

One Hundred Years of Solitude Study Guide

There is a legend [Gabriel Garcia Marquez](#) likes to tell about the writing of his most famous novel, [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#). He claims that he wrote the book barricaded in his study in Mexico, after receiving a vision. One day, while he and his wife and children were in their car driving to Acapulco, he saw that he "had to tell [his] story the way his grandmother used to tell hers, and that [he] was to start from that afternoon in which a father took his child to discover ice." He made an abrupt U-turn on the highway, the car never made it to Acapulco, and he locked himself in his study. Fifteen months later, he emerged with the manuscript, only to meet his wife holding a stack of bills. They traded papers, and she put the manuscript in the mail to his publisher.

Like everything Marquez writes, there is some truth and much fiction in this tale. The truth in the tale is that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a very personal book for the author. It would not have been written if he had not experienced the childhood he had. Marquez grew up with his maternal grandparents in Aracataca, Colombia. His grandparents were cousins who moved to Aracataca from Riohacha at the end of the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), a few years before a leafstorm. Marquez's childhood anecdotes tell of a big house full of ghosts, conversations in code, and relatives who could foretell their own deaths. It was also a house filled with guests and social events, shaded by almond trees and bursting with flowers. When Marquez's grandfather died, Marquez was sent to live with his parents. In his grandfather's absence, his grandmother, who was blind, could no longer keep up the house. It fell into a state of ruin, and red ants destroyed the trees and flowers. Also early in his childhood, Marquez witnessed the massacre of striking banana workers at a plantation named Macondo at a train station. The government made every attempt to block information from the public and pacify the foreign plantation owners. Marquez was horrified, and even more horrified when he reached high school and learned that the event had been deleted from his history textbook.

Careful readers of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* will recognize many of these elements in the book; there is no doubt that if Marquez had not grown up in Aracataca and had a keen ear, the novel would not exist. On one hand, the context for the book is Marquez's own personal nostalgia for childhood, for his grandparents, for a big house filled with ghosts and laughter. On the other hand, the context for the book is Marquez's political beliefs and the oft-brutal realities of growing up in a particularly tumultuous developing country. Growing up in Colombia, which has a long and tragic socioeconomic history, Marquez learned about politics and economics early on. In his conversations with other Latin American writers the Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes was one of the writers who gave Marquez extensive feedback and advice on the early chapters of *Solitude* he developed his own theoretical views about writing and politics. He often claims "The first duty of a writer is to write well" implying that writing must not be polemical but there is no doubt that the economic history of Latin America, which is a history of inequality and exploitation, has had a crucial impact on all of his writing.

Marquez's approach to writing *One Hundred Years of Solitude* combining his own memories and imagination with focused aesthetics and an eye for the tragic history of his country has had an immeasurable impact on writers of color worldwide. Coming at the time it did, in the midst of a boom in Latin American writing, it was immediately recognized as one of the finest, if not the finest, offerings from that period. More importantly, it crossed every boundary to becoming an international bestseller and worldwide phenomenon. Even Latin American writers who found fault with it could not deny that it had directed the attentions of the literary world to Latin America. The book was an immediate commercial and critical success when it appeared in 1967, and has since been translated into 26 languages and sold millions of copies worldwide.

Other writers of color from different traditions followed in Marquez's footsteps to draw attention to their own countries and struggles. As critic Regina James says, "*Solitude* represented the marginal and the primitive, yet it neither adopted the superior perspective of the Western anthropologist nor imitated an imagined, alien innocence. Many writers recognized their own ambivalent

and difficult relationships with a traditional culture. In much of the world, the unimaginably old coexists with the unbearably new. For writers conscious of straddling two cultures, nostalgia for a simpler, primitive past vies with wonder at the persistence of habits of thought, patterns of life, and modes of belief that surely ought to be extinct, mere harmless fossils. Garcia Marquez turned puzzlement or outrage into ironic wonder, and he enhanced the strangeness of the real. Today, we see his influence in such celebrated writers as America's Toni Morrison, India (and England)'s Salman Rushdie, and Trinidad's V.S. Naipaul.

