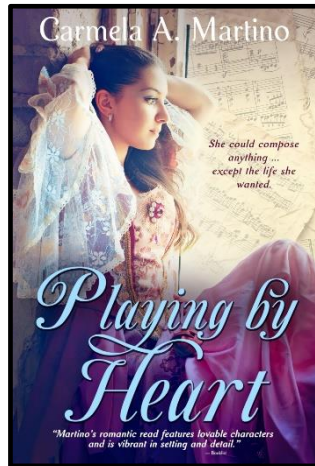

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



The second edition of *Playing by Heart*, which was released in **September 2025**, includes the following **Book Discussion Questions**. They are available here for use by readers who don't have access to the new edition.

For additional book club resources as well as a **free Teacher's Guide** with novel-related activities, see the **Book Clubs** page of author Carmela Martino's website: www.carmelamartino.com/bookclubs.htm.

Carmela enjoys speaking to book clubs, students, and readers of all ages about the two amazing sisters who inspired *Playing by Heart*. The Book Clubs page also includes information on how to arrange for Carmela to visit your book club or classroom.

All readers are invited to subscribe to **Carmela's Creativity Newsletter** containing publishing news, event info, creativity tips, and more at: [//subscribepage.io/cmartino](http://subscribepage.io/cmartino). As a thank you gift, you'll receive access to a deleted scene from an early draft of the novel.

Discussion Questions

1. Although Emilia is incredibly gifted, she initially believes she has “meager talent.” Why do you think that is? What makes her begin to suspect that she may be wrong? Have you ever believed something about yourself that you later realized was untrue?
2. Emilia is driven to prove her musical talents valuable to her father out of fear for her future. What, specifically, does she fear? Do you think her fear is valid? How do you think her life would have turned out if she *hadn't* tried to prove her talents valuable?
3. Maria is also gifted. What are her gifts and how do they compare to Emilia's? How do Maria's specific goals and dreams for her future compare to Emilia's goals?
4. Maria's father, Signor Salvini, has plans for Maria that conflict with her own goals. How does she deal with this conflict? What would you have done in her situation?
5. One of the novel's themes centers on recognizing your gifts and using them to follow your calling. Is the term “calling” still relevant in modern times? If so, what gifts do you have that could be tied to your calling? If the term calling is no longer relevant, why not?
6. The Author's Note explains how the characters of Emilia and Maria were inspired by two sisters who lived in 18th-century Milan. Before reading the novel, what assumptions did you have about the type of educational and professional opportunities available to girls in Europe at that time? Did the novel change any of your assumptions? If so, how?
7. The Author's Note also mentions that much more is known about Maria Gaetana Agnesi, the inspiration for the character of Maria Salvini, than about composer Maria Teresa Agnesi, who was the model for Emilia. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from Emilia's point of view rather than Maria's? How would the story have been different if told from Maria's viewpoint?
8. If Emilia and Maria had been born in 21st-century America, how would their lives have been different? Would they have had to face any of the same issues or concerns that they do in the novel?
9. Some readers have called *Playing by Heart* “Austen-esque,” saying it has much in common with Jane Austen's work, especially *Pride and Prejudice*. In what ways are the two novels similar? In what ways are they different?
10. The end of the novel leaves some things unresolved. What do you think will happen to Emilia, Maria, Isabella, and Paola? How much say do you think they'll have in what the future holds? Will they be happy?

NOTE: A free Teacher's Guide is also available for download at www.carmelamartino.com/bookclubs.htm.