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Getting the most from this guide



This guide is designed to help you to develop your understanding and critical appreciation of the concepts and issues raised in *Como agua para chocolate*, as well as your language skills, fully preparing you for your Paper 2 exam. It will help you when you are studying the novel for the first time and also during your revision.

A mix of Spanish and English is used throughout the guide to ensure you learn key vocabulary and structures that you will need for your essay-work, while also allowing you to develop a deep understanding of the work.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help build your language skills and focus your understanding of the novel:

la cortesía politeness

For every paragraph in Spanish, key vocabulary is highlighted and translated. Make sure you know these words so you can write an essay with accurate language and a wide range of vocabulary, which is essential to receive the top mark for AO3.

Activity

A mix of activities is found throughout the book to test your knowledge of the work and to develop your vocabulary and grammar. Longer writing tasks will help prepare you for your exam.

Build critical skills

These offer an opportunity to consider some more challenging questions. They are designed to encourage deeper thinking and analysis to take you beyond what happens in the novel, to explore why the author has used particular techniques, and the effects they have on you. These analytical and critical skills are essential for success in AO4 in the exam.

GRADE BOOSTER

These top tips advise you on what to do, as well as what not to do, to maximise your chances of success in the examination.

Answers

Answers to every activity, task and critical skills question can be found online at www.hoddereducation.co.uk/mfl-study-guide-answers.

TASK

Short tasks are included throughout the book to test your knowledge of the novel. These require short written answers.

Key quotation

Key quotations are highlighted as they may be useful supporting evidence in your essay.

4 Themes



The theme of love, with its powerful emotions, dominates *Como agua para chocolate*. This theme is fused with another, that of cooking. The two come together in the title of the novel *Como agua para chocolate*, a Mexican saying which alludes to water boiling to the right temperature for hot chocolate: metaphorically it refers to the passion aroused by love. The novel re-creates a past society that is profoundly influenced by traditional values and steeped in the fratricidal conflict of the Mexican Revolution. Tita is a woman denied her freedom of choice by these values; the novel relates her struggle. The five themes are therefore:

- *el amor* (love)
- *la gastronomía* (cooking)
- *la tradición* (tradition)
- *la libertad del individuo* (freedom of the individual)
- *la Revolución Mexicana* (the Mexican Revolution)

El amor

apasionado/a

passionate

prohibir to forbid

embelesado/a captivated

perseguir to continue

la relación relationship

Esta novela cuenta la historia del amor **apasionado** entre Tita y Pedro. La madre de Tita, Mamá Elena, **prohíbe** el matrimonio propuesto por Pedro y le ofrece la mano de Rosaura, la hermana de Tita. Pedro acepta porque, aunque no puede amar a Rosaura, sí puede estar cerca de la mujer a quien ama. La intensidad del amor de Tita por Pedro parece disminuir cuando ella se relaciona con el doctor Brown, que está **embelesado** con Tita, pero el amor que ella siente por Pedro es más intenso, y Tita nunca puede olvidarse de él. Después de muchos años de frustración y de **perseguir** su **relación** en secreto, Pedro y Tita logran una unión feliz al final. La novela cuenta otras historias de amor, algunas tristes, como las de Nacha y de la joven Mamá Elena, y otras alegres y con final feliz, como las de Gertrudis y de Chenchita.

The theme of love brings into play a range of negative and positive emotions in the characters: betrayal, despair, anger, jealousy, delight and ecstasy. The novel proclaims the power of the lovers' passion to overcome all hurdles. At the end the triumph of love is complete: Pedro and Tita are finally united, free from the obstacles of the past.

Throughout the novel this theme is sharpened metaphorically by the contrast of heat (or fire), which represents the passion of love, with cold, which is identified with the absence of love. When Tita first meets Pedro she feels 'la mirada de Pedro sobre sus hombros' and, despite moving away to avoid his look, her blood is still running through her veins 'abrasadoramente'. She is devastated by what

she believes to be his rejection of her and cannot escape a feeling of intense cold in her bones. Even the enormous quilt that she wraps herself in cannot give her warmth. Moreover, John Brown advises Tita to flee from cold people because they put out the fire we have within us. The chill that Tita feels when she is with Mamá Elena persuades her that she must avoid her mother rather than return to the ranch. The image of love as fire is explored further when John explains to Tita a theory that each person has a box of matches inside, which can only be lit by one who loves you. The match creates an inner heat when struck by this person. This episode foreshadows the ending of the novel, where the idea is given substance as Tita eats the matches given her by John so that she can be reunited with Pedro. The lovers are consumed by fire, and the ranch itself is burned to a cinder.