One Hundred Years of Solitude Summary

Author's Note: [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#) is not a typical novel in that there is no single plot and no single timeline. The author, [Gabriel Garcia Marquez](#), has crucial thematic reasons for the unusual construction of the novel. It is his intention to show that history moves not only in cycles but also in circles. For this reason, there is no single main character in focus, nor does the novel follow a regular timeline. In his quest to show how history moves in circles, Marquez gives virtually every member of the Buendia family one of the following names: (men) [Jose Arcadio](#), [Aureliano](#) (women) Ursula, [Amaranta](#), Remedios. This can sometimes be confusing to the reader, which is, after all, the point. In an effort to make matters less confusing, Marquez has included a family tree at the beginning of the book, and he uses a slight variation on these names for each different character.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is both the history of Macondo, a small town in an unnamed region of South America, and the town's founders, the Buendia family. The book follows seven generations of the Buendias and the rise and fall of Macondo. The family patriarch, [Jose Arcadio Buendia](#), founded the town with his wife, [Ursula Iguaran](#). Because Jose [Arcadio](#) Buendia and Ursula Iguaran were cousins, they have a fear of bearing children with pig's tails; this fear will linger over the book.

Jose Arcadio Buendia is an intrepid, curious man with a flair for exploration and the sciences. He delves into one scientific quest after another and eventually loses his senses, forcing the men of the town to tie him to a tree. Both his strengths and weaknesses

are exhibited in the Buendia men throughout the novel, starting with his sons Jose Arcadio and Aureliano. Jose Arcadio inherits his father's massive strength and impulsiveness; Aureliano inherits his strong ethical sense and his solitary intensity. Both these men go to their own extremes: Jose Arcadio becomes the ultimate macho and dies mysteriously after usurping lands; Aureliano (known in the novel as [Colonel Aureliano Buendia](#)) becomes one of the greatest and most notorious rebels in the country during an extended period of civil war. Macondo, once an innocent paradise, becomes acquainted with the outside world during the period of civil war. It is during this period that death and bloodshed first comes to Macondo's door; the town remains linked to the outside world because of the fame of Colonel Aureliano Buendia.

In contrast to her husband, Ursula Iguaran is fiercely practical and possessed of much common sense. She is energetic, tenacious (she lives so long that she loses track of her age) and spends her life looking after the family line. Unfortunately none of the female Buendias match her fortitude: Amaranta, her daughter, is tenacious only in personal bitterness while her great-great-granddaughters Renata Remedios and [Amaranta Ursula](#) are possessed of her energy but none of her common sense. The failure of the next generations to be possessed of their ancestors' strength of character causes the family to falter as history and modernity storm Macondo.

After the civil war, foreign imperialism comes in with devastating effects. White capitalists come to Macondo and seem to usurp God's powers with their ability to change the seasons and the water flow. They set up a banana plantation that exploits the residents of Macondo; when the workers organize and strike, they are all systematically killed in a government-sponsored massacre. One of the Buendias, [Jose Arcadio Segundo](#), was a major organizer and could not face the world after this event.

For Macondo, too, the banana massacre brings major change. Rains begin the night of the massacre and do not stop for almost five years; washing away the banana plantation and leaving Macondo in a state of desperation. The impoverished town loses its importance and its modernity; from then on, the town exists in a state of regression. For the Buendias, also, the rains signal the

quickening speed of their downward spiral. The older members of the family are lost in nostalgia; the younger ones are lost in debauchery and solitary isolation. As the town is abandoned, the last members of the family succumb to incestuous desire and birth a child with a pig's tail. At the very end of the book, it is revealed that the history of the Buendias has been ordained since the beginning, and that they will never have a second chance.

One Hundred Years of Solitude Character List

Jose Arcadio Buendia

The founder of Macondo and the patriarch of the Buendia family. He marries his cousin, Ursula Iguaran, and they have three healthy children despite the warning that incest leads to children with pig's tails. An introspective, inquisitive man of massive strength and energy, he spends his time engaged in scientific pursuits. He is helped in his efforts by the gypsy Melquiades. When his last experiment—an attempt to create a daguerreotype of God—causes him to lose his senses, the men of the town lash him to a tree. He remains under the tree for years and years, babbling in Latin, and Ursula brings him back into the house shortly before his death.

