

When The Cypress Whispers
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Reading Group Guide

Questions:

1. What does the title, *When The Cypress Whispers*, refer to? What happens *When The Cypress Whispers*?
2. When we first meet Daphne, she is 12 years old and racing towards the cove on Erikousa where “the sea christened her again each summer” and where she “felt safe from...the stares of girls whose freckled skin smelled of strawberry lotion.” What does this passage tell you about Daphne and her life as first generation child of immigrants?
3. Ancient Greek Myths play an important role in Daphne’s story. How do the myths of Persephone and Demeter, Arachne and Ariadne reflect Daphne’s life? How does Yia-yia use these myths as a tool to guide and help Daphne? What lessons can we still learn from the Ancient myths in modern times?
4. Daphne is first drawn to Alex when she hears him recite the “Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss” passage from Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*. What is it about this reading that draws Daphne to Alex? How does this piece of literature foreshadow their relationship and Daphne’s life?
5. When explaining the role of the ancient oracles Yia-yia tells Daphne that “only women who had truly known what it is to love another could be trusted, Daphne. Only these women could understand how precious life really is.” Then, when Yia-yia explains their family’s connection to the *Cypress Whispers*, she tells Daphne. “We are blessed my dear, but also cursed.” What does Yia-yia mean by this? Do you feel that your perspective on

life and what you value has changed as you've gotten older and gained more life experience?

6. Hubris is mentioned several times throughout the story. First in the myth of Arachne, then later with Yia-yia's foreboding words about Stephen, "Hubris is a dangerous thing. Look away for a moment, and your prized possession may escape even the loveliest of traps." The Ancient Greeks saw hubris as a fatal flaw, do you agree?

7. At first, Yianni's relationship with Yia-yia is a mystery to Daphne. Eventually she comes to understand their bond and that Yianni is a man consumed by guilt. What is the source of Yianni's guilt and how does this affect his relationship with Yia-yia and his initial reaction to Daphne? If you could go back and change something about your relationship with your parents or grandparents, what would it be? What would you do differently?

8. Daphne spends her life chasing the American Dream yet when she finally achieves financial success she must re-evaluate what is really important in life. How is the box under Yia-yia's bed symbolic of this conflict? What does the American Dream mean to you? How do you define success?

9. The story of Dora and Yia-yia is based on the author's own family history. Yvette's grandmother was one a group of islanders who risked their own lives to hide and save a family of Jews from the Nazis. What about your own family's history? What story from your family's past might inspire a novel?

10. Like many working mothers Daphne struggles to find balance between building her business and nurturing Evie. What does Yia-yia teach Daphne about raising children? Do you agree with Yia-yia that "Little girls need their imaginations and

their mothers. Nothing else.” Is it possible to balance a career and children? What is the key to making that balance work?

11. Daphne realizes that while Stephen is a good man, they are very different, both products of their upbringing. When Stephen tells Daphne to forget the past and focus on their future together she responds, “I am my past.” Do you agree that we are our pasts? Is it possible for two people from different worlds to have a successful relationship? What challenges can than present? How can it be beneficial?
12. When Yia-yia reads Daphne’s coffee cup she tells her, “Someone will come into your life and show you love like you’ve never known before. He will walk beside you for the rest of your life.” Who does Yia-yia see in Daphne’s coffee grounds? There are different kinds of love; love for a partner and love for a child. How would you describe the transformative nature of each?
13. Evangelia and Dora, Yia-yia and Daphne, Daphne and Popi, the story is filled with rich female characters and the deep relationships between them. When Evangelia describes her relationship with Dora she says, “When I saved Dora, she in turn saved me as well.” What about you? Was there a moment in your life where you felt “saved” by another person? Who are the people in your life that you know you can always depend on?
14. At the end of the book, we learn the Ancient myth of Daphne the forest nymph. In what way does Daphne’s own life mirror the myth of Daphne?
15. Yia-yia tells Daphne that when she is lost or in need of guidance, all she needs to do is close her eyes and listen for the voices of their ancestors whispering to her between the rusting leaves of the cypress tree. What about you? Whose voice do you hear when the cypress whispers?