



DISCUSSION GUIDE

The House of Broken Angels

“Intimate and touching . . . the stuff of legend.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*
“An immensely charming and moving tale.” —*Boston Globe*

Summary

In his final days, beloved and ailing patriarch Miguel Angel de La Cruz, affectionately called Big Angel, has summoned his entire clan for one last legendary birthday party. But as the party approaches, his mother, nearly one hundred, dies, transforming the weekend into a farewell doubleheader. Among the guests is Big Angel’s half brother, known as Little Angel, who must reckon with the truth that although he shares a father with his siblings, he has not, as a half gringo, shared a life.

Across two bittersweet days in their San Diego neighborhood, the revelers mingle among the palm trees and cacti, celebrating the lives of Big Angel and his mother, and recounting the many inspiring tales that have passed into family lore, the acts both ordinary and heroic that brought these citizens to a fraught and sublime country and allowed them to flourish in the land they have come to call home.

Luis Alberto Urrea

Hailed by NPR as a “literary badass” and a “master storyteller with a rock and roll heart,” Luis Alberto Urrea is a prolific and acclaimed writer who uses his dual-culture life experiences to explore greater themes of love, loss and triumph.

A 2005 Pulitzer Prize finalist for nonfiction and member of the Latino Literature Hall of Fame, Urrea is the critically acclaimed and best-selling author of 17 books, winning numerous awards for his poetry, fiction and essays. Born in Tijuana to a Mexican father and American mother, Urrea is most recognized as a border writer, though he says, “I am more interested in bridges, not borders.”

Urrea attended the University of California at San Diego, earning an undergraduate degree in writing, and did his graduate studies at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

After serving as a relief worker in Tijuana and a film extra and columnist-editor-cartoonist for several publications, Urrea moved to Boston where he taught expository writing and fiction workshops at Harvard. He also taught at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette.

Urrea lives with his family in Naperville, IL, where he is a distinguished professor of creative writing at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

Discussion Questions (generic fiction questions from LitLovers.com)

1. How did you **experience** the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?

2. Describe the main **characters**—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.

- Why do characters do what they do?
- Are their actions justified?
- Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
- How has the past shaped their lives?
- Do you admire or disapprove of them?
- Do they remind you of people you know?

3. Are the main characters **dynamic**—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?

4. Discuss the **plot**:

- Is it engaging—do you find the story interesting?
- Is this a plot-driven book—a fast-paced page-turner?
- Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
- Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
- Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?

5. Talk about the book's **structure**.

- Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
- Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
- Does time shift back & forth from past to present?
- Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?
- Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
- What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?

6. What main ideas—**themes**—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use **symbols** to reinforce the main ideas?

7. What **passages** strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

8. Is the **ending** satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

9. If you could ask the **author** a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

10. Has this novel **changed you**—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?