Ursula Iguaran

The matriarch of the Buendia family; she lives so long that she loses track of her age. Practical, energetic, and fiercely devoted to the well-being of her family, she exhibits superhuman will and character. Although she lacks the excesses of her husband, she has the entrepreneurial skills to begin a business in candy animals and pastries that keeps the family afloat during hard times. She is also the one who discovers a path from Macondo to the outside world after her husband fails.

Jose Arcadio

The eldest son of Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran. He is a caricature of a "macho." Physically massive, covered with tattoos, and so well-endowed that he can live off the tidings of impressed women, he runs away with the gypsies. He comes back years

later after having sailed around the world many times and marries Rebeca. Ursula turns them out of the house, but this does not stop them from living happily and well. Jose Arcadio is a good hunter and after he usurps lands, they do not suffer for money until he is mysteriously killed.

Colonel Aureliano Buendia

The younger son of Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran. As a child he had dreams and portents; he is prophetic until death. He falls in love with Remedios Moscote when she is only nine years old and loses much of his emotion after her death. Introspective, studious, and resolutely solitary, he becomes the country's most notorious rebel after the civil wars start. War has an irrevocable effect on him and he locks himself up in Melquiades' old laboratory, making golden fishes and avoiding the world until his death of old age and grief.

Remedios Moscote

The youngest daughter of Don Apolinar Moscote. She is only nine years old when Aureliano falls in love with her; they marry after she reaches puberty. She was a child for a very long time and after puberty did not shed all of her childish habits. But when she is married, she behaves with grace and responsibility. She endears herself to the Buendia family, especially Ursula. She dies young, due to an internal ailment.

Pilar Ternera

A neighborhood fixture with a special relation to the Buendias. In the beginning of the book, when she is still young, she takes many young men to her bed; as the novel progresses she becomes the enormous matron of a brothel. She reads fortunes and cards that are often correct although few people heed her advice. She is the mother of both Aureliano Jose (by Aureliano) and Arcadio (by Jose Arcadio), although Arcadio never knows that she is his mother. At different points in the book, the Buendias come to her for sexual comfort, guidance, and advice.

Amaranta

The daughter of Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran. She never marries and spends most of her life consumed in personal bitterness towards Rebeca, who first gained the attentions of Pietro Crespi. Amaranta eventually drives Pietro Crespi to suicide and wears a black bandage for the rest of her life in contrition.

Lonely all her life, she has relationships with her nephew and great-great-nephew that are tinged with incestuous feelings. She receives a premonition of death many years before and dies perfectly prepared and perfectly at peace.

Aureliano Jose

The son of Colonel Aureliano Buendia and Pilar Ternera. He has an intensely intimate relationship with Amaranta and wishes to marry her. Instead, he joins his father and the rebel forces, only to desert later. He is shot in the back by a government soldier during an uprising.

Arcadio

The son of Jose Arcadio and Pilar Ternera. He is neglected throughout most of his childhood. After Colonel Aureliano Buendia leaves to join the civil war, he rules Macondo as a tyrant, enforcing the most arbitrary rules he can come up with. He tries to force Pilar Ternera to go to bed with him; instead she introduces him to Santa Sofia de la Piedad, who bears him three children. He is killed by a firing squad when the Liberals lose the war.

Rebeca

She shows up at the Buendia household mysteriously when she is eight years old, eating earth and bringing the insomnia plague to Macondo. They raise her as one of their own daughters and she has an intense, love/hate relationship with Amaranta. Rebeca is the more beautiful of the two and garners the attention of Pietro Crespi. They have a perennial engagement, unconsummated for many years, until she meets Jose Arcadio. She marries Jose Arcadio and Ursula turns her out of the house in anger for this disrespectful gesture. After Jose Arcadio's death, she barricades herself in her house and never comes out again.

Santa Sofia de la Piedad

The mother of Jose Arcadio Segundo, Aureliano Segundo, and Remedios the Beauty, and the common-law widow of Arcadio. Strange and solitary. She is a tireless worker for the Buendia household for more than fifty years. Then one day, when it is clear to her that the Buendias are on the path to decline and cannot return, she simply walks out of town and is never seen again.

