



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Mahala

A novel based on a true story

CAROL MARQUES BARRIOS

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WELCOME

A note from Carol



I first heard this story at my grandmother's kitchen table, when she was in her eighties and still smiling about the day she spat in her suitor's eye. Mahala was a real woman, and she was mine. Thank you for bringing her to your club.

These questions are here to open the conversation, not box it in. Use the ones that fit your group and skip the ones that do not. And if you would like me to join you, I would love to.

Before you begin: a content note

Mahala is suitable for adult and older-teen readers and for library and book-club programming. Readers may wish to know it opens on recurrent miscarriage and infertility grief, and that its heart is a child given away by agreement between two families. It also touches the death of parents and the hardships of colonial-era and indenture history. There is no on-page sexual content, no graphic violence, and no profanity of note.

She was a
feminist
before the word
ever reached her.



MAHALA
CAROL MARQUES BARRIOS

A LINE FROM THE BOOK

FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

The questions

01 The refusal

Mahala is thirteen when four parents choose her husband, and she says no. Where do you think a girl that age, in that place and time, finds the nerve to refuse?

02 A gift or a wound

Mahala is given as a baby to her mother's closest friend and raised next door to her own brothers and sisters. The book never settles whether that was a gift or a wound. Where did you land, and did the story move you as it went?

03 The thing she lost

"I just feel like I lost something. Can you understand that?" What is the something Mahala feels she lost, and is it the same thing the two mothers in her life believe they gave her?

04 Mothers and daughters

There are three mother-daughter relationships in this book. Which one felt closest to your own, and what did it show you about the others?

05 Different rules

The expectations placed on Mahala are not the ones placed on the men around her. Where did you feel that most sharply, and how much of it do you think still holds today?

06 Born before her time

Carol calls her grandmother "a woman born before her time." What does Mahala want that the world around her is not yet ready to give her?

FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

The questions, continued

07 What her mind is for

"Being intelligent doesn't mean anything if I can't do something with it." How does Mahala spend her intelligence across the book, and what does it cost her?

08 Finding her voice

In New York, Mahala makes her way in the garment district and becomes an advocate for the women she works beside. What do you think moves her from getting by to speaking up?

09 Replaceable

One of the people she works for tells her, "Jobs are replaceable; people aren't." Who in the book treats people as replaceable, and who refuses to?

10 What she carried

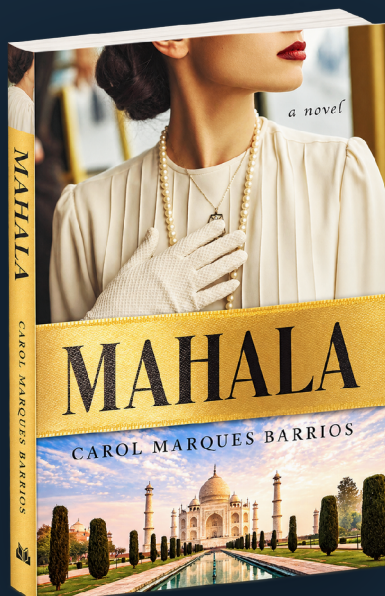
Mahala leaves colonial St. Vincent for New York, and her family's story crosses an ocean more than once. What does she carry with her, and what does she leave behind for good?

11 Because it is true

Mahala is based on Carol's real grandmother, and the Author's Note tells you which parts are true. Did knowing it was real change the way you read it? Would it land differently if it were pure invention?

12 One question for Mahala

If you could sit across the kitchen table from the real Mahala, what is the one thing you would ask her?



Invite Carol to your discussion

Carol offers book clubs a free thirty-minute video visit. Read the book, pick a date, and she will join your conversation.

Read Mahala your way: hardcover, ebook, and audiobook.

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