

Book Club Discussion Guide

About the Author



Book Title: German girl **by Armando Lucas Correa**

With 20 years of experience in Hispanic media, award-winning journalist and author Armando Lucas Correa is the Editor in Chief of **PEOPLE EN ESPAÑOL**, the top selling Hispanic magazine in the U.S. with more than 7 million readers every month. In his role, he oversees the editorial content of the magazine, PeopleEnEspanol.com and its digital editions for tablets and mobile.

He also oversees the brand's social media strategy and events like 50 Most Beautiful (New York), the 25 Most Powerful Women (Miami), as well as Festival People en Español (New York).

In Cuba, and entered the world of print journalism in 1988 when he was appointed the editor of Tablas, a national theater and dance magazine based out of Havana, Cuba.

Correa is the recipient of various outstanding achievement awards from the National Association of Hispanic Publications and the Society of Professional Journalism. He is the magazine's primary spokesperson and regularly appears on national Spanish-language television programs discussing celebrity news and scoops.

His book **En busca de Emma** (In Search of Emma: Two Fathers, One



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Daughter and the Dream of a Family) was published by Rayo, Harper Collins in 2007 and for Aguilar, Santillana (Mexico) in 2009. His first novel *The German Girl* will be published in October in English and Spanish by *Atria Books*, a division of *Simon and Schuster*.

He currently resides in Manhattan with his partner and their three children.



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In 1939 before everything changed, Hannah Rosenthal lived a charmed life. Her family moved in Berlin's highest social circles, admired by friends and neighbors. Eleven-year-old Hannah was often taken by her mother for an afternoon treat at the tea room of the beautiful Adlon Hotel, both dressed in their finest clothes. She spent her afternoons at the park with her best friend Leo Martin. But, in an instant, that sunlit world vanished. Now the streets of Berlin are draped with red, white, and black flags; their fine possessions are hauled away, and they are no longer welcome in the places that once felt like home. The two friends make a pact: come what may, they promise to have a future together.

As Hannah and Leo's families desperately begin to search for a means of escape, a glimmer of hope appears when they discover the *Saint Louis*, a transatlantic liner that can give Jews safe passage to Cuba. After a frantic search to obtain visas, the Rosentals and the Martins depart from Hamburg on the luxurious passenger liner bound for Havana. Life aboard the ship is a welcome respite from the gloom of Berlin—filled with masquerade balls, dancing, and exquisite meals every night.

As the passengers gain renewed hope for a bright future ahead, love between Hannah and Leo blossoms. But soon reports from the outside world began to filter in, and dark news overshadows the celebratory atmosphere on the ship; the governments of Cuba, the United States, and Canada are denying the passengers of the *St. Louis* admittance to their countries, forcing them to return to Europe as it descends into the Second World War. The ship that had seemed their salvation seems likely to become their death sentence.

After four days anchored at bay, only a handful of passengers are allowed to disembark onto Cuban soil, and Hannah and Leo must face the grim reality that they could be torn apart. Their future is unknown, and their only choice will have an impact in generations to come.

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Decades later in New York City on her eleventh birthday, Anna Rosen receives a mysterious envelope from Hannah, a great-aunt she has never met but who raised her deceased father. In an attempt to piece together her father's mysterious past, Anna and her mother travel to Havana to meet Hannah, who is turning eighty-seven years old. Hannah reveals old family ties, recounts her journey aboard the *Saint Louis* and, for the first time, reveals what happened to her father and Leo. Bringing together the pain of the past with the mysteries of the present, Hannah gives young Anna a sense of their shared histories, forever intertwining their lives, honoring those they loved and cruelly lost.



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Discussion Questions

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1. "I was almost twelve years old when I decided to kill my parents."
The book opens on a pretty dark scene in which Hannah believes death is the best way out of her current situation. Why do you think she feels this way? How does this set the tone for the rest of the book?
2. Consider Hannah's reaction to being called "dirty" and then her reaction to being confused for an Aryan and ending up on the cover of *Das Deutsche Mädel*.
3. When Alma boards the *St. Louis*, she is wearing her best outfit and jewelry. Why is it so important for her to dress well as she leaves Germany? What message is she trying to send?
4. *People* praised *The German Girl* as "a timely must-read." There are telegraphs and various news headlines interspersed throughout Hannah's journey on the *St. Louis*, broadcasting the political climate and crises of the time. How do these compare to today's headlines and crises?
5. Had you heard of the tragedy of the *St. Louis* prior to reading this book? How would those refugees have benefited from today's social media exposure versus the newspaper coverage of the time?

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6. Why does Hannah's family feel betrayed by her brother's involvement in the Cuban Revolution? How is it similar to their experience in Berlin prior to leaving Germany for Cuba?
7. There are many parallels in *The German Girl*. Among them are Alma's and Ida's reactions to grief, forcing their daughters to assume more responsibilities at a young age. What do you think of their insistence upon wanting to erase the past to make the present more bearable? Does this coping mechanism ever really help?
8. Compare and contrast Hannah and Anna and their reactions to loss. How have the tragedies experienced by the Rosenthals bound them together and affected the other?
9. The 907 passengers who were not allowed to disembark in Cuba—and were later also rejected by the United States and Canada—found refuge in Great Britain (288), the Netherlands (181), Belgium (214), and France (224), before all but those taken in by Great Britain were claimed by the war. What do you think happened to the passengers in the moments before they disembarked in those countries? How do you think the locals reacted to their arrival?
10. Hannah keeps the little blue box all those years without ever opening it. Why do you think she kept her promise? What did you expect Hannah to find in the little blue box?
11. What does Anna represent for the Rosen family? Why was it important for Anna to meet Hannah and finally bring closure to their family history?

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Reviews

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"Fascinating . . . a brilliant entrée into the souls, terrors, ardors, endeavors and hopeless valor of people who have been written off. . . . Now, in a new age of people in peril and adrift on the world's seas, this magnificent novel—and the unexpected and intricate tragedies of its powerfully imagined characters—bespeaks this eternal injustice."
(Thomas Keneally, Bestselling author of *Schindler's List*)

"An unforgettable and resplendent novel which will take its place among the great historical fiction written about World War II. Hannah Rosenthal will remain in your heart and her determination to tell the story of what she saw, lived, and lost will change the way you look at the world." (Adriana Trigiani, bestselling author of *The Shoemaker's Wife*)

"powerful and affecting...that sheds light on a sorrowful piece of Holocaust history." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"I found myself unable to put the book down. I was able to identify with what my parents must have experienced first in Germany and later the *St. Louis*. . . . beautiful and heartbreaking." (Judith (Koepple) Steele, survivor of the *St. Louis*)

"It was so true to our many life experiences... I became enthralled with the descriptions of the emotional turmoil that these characters endured." (Eva (Safier) Wiener, survivor of the *St. Louis*)

"A vital tribute to liberty, love and justice...one of the most fascinating and extraordinary literary events of recent times." (Zoé Valdés, international bestselling author of *The Weeping Woman*)



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"Profound and moving ... This novel touched me personally, especially because it is written from the point of view of a girl, just like me, on the ship. This tragedy, ignored for so many years, contains a lesson the world must learn and never forget: compassion for refugees." (Ana Maria (Karman) Gordon, survivor of the St. Louis)

"A timely must-read." (*People*)