Jose Arcadio Segundo

The son of Arcadio and Santa Sofia de la Piedad; twin of Aureliano Segundo. The two boys seem to have their names and personalities reversed, as Jose Arcadio Segundo is possessed of the same solitary introspection as Colonel Aureliano Buendia. At first he seems to be wild, working as a cockfighter and then as the foreman of the banana plantation, but he has a change of heart and becomes a union organizer. He is deeply traumatized by the massacre of banana workers and is the only person in town who remembers the event. Before he dies, he passes his knowledge on to Aureliano.

Aureliano Segundo

The son of Arcadio and Santa Sofia de la Piedad; twin brother of Jose Arcadio Segundo. Contrary to the family's patterns, he inherits Jose Arcadio's size and reputation for carousing. With his dedicated mistress, Petra Cotes, he gives enormous parties when his fortunes are good, and argues with his haughty wife, Fernanda del Carpio. After the rains, he is poor, but he dedicates the rest of his life to raising enough money in order that his youngest daughter, Amaranta Ursula, can go to school in Europe.

Remedios the Beauty

The daughter of Arcadio and Santa Sofia de la Piedad. She has no personality traits in common with the other Buendias; as such her fate is completely different from everyone else's. Completely lacking in convention and shame, so beautiful that three men die from attempts to gain her love, she is symbolic of a primal state that Macondo has lost. She ascends to heaven one morning, alive, lifted by angels.

Fernanda del Carpio

The wife of Aureliano Segundo; mother of Renata Remedios, Jose Arcadio II and Amaranta Ursula. She is the last descendent of an impoverished royal family line from a gloomy, dying town. Despite the fact that her line was dying and they had no money, her father told her that she was to be a queen and she believes that until her death, making life difficult for the "common" Buendias around her. She clings to inflexible beliefs and a medieval code of ethics. This estranges her from her children and those around her.

Renata Remedios (Meme)

The eldest daughter of Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda del Carpio. Fearful of her mother's wrath, she practices the hated clavichord with great intensity; she is really a modern free spirit who loves parties and social gatherings. She becomes friends with her father, partially out of disdain for Fernanda, and rebels by falling in love with Mauricio Babilonia, a mechanic. When her mother discovers their love affair, she has Mauricio Babilonia shot and sends Meme to a convent, where she lives for the rest of her life without speaking.

Mauricio Babilonia

A mechanic at the banana plantation. Dignified, handsome, and patient despite his lowly status, he courts Meme Buendia. After Meme is confined to her house, he sneaks in at night to make love to her. One night he is shot by a guard hired by Fernanda; he spends the rest of his life paralyzed with a bullet in his spine.

Jose Arcadio (II)

The son of Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda del Carpio. When he is born, Ursula wishes him to be a priest and, eventually, the Pope. He is sent to the seminary in Rome to continue his theology studies, but instead he becomes dissolute. He returns to Macondo in hope of an inheritance and discovers Ursula's buried fortune. With the money, he turns the house into a debaucherous love den, inviting local boys to share it with him. Four of these boys kill him in the bathtub and steal his money.

Amaranta Ursula

The youngest daughter of Aureliano Segundo and Fernanda del Carpio. She is sent to study in Brussels at the age of eleven; she returns to Macondo worldly, sophisticated, and married to a wealthy European named Gaston. She has too much life and vigor for the dying town and, despite her efforts, cannot revitalize it. Left alone with her nephew Aureliano, she and he begin a wild love affair and give birth to the final Buendia, a boy with a pig's tail.

Aureliano

The illegitimate son of Renata Remedios and Mauricio Babilonia. He is treated like a second-class citizen by Fernanda and Jose Arcadio II and neglected throughout most of his childhood.

Studious and fiercely solitary, he becomes the repository of Jose Arcadio Segundo's tragic memories and spends most of his life locked in Melquiades' old laboratory, trying to decipher the mysterious parchments. When Amaranta Ursula returns, he falls madly in love with her and they embark on a wild affair, eventually giving birth to the final Buendia.