The love affair of Tita and Pedro is centre stage, but other characters are also touched by the heat of passion, at times accompanied by a literal fire. Tita's sister Gertrudis, having been prevented from taking her shower because the cubicle catches fire, is whisked off by a revolutionary soldier on horseback. Hers is a full-blooded romance, and she is deliriously happy. Gertrudis is a forceful, guilt-free character who, unlike Tita, is able to escape her mother's influence and follow her desires. Love is seen to be a powerful force for good in the case of the maid, Chenchá. She recovers from the humiliation of being raped when she is accepted in marriage by a former suitor. In this society, love can be frustrated by class prejudice: as a young woman Mamá Elena had a mulatto lover, but once her family learned of the affair they took action to avoid the social stigma that the relationship implied, and Mamá Elena was forced to marry another man, Tita's father. Love can also be thwarted by a powerful employer, as in the case of Nacha's romance, which Mamá Elena's mother cruelly prevented.

Key quotation

Pedro la ayudó en silencio y con gran ternura. Al hacerlo, una serie de sentimientos encontrados se apoderaron de ellos: amor, deseo, ternura, lujuria, vergüenza..., temor de verse descubiertos.

[Capítulo IV]

La gastronomía

La autora, Laura Esquivel, ha dicho que cocinar significa “una ceremonia de unión con el universo, un **placer** enorme...” y que en la cocina “el amor siempre está presente”. Su novela, que contiene “recetas, amores y remedios **caseros**”, gira en torno a Tita, la hija de Mamá Elena. Tita es cocinera del rancho y está enamorada de Pedro. Ella pasa mucho tiempo en la cocina, preparando platos. Cada capítulo presenta una receta, la mayoría de estas preparada por Tita, que se da cuenta de que

TASK

1 Examina el desarrollo de la relación entre Tita y John Brown. En tu opinión, ¿por qué Tita prefiere continuar su relación con Pedro?

el placer pleasure

casero/a homely, home-made

COMO AGUA PARA CHOCOLATE

entrelazarse to be interwoven

el vínculo link, bond

contagiarse to become infected

puede comunicar sus tristezas y alegrías a través de la comida. Así, el tema de la gastronomía **se entrelaza** con el del amor, y este **vínculo** se manifiesta cuando la gente, al probar la comida, **se contagia** de la emoción de la cocinera. Los platos de Tita son exquisitos, pero también tienen el poder de hacer que la gente sienta una fuerte emoción como, por ejemplo, sus antiguos amores, un deseo sexual poderoso o el dolor, tal y como los siente Tita.

GRADE BOOSTER

Essays that have a convincing argument and a balanced structure score highly. In order to allot the maximum amount of space for your argument, make sure that your introduction and your conclusion are succinct and relevant. The paragraphs that make up the body of the essay require sufficient space to make the argument, to give evidence from the narrative that justifies it, and to quote relevantly from the novel.

The preparation of food, together with the effect it has on the recipients, is the backbone of the narrative. The story can only be told because Tita's niece, Esperanza, found her cookbook in the ruins of the ranch. Esperanza passed on her knowledge of cooking to her daughter, who is the narrator of the story.

Each chapter of *Como agua para chocolate* begins with a recipe, the detailed preparation of the food is described, and the dish itself frequently becomes an intrinsic part of the development of the plot. The protagonist, Tita, is a consummate cook who, fittingly, was born in the kitchen.

Dishes are frequently linked to a celebration, such a wedding or a festival, for which the food is of central importance. Tita cannot escape the ranch because of her culinary duties and her obligation to look after her mother but, paradoxically, she finds the freedom to express herself in the act of cooking, as well as pleasure in being the family cook. Through her dishes she is able to show her love for Pedro and his children.

