



# THE HOLY DAYS OF GREGORIO PASOS

A Novel By

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## Reader Guide: Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Gregorio, the main character of *The Holy Days of Gregorio Pasos*, is nicknamed “Portero” by his soccer community. In English, *portero* translates as goalie or keeper; in Spanish, it also carries the meanings of guard or watchman. How are these descriptions fitting for Gregorio? Talk about different elements of the story through this lens.
2. While nursing an injury he sustained as a goalkeeper, and reminiscing about religiously watching soccer games with his family, Gregorio concludes: **“Goalkeepers are, at best, secondary to the plot. They are supposed to fail.”** (p. 57) — Discuss the implications of this statement for this story. Do you think Gregorio is right?
3. Regarding the title of the novel: why are these the “holy days” for Gregorio? How would you summarize his personal, cultural, and political awareness over the course of the novel, from high school graduation to his first time setting out on his own, living in a new city away from his family members? Take into consideration the structure of the novel: what are Part One and Part Two comprised of, and why do you think that is?
4. How does the book investigate themes of being an immigrant in the United States? What are the implications of the novel being set specifically in the year 2016? Discuss Gregorio’s awareness of these issues, as a person who was raised in the US, compared to that of his uncle and parents, who emigrated from Colombia. If you have a personal connection to the terms “1.5 generation” or “second generation”: as a group, take turns discussing how Gregorio’s circumstances are similar to and different from your own.
5. Discuss the recurrence of substance abuse in the novel: which characters have significant addictions? Why do you think this is? How do Gregorio’s addictions change over the course of the book?
6. What parallels are drawn between the history of Gregorio’s parents’ homeland of Colombia and that of the United States?
7. Talk about the significance of *The Birds of Peace*—a two-piece sculpture in Medellín, Colombia, created by the Colombian artist Fernando Botero—for Nico, and for the novel as a whole.

8. **["We had the land," Nico said, "and now we have the Bible.]"** (p. 39) — How is the church and its different roles, in both Colombia and the US, analyzed in this novel? Consider Gregorio's point of view after his trip with Nico to Colombia. Consider, too, Gregorio's position in an after-school program housed in a Columbia Heights' Catholic church. What and why did Gregorio write on the pastor's front door?
9. What would you say that Gregorio learns from his dear uncle, Nico? What lessons from Nico does Gregorio take with him as he ventures out into the world on his own? What does Nico mean when he says: **"There is only one kind of letter. A love letter. To write a real one, you have to be sorry."** (p. 20)
10. **"I spent most of my time at the museum. I enjoyed sitting by *The Throne*, regardless of whatever people would say when they looked at it."** (p. 103) — Why do you think that Gregorio has such a strong attachment to the work of art called *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly*, created by the artist Saint James Hampton?
11. Juxtapose the gold in James Hampton's *The Throne* — created as a monument to his god, made of found objects covered in metallic foil to appear as though silver and gold — to the art made of the precious metal in Colombia's The Museum of Gold, featuring artifacts created prior to the Spanish conquest. What do the works of art have in common? How can these dueling representations of gold be used to examine value?
12. Many characters in the book, including James Hampton, work as janitors: who are they? Why is this job significant? Talk about how classism is explored in *The Holy Days of Gregorio Pasos*.
13. Gregorio first meets Raúl on Election Day, in Washington, DC, on a busy street corner and thinks — **"On any other day, I would've thanked him and kept walking"** (p. 108) — what happens next, and why do you believe Gregorio has this particular reaction? What would you say has shifted in Gregorio's awareness at this point in the story?
14. **"Magdalena spoke in perfect English and perfect Spanish, though she never mixed the two... She spoke, it seemed, with the voices of two people."** (p. 85) — Talk about Magdalena, a Basque exile with whom Gregorio lives. What is their relationship like? What role does Magdalena play in Gregorio's life? Talk about what we eventually learn about Magdalena's history.
15. How does the idea of home play a role in this novel? Begin by examining Gregorio's journey in this regard. Then also discuss the rest of the main characters and what home is for them.
16. Talk about Gregorio's romantic relationships: how do they evolve with time, and why do you think this is? Consider Gregorio's high school crush, his relationship with Magdalena, and finally, Ramona, whom we are introduced to in the opening chapter, set in the present day.
17. Examine Gregorio's choice to not pursue a college degree, as most of his high school acquaintances, and his sister, a lawyer, had. What experiences does Gregorio have around the Georgetown campus in DC? As a group, talk about education through lived experience compared to institutional education.
18. Gregorio says: **"Up until that game, I'd never said anything to a referee other than thank you."** (p. 148) — What happens with the referee? How is Gregorio's disposition different in this scene than in other parts of the book? Discuss the reasons why you think this is. What is the significance of this particular scene appearing where it does, close to the novel's end?