

HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



A Second Chance on Earth

by Juan Vidal

★ “Heartfelt, moving, and beautifully written.”

—Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review

ABOUT THE BOOK

A father, a friend, and a favorite book help a teen boy understand love and loss in this moving and vivid YA novel in verse.

Have you ever encountered a book that KO’d you, Iron Mike Tyson–style?

For sixteen-year-old poet and b-baller Marcos Cadena, that book is the beat-up copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* he finds among his late father’s possessions after Papi is killed in an accident.

Marcos’s papi has always loomed large in his eyes. So when Marcos travels to his parents’ childhood home of Cartagena, Colombia, to

spread Papi’s ashes, he brings his father’s book with him, convinced that Gabriel García Márquez’s masterpiece holds the key to understanding Papi’s life and accepting his death.

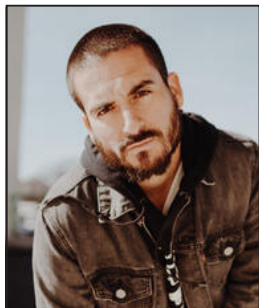
In Cartagena, Marcos befriends eighteen-year-old Camilo, a taxi driver and fellow García Márquez fan who appoints himself Marcos’s unofficial tour guide. But when Camilo reveals a troubling secret from his past, Marcos must ask himself whether everyone deserves a second chance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Marcos is grieving the sudden death of his father in an accident. Discuss the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Trace Marcos’s journey through each stage of grief. Cite specific passages from the book to support your thoughts. Explain what Marcos means by “There’s a trapped lion / alive and raging / inside my lungs” (p. 3).
- Describe Papi. How was he a dreamer? In what way was Papi a hero to Marcos? Papi was a storyteller, especially about his native country of Colombia. Discuss why Marcos holds tight to those stories. Explain what he means by “I guess that / makes me some / kind of a hoarder. / But instead of / precious metals, / I’m a hoarder of / tales and anecdotes / I hope to never lose” (pp. 9–10). How does holding on to these stories keep his dad alive? Discuss the poem “Papi Stares Back at Me” (p. 135). What are the traits that Marcos inherited from Papi?

- Everyone is telling Marcos that he is the man of the house now. Read the poem “Two Voices in My Head” (p. 81). How is Marcos conflicted about his new role? In what way does he feel responsible for Daniela, his younger sister? Debate whether Marcos feels more like a man when he returns from Colombia.
- Marcos finds a copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez among his father’s things. In what way does the novel help Marcos better understand his father? How does it guide him through the grieving process? He learns that this is a special book to Camilo. Explain why Camilo is so drawn to the book.
- Marcos is anxious to go where he can feel his father. What is his reaction when he learns that his family is going to deliver his dad’s ashes to his hometown of Cartagena, Colombia? Why does he wish he had come to Colombia alone? What does Marcos mean by “Is home a person or is it a place?” (p. 139). How does he find both in Cartagena?
- Contrast Miami and Cartagena. Marcos has few sketchy memories of Colombia from visits when he was very young. How do his father’s stories make Colombia feel familiar? How does riding around with Camilo in his taxi help Marcos understand the city Papi called “sacred ground”?
- Describe Camilo. What secrets does he hold? Explain what Marcos means by “He’s [Camilo] got a darkness inside / that feels honest; it’s a darkness / I share” (p.89). To what darkness is Marcos referring? He is confused by Camilo’s reaction at the sight of a cop. At what point does Camilo reveal the reason for his reaction? Why does Marcos decide that he needs some space from Camilo? At what point does he feel he must see Camilo again?
- Devon and Hector are Marcos’s best friends. Discuss what Marcos means by “Sometimes we’re the / Three Wise Men / and other times / the Three Blind Mice” (p. 26). Contrast Devon and Hector. In what way is Devon the brother Marcos wishes he had?
- Dealing with grief is clearly one of the themes of the book. How is the novel also about friendship, family, and forgiveness? Cite passages from the novel to support your thoughts. Marcos is a poet. How is the first-person narration in free verse an effective way of telling the story? Explain the title of the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Juan Vidal is the author of the memoir *Rap Dad*, which explores father-son dynamics and Latino masculinity through the lens of hip-hop culture. *A Second Chance on Earth* is his YA debut.