Tita's emotions are communicated to the others via her dishes. The meals often have a profound effect on the behaviour of characters and on the course of the novel. Tita cooks the meal for the wedding of her lover Pedro with her sister Rosaura. At the wedding, the deep sadness she feels at her fate is passed on to the guests who, when eating the *pastel chabela*, begin to weep, and this is followed by collective vomiting; Rosaura is highly distressed and her day is ruined. In Chapter III the dish of rose petals becomes a catalyst for the transmission of her emotions to others: she penetrates Pedro's body, communicating her desire to him with intense sensuality. The dish also acts as an aphrodisiac on her sister Gertudis; she synthesises the relationship between Tita, who emits the emotion, and Pedro, who receives it. Moreover, Gertrudis

elopes with a revolutionary soldier as a result of the incident. In the final chapter, the wedding guests are so aroused sexually by Tita's *chiles en nogada* that they leave without delay in order to find a place where they can make love 'desenfrenadamente' (Chapter XII).

Cooking can also have the effect of raising the spirits when morale is low. Tita's life is at its lowest point when she is living at John Brown's house: she has lost her vitality, has forgotten all her recipes and does not want to speak to anyone. At the point when she is beginning to recover, she smells *caldo de colita de res* brought to her by Chenchá, which brings back memories of Nacha. As she begins to eat the broth, Nacha's spirit appears, and Tita remembers the dishes they cooked together. Food has revived Tita more effectively than any medicine. At last she begins to speak again.

La tradición

La novela tiene lugar en una región rural del norte de México a comienzos del siglo XX, donde los valores tradicionales tienen una fuerte influencia social. Tita pierde la esperanza de **casarse con** Pedro porque su madre hace hincapié en seguir la tradición familiar con respecto al papel de la hija más joven: está condenada a permanecer **soltera** para cuidar de su madre hasta que esta muera. Esta tradición amenaza también con destruir la vida de Esperanza, la sobrina de Tita, porque su madre Rosaura piensa mantener la misma **costumbre**. Las costumbres sociales de la gente de **la clase pudiente** desempeñan un papel importante en la novela: **los buenos modales** establecidos por el *Manual de Carreño* imponen un **comportamiento** bastante formal en familias como la de los De La Garza. Por otro lado, la presentación de la tradición gastronómica no es nada pesimista. Las sabrosas recetas de Tita, aprendidas de Nacha, ponen de relieve las costumbres culinarias de la gente indígena de México y la vieja criada conoce muchos remedios naturales de esta gente. Además, el doctor John Brown está más impresionado con los remedios de su abuela indígena que con la medicina moderna.

The novel recounts the consequences of the decision by Mamá Elena to enforce the tradition that the youngest daughter did not marry, but looked after her mother. The force of tradition is such that Tita does not resist it openly, but this cruel decision generates conflicts that run through the entire novel.

The reputation of a family could be besmirched when one of its members behaved in a way that was deemed socially unacceptable. Thus, when Gertrudis runs off with a revolutionary soldier of her own free will, she dishonours the family name. When Mamá Elena learns that Gertrudis is working in a brothel she disowns her daughter, forbidding the family to mention her name.

The social behaviour of young people was dictated by a strict code, as prescribed by the *Manual de Carreño*. The free-spirited Tita curses this

Build critical skills

1 Encuentra en la novela un ejemplo que muestre la influencia de un plato preparado por Tita sobre el comportamiento de otros personajes. Explica cómo los influye.

casarse (con alguien)
to marry (someone)

soltero/a single,
unmarried

la costumbre custom

la clase pudiente
wealthy class

los buenos modales
good manners

el comportamiento
behaviour

Key quotation

[Tita on Pedro] ¡Y maldito Pedro, tan decente, tan correcto, tan varonil, tan..., tan amado!

[Capítulo III]

elegir to choose

llevar una vida (libre, etc.) to lead (a free etc.) life

la libertad freedom

desenfrenado/a wild, uncontrollable

Key quotation

[Mamá Elena and Tita meet] Sin palabras se hicieron mutuos reproches y con esto se rompió entre ellas el hasta entonces fuerte lazo de sangre y obediencia que las unía y que ya nunca se restablecería.

[Capítulo VII]

publication, blaming it for allowing her body to go to waste irrevocably. The tension generated by the conflict between social constraints and her desire for freedom is apparent when she blames Pedro for his willingness to adhere to conventional behaviour. Despite her desire to be free from social restrictions, for many years Tita remains obedient to the behaviour expected of her, as she and Pedro maintain a clandestine relationship. Although Pedro and Rosaura's marriage is a charade, the family carries on as if it was normal, in order to satisfy conventional manners.