Gaston

Amaranta Ursula's European husband. He is so captivated by her that he allows her to lead him by the neck on a silk rope, but he recognizes that Macondo is dead and has little to do there. When she insists on staying, he goes to Europe on business and stays there once he hears of the affair between Amaranta Ursula and Aureliano.

Pietro Crespi

An effeminate Italian pianola expert who courts both Rebeca and Amaranta Buendia in turn. He is devastated by Rebeca's unexpected marriage to Jose Arcadio and then, when Amaranta rejects him, he loses his senses and commits suicide.

Petra Cotes

Aureliano Segundo's devoted mistress. Their partnership has incredible power; when they have sex their animals proliferate with amazing speed. She is patient and loving with Aureliano Segundo in the face of many humiliations, and smartly entrepreneurial in the face of financial hardships.

Melquiades

At the beginning of the book, he appears as the mysterious leader of the gypsies and a friend of Jose Arcadio Buendia. He has a laboratory at the back of the Buendia household and at the beginning of the book performs scientific tasks there. There are conflicting reports of his death and rebirth; during one of these interludes he gives Jose Arcadio Buendia mysterious parchments and tells him that they can only be deciphered after one hundred years. These parchments engage various members of the Buendia family, especially Aureliano, who finally deciphers them at the end of the book.

Prudencio Aguilar

Before Jose Arcadio Buendia founded Macondo, he killed this man, a cockfighter who insulted him. After Aguilar's death, Jose Arcadio

Buendia was filled with grief and remorse, so he packed up and, with some willing young families, moved into the swamp. They became the first people to live in Macondo. Later in his life, Jose Arcadio Buendia and even Ursula are visited by the ghost of Prudencio Aguilar.

Don Apolinar Moscote

An amiable, ineffectual government official with seven daughters, including Remedios Moscote. He is a Conservative and is the first one to introduce Colonel Aureliano Buendia to the corruption and hypocrisy of politics.

Colonel Gerineldo Marquez

Colonel Aureliano Buendia's closest friend. They were loyal compatriots throughout the civil wars and he continues to play an important role in Colonel Aureliano Buendia's life afterwards. He also courts Amaranta, late in both their lives, and though she loves him, she refuses him as well.

General Jose Raquel Moncada

The smart, humane, and well-loved Conservative mayor of Macondo during the period of the civil wars. He is a good friend of Colonel Aureliano Buendia and the Buendia family in general, especially Ursula. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia orders his execution, Ursula recognizes that her son is lost to the world.

One Hundred Years of Solitude Themes

Time

For the characters in the novel, time alternatively moves quickly and stagnates for years. In general, children grow up quickly, but when they are adults (particularly the male adults) time abandons them, leaving them to sit with their own nostalgia and bitterness for years on end. Time abandons [Colonel Aureliano Buendia](#) after the civil wars, and [Jose Arcadio Segundo](#), both of them locked in [Melquiades'](#) laboratory, refusing to join the living, moving world. In her later years when Ursula considers her family, time appears to be moving in a circle. New children turn out to be like their ancestors, only horribly exaggerated in some flaw or strength. Time is indeed moving in a circle in this book, but

instead of expanding outward it is collapsing in on the Buendia family as their eventual demise draws closer. Marquez's point is that time moves in circles and cycles, and people are not always progressing.

Solitude

The words "solitude" or "solitary" appear on almost every page of this novel.

Characters

[Jose](#) [Arcadio](#) [Buendia](#), [Amaranta](#), Ursula, [Aureliano](#), [Jose Arcadio](#)Segundo--are left completely alone, even forgotten, for years at a time. Buendia men named Aureliano are said to have a "solitary" air. And the town itself is isolated and alienated from the outside world. At the very end of the book, the narrator concludes that the Buendias are a race condemned to solitude, and therefore they will not get a second chance. Marquez intends for the theme of solitude to be read in many different ways. It is a protest against the practice of the Western world to "condemn" people of color to solitude, denying them access to the resources of the developed world. It is also a comment on the nature of man<a comment that too much solitude can be destructive both to individuals and to society at large.

