

Kantika

A NOVEL

BOOK
CLUB
KIT

The background features a complex, repeating pattern of stylized floral and geometric motifs. The colors are primarily dark blue, yellow, green, and white. The motifs include five-petaled flowers, scalloped leaves, and intricate lattice-like structures. The pattern has a slightly distressed or aged appearance, with some areas showing wear and tear, particularly along a vertical crease down the center and a horizontal crease across the middle.

Elizabeth
Graver



Welcome to the Book Club Kit for *Kantika*

Please note: In order to provide book clubs with the most informed and thought provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Kantika*, you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.



1. *Kantika* means “song” in Ladino. How and why, in terms of both its literal and metaphoric meanings, is this a fitting title for this story?
2. *Kantika* tells the story of a 20th-century Sephardic family, part of a vanishing world that has often been overlooked in narratives about the Jewish American immigrant experience. Whether you’re familiar with this world or new to it, what did you find most interesting or surprising about the portrayal?
3. On p.144, Alberto, urging Rebecca to leave Spain for the United States, states “for us, America has fewer ghosts.” Discuss.
4. What makes Rebecca and Luna’s relationship so complicated and powerful? What might they teach each other by the end?

5. Though *Kantika* ends in 1950, many of its concerns—whether around forced migration, language crossings, ideas of a “homeland,” religious pluralism and prejudice, blended families, and the complexities of parenting a child with a disability—are still with us today. What echoes do you see with our current world? What has changed, for better or worse?
6. In the Acknowledgements, Elizabeth Graver notes that she used her grandmother’s migration story as inspiration. How does knowing about *Kantika*’s relationship to the author’s family impact your reading of it?
7. What effect does the inclusion of photographs have on you as a reader? What do the photos reveal? Hide? How might they offer ways for you to think (or write) about your own family photographs?
8. In a 2013 interview in the *Atlantic*, Haitian American author Edwidge Danticat talks about how all immigrants are artists. “You begin with nothing,” she writes, “but stroke by stroke you build a life. This process requires everything great art requires—risk-taking, hope, a great deal of imagination, all the qualities that are the building blocks of art. You must be able to dream something nearly impossible and toil to bring it into existence.” How might this quote apply to the characters in *Kantika*?

