

One Hundred Years of Solitude review – Gabriel García Márquez's classic makes for startling TV beauty

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Work in pairs. Make a list of famous books that have been turned into movies. Discuss:

- Have you seen these movies?
- Have you read these books the films/TV series are based on?
- Which adaptations do you think are the best?
- Which are the worst?
- Why is it difficult to turn a book into a movie?
- Are there any books you'd like to see on the big screen?

2 Key words

a. Choose the correct word to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- a film or show made from a book
 - revenge
 - utopia
 - adaptation
- a group of family members born and living during the same time
 - generation
 - imagination
 - ancestors
- the ability to form pictures in your mind
 - isolated
 - imagination
 - haunted
- visited by ghosts or bad memories
 - eccentricity
 - haunted
 - doomed
- something you do to hurt someone who hurt you
 - revenge
 - adaptation
 - utopia
- far from other places or people
 - corruption
 - alchemy
 - isolated
- expressing the opinion that something or someone is not valuable; derogatory
 - disparaging
 - ephemeral
 - benign

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8. an imagined perfect place
 - a. utopia
 - b. ancestors
 - c. isolated
9. an unusual or strange behaviour
 - a. revenge
 - b. alchemy
 - c. eccentricity
10. certain to fail or have a bad ending
 - a. doomed
 - b. corruption
 - c. adaptation
11. family members who lived long ago
 - a. generation
 - b. ancestors
 - c. utopia
12. dishonest or illegal behaviour
 - a. corruption
 - b. revenge
 - c. isolated

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. Children often use their _____ during playtime.
2. Three _____ of the family have lived in this house, from grandmother to grandchild.
3. Their grandmother's _____ included talking to plants and wearing mismatched socks.
4. Without proper planning, the project was _____ to fail.
5. The newspaper exposed _____ in the local government.
6. The Netflix _____ of the book stays true to its Colombian roots.
7. Instead of seeking _____, she chose to forgive and move forward.
8. He felt _____ by the memories of his childhood home long after moving away from the terrible place.

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This 16-part series might struggle with the novel’s problematic sexual politics, but it’s a big, gorgeous adaptation of a big, gorgeous book

Jack Seale
11 December, 2024

- 1 Gabriel García Márquez’s 1967 novel is not just a classic but a high point of magical realism and Spanish-language literature in general. One Hundred Years of Solitude is a big, big book. Netflix is keen to take care with the adaptation, so they made it in the novel’s home of Colombia. At 16 episodes, it’s a pretty big TV series.
- 2 The novel takes place largely in one location and it moves through several generations of the same family, telling its story in episodes. The filmmaker’s faced difficulty in creating images that were planted in one’s imagination by Márquez’s prose. Those who love the book might think the pictures on the screen can never measure up. Others think One Hundred Years of Solitude is cursed by its own influence, now cheapened by too many copycats.
- 3 We start in the middle of the 19th century, at the wedding of José Arcadio Buendía (Marco González) and Úrsula Iguarán (Susana Morales). They are cousins, so their marriage is frowned upon by Úrsula’s mother, who predicts their children will have pig’s tails. Hurt by this, and feeling unwelcome in their home town on account of José Arcadio being haunted by the ghost of a man he killed in revenge for a disparaging comment made during a cockfight, they follow José Arcadio’s dream of founding a new town: Macondo.
- 4 Macondo is an isolated utopia where strange things happen naturally. Priests and babies can float; the dead choose not to stay dead. A group of gypsies visit every year, selling such miracles as alchemy, magnets, ice and a syrup that makes you invisible. All of these things are treated as equally normal. As reality bends around them, the townsfolk often stare across the colourful madness, embracing it and their own eccentricities. The camera swoops from room to room and house to house, certain that it will find something extraordinary behind every new door.
- 5 The curse that says the couple’s inbreeding will produce beasts does not come true, at least not for a long time. However, the sons and grandsons of José Arcadio and Úrsula are doomed in another way. They are destined to repeat their own mistakes and those of their ancestors, a problem highlighted by all the males in the family having similar names. Male Macondans’ choices often go beyond the merely eccentric, however, and it’s here the TV show has a problem to solve.
- 6 Politics begins to affect Macondo. It brings corruption, civil war and opportunities to show hidden cowardice or courage. The show presents these relationships as unharmed, which caused debate. It’s not yet time for Macondo to become a metaphor for the damages of capitalist imperialism. The story is split into two parts, with a second batch of eight episodes coming next year.
- 7 A rain of yellow flowers announces the death of José Arcadio, and blood comes all the way across town to Úrsula’s feet to tell her that her son is dead. These scenes are made with care and are very beautiful. There’s enough here to make Macondo worth revisiting.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. When was the novel originally written?
2. How many episodes is Netflix's adaptation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* divided into?
3. How many locations and how many generations are in the series?
4. What prediction does Úrsula's mother make about the couple's children?
5. Why do José Arcadio and Úrsula leave their home town?
6. What is the name of José Arcadio's new settlement?
7. What are the four things the gypsies sell in Macondo?
8. What happens to announce José Arcadio's death?
9. How does Úrsula find out about her son's death?
10. What makes Macondo an 'isolated utopia', according to the text?

4 Key language

a. Underline the passive voice in the sentences below.

1. Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 novel is not to be taken lightly.
2. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is cursed by its own influence.
3. Their union is frowned upon by Úrsula's mother.
4. All miracles are treated as equally normal.
5. The sons and grandsons of José Arcadio and Úrsula are doomed in another way.
6. The rain of yellow flowers and the blood trail are made with care.

b. Choose three of the sentences from task a. Rewrite them in the active voice.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- The book is always better than the film.
- Filming the series in Colombia, where the novel is set, makes it more authentic.
- Putting books onscreen leaves nothing to the imagination.

6 In your own words

a. Write your own review of a TV show or film you have recently watched. Answer these questions.

- Why did you choose this particular TV show or film?
- What is the summary of the plot?
- Describe one of the best scenes. What visual elements are present?
- What themes or messages are present in the work?
- What makes this production unique or noteworthy?

b. Share your review with the class, the facts you learned about the film and your opinions of it.