of duende. Of inspiration and passion" (p. 346)? How does the way Emoni is feeling affect her food? How does the author describe Emoni's cooking and its effect on people? Do you think Emoni's food is magical?

Home. How does Emoni describe Philadelphia throughout the book? Where is home for you? What makes it home? On the last day of the trip to Spain, Emoni says "Maybe that's the point of a trip like this; you start the process of learning and then you carry it with you back home" (p. 341). In what ways does being in Spain make Emoni feel more "free" to say, think, and do what she hasn't felt able to do at home? What does Emoni learn about herself in Spain that she brings back home with her?

Chosen Family. When reflecting about family, Emoni says, "People say that you're stuck with the family you're born into ... But we all make choices about people. Who we want to hold close, who we want to remain in our lives, and who we are just fine without" (p. 60). Who are the people that Emoni chooses as family? What makes her choose them? Who are the people you choose as your family? What makes you choose them?

Motherhood. Early on, Emoni characterizes Babygirl as "front and center, the candlelight we read the world by" (p. 53). Who is the "we" that Emoni describes? How does Emoni feel about being Babygirl's mom? In what ways does Emoni put her daughter "front and center"? What are the difficult relationships that Emoni has to navigate because of her daughter?

Limitations and Possibilities. What are some of the things that limit Emoni's ability to live the life she wants and to pursue her dreams? How are these limitations connected to race, class, and gender? What "leaps of faith" does Emoni take in order to create more possibilities for herself? What are the resources and people that support and encourage her to take those leaps? What are your dreams? Do they feel possible? Why or why not?

Guide prepared by Amanda Torres (amandatorreswrites.com), writer, community organizer, educator, and non-profit consultant.