

Background

During and after the Mexican Revolution of 1910, almost half a million Mexicans immigrated to the United States, a majority of them settling in border states. The Rio Grande Valley is an important agricultural region in Texas, and because of this, a majority of immigrants, many of them illiterate, found jobs as farm laborers. Those who were educated were able to better themselves; even so, their cultural ties to Mexico were often so strong they had difficulty adapting to the American way of life.

The Story

The Caballeros of Ruby, Texas leads us through the lives of a prosperous Mexican-American family, told through the eyes of three of five daughters. The women in the story are the lifeblood of the family, yet their lives turn around the fortunes and misfortunes of their father, Don Miguel Caballero, a contractor of Mexican migrant workers.

The Author

Cynthia Leal Massey is a second generation American of Mexican descent. *The Caballeros of Ruby, Texas* is her second novel and a 2003 WILLA Award finalist for Best Original Softcover fiction. She is the author of *Fire Lilies*, a saga of the Mexican Revolution and winner of the 2002 Independent E-Book Award for Best Romance and 2002 EPIC Award finalist for Best Historical Novel. Massey has published fiction and nonfiction in national and regional magazines.

Discussion/Writing Prompts

1. Discuss the similarities and differences between the three viewpoint narrators—Isabel, Terre, and Marta.
2. The novel deals with memory and how it varies depending on the individual. Of the three viewpoint narrators, which seems to have the most "honest" memory/appraisal of her parents' marriage? Explain.
3. What do readers learn about memories and people from the three perspectives of the characters?
4. How does Isabel react to Marcos' traditional "macho" attitude? Did her response surprise you? What about Marcos' response to her defiance?
5. Were you surprised when Terre announces that she wants to become a nun? Why or why not?
6. Diego Gómez, Terre's boyfriend, has a 'relationship' with a woman while he is in San Antonio. The novel never confirms whether or not he is the father of the woman's child. Do you think he is? Cite passages to support your ideas.
7. What incident in the story begins Don Miguel's downward spiral?
8. How are the settings of the Rio Grande Valley and then the Salinas Valley of California an integral part of the novel? Explain.
9. Why does Marta feel guilty about her parents' separation?
10. What role does the girls' brother, Raul, play in the novel? How do his sisters feel about him?
11. The story is told in chronological order with flashbacks from three different points of view. How effective is this structure in the telling of the story?

12. The relationship the Caballero family has with the Anglo community is different from that of most other Mexican-American families. What are the reasons for this?

13. What kind of person/wife is Beatriz?

14. What are the major conflicts between Beatriz and Miguel?

15. Why does Beatriz finally leave Don Miguel?

16. How do you think Miguel Caballero's "clinging to his past" contributes to his downfall?

17. Why wasn't Don Miguel able to show the same fidelity to his marriage vows as he did to honoring the contract with his workers?

18. Beatriz has migraines several times in the novel. In the Epilogue, Isabel says that her mother never had a migraine again after she and Don Miguel split up. Explain the cause of this physical ailment as it relates to Beatriz.

19. In the Epilogue, Isabel says of her father, "I picture him with one foot in Mexico and one foot in the United States, as if he were standing on a map of the two countries. He could not declare for one, because he could not revoke the other." How does this analysis of Don Miguel relate to the problems in his marriage?

20. Do you consider Don Miguel a "tragic" figure?

Theme & Topics

- Culture & its effect on identity
- Family relations
- Memories
- Nature's role in dramatic events
- Relations between two cultures
- Unreliable narration
- Women's & girls' roles in the mid-twentieth century

A Reader's Guide to



The Caballeros of Ruby, Texas

by
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Literary Fiction

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