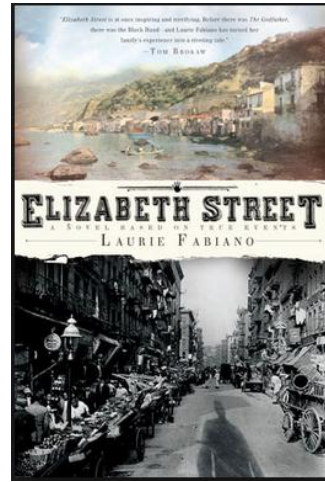


## Discussion Questions

### Elizabeth Street by Laurie Fabiano



1. Talk about the name of the Italian town in which Giovanni Costa was born. What is its mythological background as well as its metaphorical implication in Fabiano's novel.
2. Describe Giovanni. What kind of a character is she? What inner strengths does she draw upon that give her the courage to pursue a new life far from home, stand up to an American corporation and, eventually, take on the Black Hand?
3. Talk about Giovanni's second marriage. Was it a pragmatic decision, cowardly, or courageous to marry a man she didn't love. Did she have other options? What might you have done in her place?
4. Much of the power of this book lies in its detailed descriptions—the sights and sounds of life in Little Italy, New York, at the turn of the last century. Read aloud and talk about some of the passages that struck you as most descriptive or interesting.
5. Have you come away from this book with a different insight into the immigrant experience of the early 1900s—the need to develop close knit families and communities, as well as the overwhelming challenges faced by many new arrivals? Talk about some of those hardships.
6. Does this book inspire you to investigate your own family's history as newcomers (we all were at one time) to this country? If you're recently descended from immigrants—and steeped in family lore—does Fabiano's book ring true to you? Does it feel authentic?
7. Talk about the experience of many of the Italians, particularly southerners, on their arrival at Ellis Island. What prompted the discriminatory treatment? How else were Italians discriminated against once they stepped foot on the mainland? What about other nationalities arriving earlier or around the same time—the Irish and Eastern Europeans on the East Coast of the U.S., and the Chinese on the West coast.
8. It would be impossible to read Elizabeth Street and not consider today's immigration issue. Can you make any comparisons between conditions in the novel and those in contemporary life?
9. What prompted the beginnings of the Black Hand? How did they gain power over the residents of Little Italy—and why, politically, was it allowed to flourish? Does Fabiano's depiction challenge or support what some have considered the romanticized myth of the underworld?
10. Had you known before about the devastating 1908 earthquake in Italy and tsunamis that followed?

11. According to Fabiano, the story is based on her great- grandmother and grandmother, who was indeed abducted as a child. Does knowing this affect your view of the novel?

12. There are a number of comparisons made of this book to *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*...or Doctorow's *Waterworks*; even to a films like *Gangs of New York* or *The Godfather*. Have you read other works in which you see similarities—perhaps *The Namesake* or *Shanghai Girls*?

13. Overall, what was your experience reading *Elizabeth Street*? Was it engaging, were characters well developed, did the pace move well, was the ending satisfactory?