

# Character analysis of Úrsula Iguarán Buendía



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

One Hundred Years of Solitude, by Gabriel García Márquez, documents both the triumphs and tribulations of a village called Macondo and its founders, the Buendía family. José Arcadio Buendía and his wife, Úrsula Iguarán, establish Macondo in early nineteenth century Colombia. The novel closely follows the couple and their descendants, spanning six generations, each as complex as the next. Although the story presents a linear organization on the surface, the structure of the novel is more circular. Names, personalities, events, and relationships repeat themselves within the Buendía family. Úrsula, who lives to be well over 100 years old, is the woman who most fully recognizes that her family's time in Macondo is simply a repetitive loop driven by solitude. She describes this loop, saying, "It's as if time had turned around and we were back at the beginning" (193). Although some may consider her old age to be a blessing, it is also a terrible curse. A centenarian, Úrsula endures immense suffering as her descendants repeat their ancestors' mistakes.

Despite her family's troubled nature, Úrsula is responsible for the survival and the longevity of the family name. She is a strong character who excels in her roles as the Buendía family matriarch and as the independent, well-respected founder of her community. Empowered by her wisdom, strength, and unwavering dedication to her family, Úrsula develops an understanding of her family's solitude. Úrsula's life as a founder of Macondo is relatively comparable to Eve's beginning in Genesis. The novel begins as Úrsula and José Arcadio Buendía create a utopian village, which is similar to the Garden of Eden. Márquez alludes to the creation story when describing Macondo, stating, "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in

order to indicate them it was necessary to point (1)". The Buendías create this new settlement from scratch just as Adam and Eve did thousands of years ago in the Garden of Eden. Úrsula, like Eve, becomes the matriarch of her society. A seemingly perfect civilization, Macondo was surprisingly not immune to wrongdoing. What could be considered the original sin of Macondo is also one of the most prevalent themes throughout the novel: incest. Because she is married to her cousin, Úrsula has always feared the possible deformities her children may develop, such as a pig's tail. The Bible condemns incest in Leviticus 18: 6-18, declaring, "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness...for their nakedness is your own nakedness". Márquez treats incest as more of an understood truth rather than an ethical issue. His nonchalant attitude about the topic is most outwardly refuted by Úrsula. She recognizes the possible consequences, and she tries to spare her family from disaster at all costs. She is completely dedicated to the wellbeing of her family. Another biblical reference comes when describing the Buendía's newly built home. Since Úrsula lived in the first and the best house in Macondo, all others were "built in its image and likeness" (8). Recalling the way in which Eve pioneered her family's life in Eden, Úrsula established her family in Macondo.

In addition to her Eve-like tendencies, Úrsula possesses a name of significance. Úrsula translates to "little female bear". Perhaps Márquez gives her this name because of her unwavering strength in the face of adversity. Úrsula is undoubtedly the strongest and most influential person in Macondo, greatly overshadowing even her male relatives. José Arcadio Buendía's preoccupation with scientific discovery thrusts Úrsula into a role that many

women may not have been able to handle. Úrsula becomes an extremely significant woman in a primarily patriarchal society. She accomplishes tasks that her husband could not, such as discovering a passageway out of Macondo. The extent of Úrsula's power becomes extremely apparent when she convinces the men of Macondo to leave the town where it is rather than move. She wholeheartedly opposes the idea, saying, "If I have to die for the rest of you to stay here, I will die." (13). Even her own husband is surprised by her stubbornness. It is obvious that Úrsula acts as the primary decision maker in her family because the men leave the town exactly where it is. She is unmoving when it comes to what she wants. In addition, she is able to gather the women of the village to oppose her politically corrupt son, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, in his decision to kill the mayor of Macondo, General José Raquel Moncada. Despite the women's protest, Colonel Aureliano Buendía carries out the execution, but Úrsula's ability to rally the women of Macondo shows public prominence. In addition to the Colonel's cruel reign, Úrsula's grandson, Arcadio, brings even more shame to the family. Placed in charge of Macondo by Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Arcadio reigns as an obsessive dictator. Úrsula becomes so angered by her grandson's actions that she publically opposes him and lashes him. Her superiority in this situation is almost overwhelming. Declaring her own orders, she proves herself to be a politically powerful, unbiased, honest woman, unafraid of confrontation and consequence. Úrsula undoubtedly lives up to the name she has been given as displayed through her insurmountable strength and dominance when overcoming a challenge.

Even as young woman, Úrsula gains the respect of her neighbors and family, which allows her to excel in many of her responsibilities. She assumes the roles of entrepreneur and, more importantly, mother. Úrsula's husband, José Arcadio Buendía, is a dreamer. Enchanted by the discoveries of the gypsies, he becomes so consumed by science that he unintentionally abandons all responsibilities to his family. He sells his animals for magnets and uses Úrsula's inheritance to purchase a telescope, thinking that his research will bring prosperity to his beloved family. Once the intelligent patriarch of his family, José Arcadio Buendía focuses his energy entirely on discovery. His curiosity eventually drives him insane, and he ceases to have meaningful communication with his family. Despite her husband's newly encountered solitude, Úrsula continues to love and support José. However, she must now provide for her family. The establishment of her business, which sells candy animals, becomes successful, allowing her to expand the company into a pastry shop. She promises that as long as she lives, her household will have the money it needs. Úrsula's hard work proves that she will not let her family suffer any more than they have if she can avoid it. Although life as an entrepreneur is not simple, her job as the head of her family is her most difficult task.

The adversities that the Buendía family overcomes, such as incest, politics, and death, are destructive enough to break any family. However, Úrsula's quiet determination manages to hold her family together for many generations. She rightfully gains the respect and honor that she deserves in Macondo. Conversely, as Úrsula ages, the prominence she once had begins to fade. She slips into blindness, but because of her vivid memories and

developed senses, her family does not realize her handicap. It is important to realize that Úrsula is forced into her solitude. Nature chooses Úrsula's blindness, not she herself. Her newly found isolation enables her to reflect on her family's troubled past, and she is saddened by it. Strangely enough, it is her blindness that allows her see. Úrsula understands her family's solitude, connecting with her loved ones on a deeper level than ever before. Her disability does not hinder her interactions with her family. The years spent watching her relatives repeat the mistakes of their predecessors allow Úrsula to understand her descendants better than they understand themselves. She begins to fade away, and both the family and the town she once built follow closely in her footsteps.

The combination of Úrsula's practicality and understanding is the driving force behind the Buendía family. Her death at the end of the novel symbolizes not only the downfall of Macondo, but the demise of her family as well. The family she so lovingly nurtured and the village she once established now follow her to the grave. Úrsula is a timeless character, both literally and figuratively. She lives for over a century, giving rise to a spectacularly complex family and a village that became her home. Úrsula Iguarán Buendía truly possesses the characteristics of a terrific heroine.

Works Cited García Marquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print. "4 Bible Verses about Incest." *What Does the Bible Say About Incest?* Crossway Bibles, 2001. Web. 14 Sept. 2013.