Incest

Incest is a secondary theme of solitude. It plays an enormous role in the novel, from the very beginning with Ursula's warning that children born of incestuous relationships may be born with the tails of pigs. And indeed, at the very end of the novel, a Buendia is born with the tail of a pig. For most families, incest is not a great threat. The fact that it is something the Buendias have to keep dodging marks them as a family unable to escape the family homestead, unable to look outside themselves. They are too solitary. Essentially, incest is the practice of keeping family members within the family<so it marks the Buendias as too disengaged from the world around them.

"Magic Realism"

Critics often classify Marquez's writing as "magic realism" because of his combination of the real and the fantastic. The novel carefully balances realistic elements of life, like poverty and housecleaning, with outrageous instances, like a levitating priest.

There are many purposes of this. One is to introduce the reader to Marquez's Colombia, where myths, portents, and legends exist side by side with technology and modernity. Another reason for this is lead the reader to question what is real and what is fantastic, especially in the realm of politics. It is to force to question the absurdity of our everyday lives.

Religion

In *Solitude*, organized religion is often the subject of jokes and satire. One of the novel's most unsympathetic characters, [Fernanda del Carpio](#), is a fervent Catholic who thinks nothing of putting her own child in a convent and forgetting about her. Macondo's priest, Father Nicador, is trotted out again and again for comic relief. In general, organized religion is regarded with skepticism. The characters who follow the path of God in an unconventional, but moral, way, like Ursula, are treated with more dignity and respect.

Civilization

The novel follows the town of Macondo from its founding to its demise. In between, there is prosperity, growth, war and civil strife, modernity and progress, and a cataclysmic event that leads to its downfall and eventual demise. Some critics have noted that the book also follows the trajectory of classical Greek civilization, with its careful recording of how and when science, art, and politics come to Macondo. This contributes to *Solitude*'s appearance as a "total novel," with everything contained in it. It also contributes to Marquez's overall vision of Macondo as a lens through which all human history and all human nature can be seen.

The Book of Genesis

From the very first paragraph, the narrator gives readers the impression that Macondo is akin to the Garden of Eden. The preponderance of plagues that the town suffers through (insomnia, rain) are also biblical; as is the flood that rains on Macondo in an effort to rid the town of wicked men. By consciously echoing the Book of Genesis, Marquez is alerting us that this is his attempt to rewrite the history of the world and the human race, in a novel that has everything in it.

Plagues

At least two definite plagues come to Macondo: the insomnia plague and the rains that last for almost five years. Critics go back and forth on whether or not the invasion of the foreign businessmen constitutes a third plague, although they certainly bring death and destruction with them. The first of these plagues very nearly causes Macondo to lose its memory; the second of these plagues brings about the eventual downfall of the town. Essentially, both plagues are dangerous because they prevent Macondo from staying in touch with reality and the world around them by plunging them into nostalgia and erasing the town's memory.

Politics

The twisted and meandering world of politics is under a great deal of scrutiny in this novel, particularly the chapters that deal with Colonel Aureliano Buendia. The world of politics is a gloomy one. There is little difference between the Liberals and the Conservatives; both parties kill and exploit the people. Although Marquez has a definite anti-capitalist bent, his purpose in portraying the politics of the region is not to be polemical. Instead, he comments on how the nature of Latin American politics is towards absurdity, denial, and never-ending repetitions of tragedy.

Modernity

This theme is particularly important for the chapters dealing with the banana plantation. In the span of only a few years, Macondo is transformed from a sleepy backwater to a frighteningly modern town via the influences of technology, economic exploitation and foreign invasion. But the arrival of new machines and farming techniques do not make Macondo a better place to live in, in fact things only get worse. The point of this is that modern technology is meaningless without a concurrent improvement in ethics, and "progress" turns brutal without a plan to lessen economic inequality.

Female Sexuality

Although a lesser theme in the novel, important patterns surface regarding the theme of women's sexuality. In general, the women who have unconventional relationships [Rebeca](#), [Petra](#)

[Cotes, Amaranta Ursula](#) are happier and more sympathetic than the women who cling to society's standards of behavior. Amaranta and Fernanda del Carpio. The fact that [Aureliano Segundo](#)'s coupling with Petra Cotes dramatically increases the proliferation of his animals is a signal that free love can be healthy for society at large.