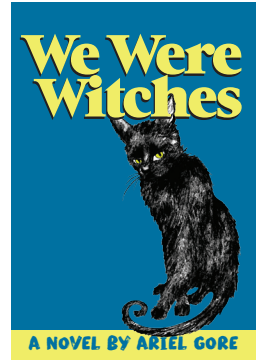


READING GROUP GUIDE

WE WERE WITCHES

ARIEL GORE

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1. Ariel's experience of childbirth is one of extreme pain and literal scarring. How does this unique experience continue to affect Ariel throughout her adult life?
2. Western culture envisions success in a linear progression, which Ariel's professor compares to a penis. While Ariel's first urge is to invert Freytag's pyramid and "shape [her story] into a vagina," she later concedes and considers "[abandoning] both genitalia . . . when it came to envisioning the true shape of experience" (21). Do you identify with one of these descriptions more than the others? If so, which one and why?
3. The main narrative of *We Were Witches* is interrupted with moments of warped and blurred reality, and with the insertion of spells and fairy tales. How does this nonlinear narrative affect your experience of reading the book? In what ways do these deviations contribute to, or potentially hinder, Ariel's story?
4. As a mother, Ariel finds herself in situations where she must lie in order to provide for her daughter, Maia. Ariel believes "mothers are the cultural keepers of the lies," whereas "writers are the cultural tellers of the truth" (52). Later, she also says: "A mother's job is to keep her children safe. A writer's job is to make herself vulnerable" (75).
 - a) Do you agree with Ariel's assessment of these roles?
 - b) How have these two potentially conflicting roles—mother and writer—shaped the relationship between Ariel and Maia?
5. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich writes, "We have no familiar, ready-made name for a woman who defines herself, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is self-identified, who has chosen herself" (71). While reading this passage to her daughter, Ariel acknowledges that her own mother did not have any choice in having children, whereas Ariel did. Ariel decides that she needs to choose herself as well. What does it mean to choose one's self, and what are the obstacles to such a choice? In the course of choosing another person, place, or thing, can you also be choosing yourself?

6. Ariel becomes close with an elderly woman who describes herself as “always dying and always keeping on” (113), a description that appeals to Ariel. What do you think this means? Have there been instances in your life when you have been “always dying and always keeping on”?
7. Many prominent authors and feminists—such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and Sylvia Plath—are present in the book, appearing both in quoted passages and as characters that appear and speak to Ariel. What purpose do these women serve in the narrative? How do they complement or contradict Ariel’s experiences?



ARIEL GORE is the author of nine previous books of fiction and non-fiction and is the founding editor of *Hip Mama*. She’s won an American Alternative Press Award, a Lambda Literary Award, a Rainbow Award, and a New Mexico–Arizona Book Award. Her stories and articles have appeared in *Psychology Today*, the *Rumpus*, *Ms.*, *Salon*, and elsewhere. She lives in Oakland and Santa Fe and teaches online at Ariel Gore’s School for Wayward Writers, literarykitchen.com.