The traditions of the indigenous people of Mexico are strongly represented in two areas, food and medicine: the recipes that Tita prepares so successfully were learned in many cases from her indigenous mentor, Nacha. Nacha's spirit advises Tita to treat Pedro's burnt skin with 'la corteza de tepezcohuite' (Chapter X), a recipe that was handed down by John Brown's indigenous grandmother 'Luz del amanecer'. John takes a professional interest in the traditional remedies for ailments to be found among the native peoples. His grandmother was revered for her skills and her cures by the North American community.

La libertad del individuo

En la sociedad de México de esa época, las mujeres no eran libres de decidir su destino por sí mismas. Así, a Tita, que tiene un espíritu libre, le falta la libertad para **elegir la vida** que quiere **llevar**. Tita lucha para obtener su **libertad** a lo largo de la novela. Rosaura, sin embargo, es menos libre de espíritu que Tita. Gertrudis, mujer **desenfrenada**, no respeta la tradición familiar y se siente libre.

Como agua para chocolate is the story of the struggle of an individual to free herself from the shackles imposed by society, which has denied her marriage to the man she loves. Tita retains her independence of mind, but she will not flout her mother's authority openly. She is portrayed as a woman who is capable of thinking for herself: the cruel denial of her freedom leads her to question the justice of traditional customs. She finds a degree of freedom in her role as the family cook, expressing her emotions through food.

In Doctor Brown's house she feels the need to be released from her past existence and takes the first steps towards independence. When Tita visits the ranch to care for her paralysed mother (Chapter VII), Mamá Elena notices that her daughter has become a changed person. Despite the transformation of the mother-daughter relationship, it is only when Tita confronts Mamá Elena and her spirit disappears for good that Tita finally shakes off her mother's influence (Chapter X). This is another decisive moment in Tita's spiritual odyssey, marked by the disappearance of her phantom pregnancy.

The final phase of Tita's journey to independence is the longest one, as she and Pedro keep their relationship secret for over 20 years. In the final chapter they come together to make love in complete freedom: 'Por primera vez podían

amarse libremente'. Tita has chosen her destiny freely, having conquered her ghosts, and is united in the afterlife with the man she loves.

GRADE BOOSTER

If you answer a theme-based question in the examination, such as:

En tu opinión, ¿ha alcanzado Tita la verdadera libertad al final de la novela? ¿Por qué (no)?

the key to a good answer is to focus on the precise words of the question and to answer relevantly. In this case, you should concentrate on three points: what *la libertad* really means for Tita, what the ending of the novel tells you about this theme and your opinion on this issue.

La Revolución Mexicana

Durante gran parte de la novela se observa un **trasfondo** de conflicto, entre los bandos militares y civiles de la Revolución Mexicana. Este ambiente de conflicto social da un **marco** de **inestabilidad** a la narración. A veces, lo que pasa en el conflicto afecta al argumento de la novela. Gertrudis se libera del rancho en el caballo de un rebelde y las **hazañas** revolucionarias del ejército se vuelven cada vez más importantes para ella, culminado en su **ascenso** a *general*. Hay un vínculo entre la rebeldía exterior del país y la rebeldía interior de Tita, que también busca, a su manera, un cambio radical en su destino.

el trasfondo

background, setting

el marco framework

la inestabilidad

instability

la hazaña deed

el ascenso promotion, rise

The background to most of the novel is the Mexican Revolution, a fratricidal struggle for change in society. The revolutionary factions were seeking freedom from the abuses of the past, just as Tita was seeking her liberty from the traditional values of an oppressive mother; Tita's revolution, however, is an inner, psychological one. Revolutionary bands that were roaming the countryside come into contact with Mamá Elena's family on three occasions; each time their intervention has an impact on the plot. In Chapter III, a *villista* revolutionary carries Gertrudis off on horseback; as a result of this scandal, she is disowned by her mother. However, the Revolution has a positive effect on Gertrudis: she finds her role in the faction she joins, rising to become a *general*, and marrying the man who carried her off. On the second occasion, in Chapter V, the insecurity of the countryside, with no protection against marauding bands, is apparent. The revolutionaries attack the ranch but, on being confronted by Mamá Elena with a gun, they retreat. On the third occasion, a group of *bandoleros* comes to the ranch, injuring Mamá Elena and raping Chenchá. This incident is a key moment in the plot: Tita has to return to the ranch to look after her mother and Mamá Elena's subsequent death removes from Tita the obligation to care for her.

Actividades



1 Une la primera parte de la frase con su terminación:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Después de la muerte de Mamá Elena, la pasión entre los dos jóvenes... | a si vale la pena luchar contra esta tradición familiar inhumana. |
| 2 Para Tita, la cocina es liberadora y... | b Tita se aleja del rancho y se libera espiritualmente. |
| 3 El dolor de Tita es tan fuerte que se pregunta... | c vuelve a surgir, y finalmente puede ser expresada. |
| 4 Después de interminables luchas con su madre,... | d se enrola en el ejército y asciende a un alto rango. |
| 5 Tras pasar algún tiempo en un burdel, Gertrudis... | e crea un vínculo de comunicación entre las personas. |

2 Completa las siguientes oraciones con palabras del recuadro. ¡Cuidado! Sobran cinco palabras.

hasta	hazañas
atrocidades	cuidar
trasfondo	se entrelaza
dolor	obedecer
mandar	comportamiento
indígenas	casarse
permitir	placer
prohibir	

- 1 Pedro acepta con Rosaura, porque Mamá Elena le prohíbe el matrimonio con Tita.
- 2 Gertrudis contó las de los revolucionarios con mucho gusto.
- 3 John Brown creía que los remedios de los que estaba investigando eran superiores a los de la medicina moderna.
- 4 Tita, como la hija más joven de la familia, tenía la responsabilidad de obedecer a su madre que esta muriera.
- 5 El gran logro de esta novela es que el tema de la gastronomía con el del amor.
- 6 Tita no quiere a su madre, pero tiene un profundo sentido de responsabilidad hacia su familia y, además, le tiene miedo a su madre.

- 7 El caótico de la novela, lleno de conflicto, contribuye a la inestabilidad de la vida de los protagonistas.
 - 8 Rosaura quería seguir el ejemplo de su madre y el matrimonio de su hija para que esta la cuidara.
 - 9 Cuando su madre le dijo que Pedro no iba a ser su esposo, Tita sintió un profundo.
 - 10 El *Manual de Carreño* exigía que los jóvenes tuvieran un muy formal.
- 3 Contesta las preguntas siguientes en español, utilizando tus propias palabras.
- 1 ¿Por qué se casa Pedro con Rosaura?
 - 2 ¿Cómo reaccionaron los invitados en la boda de Rosaura y Pedro al comer el pastel?
 - 3 ¿Por qué no quiere Tita volver al rancho después de vivir en la casa de John Brown?
 - 4 ¿Cómo reaccionaron los padres de Mamá Elena al descubrir que estaba enamorada de un mulato?
 - 5 ¿Qué importancia tiene el *Manual de Carreño* en la novela?
 - 6 ¿Por qué Tita quiere interferir en el destino de su sobrina Esperanza?
 - 7 ¿Dónde estaban Chenchy y Tita mientras los revolucionarios atacaban el rancho?
 - 8 ¿Cómo cambió la Revolución la vida de Gertrudis?
 - 9 ¿Por qué Tita comió los fósforos al final de la novela?
 - 10 ¿Por qué se llama *Como agua para chocolate* la novela?
- 4 Examina la importancia de la cocina para la relación entre Tita y otros personajes de la novela. En tu respuesta puedes considerar a:
- ▼ Nacha
 - ▼ Mamá Elena
 - ▼ Pedro Muzquiz
 - ▼ Rosaura

GRADE BOOSTER

When answering an essay question with guidance points, take care to make a clear plan before you start to write your answer, with an introduction and a conclusion. The guidance points are there to prompt you to think about relevant content, but they will not provide the structure for your essay.

Temas



Vocabulario

- abrasador(a)** burning
acomodado/a well-off
el ambiente atmosphere
amenazar (con) to threaten (with)
apasionado/a passionate
los buenos modales good manners
casarse (con alguien) to marry (someone)
casero/a homely, home-made
el comportamiento behaviour
la costumbre custom
cuidar de to look after
desenfrenado/a wild, uncontrollable
el destino fate, destiny
el dolor grief, sorrow
elegir to choose
embelesado/a captivated
indígena native, indigenous (of the Americas)
la inestabilidad instability
liberar to free
la libertad freedom
luchar to struggle, fight
el marco framework
el matrimonio marriage, matrimony
obedecer to obey
pedir la mano to ask for someone's hand (in marriage)
el placer pleasure
poderoso/a powerful
probar to taste
prohibir to forbid
la receta recipe
sabroso/a tasty
soltero/a single, unmarried
el sufrimiento suffering
el trasfondo background, setting
el vínculo link, bond