



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WHEN MY BROTHER WAS AN AZTEC BY NATALIE DIAZ

1. How does "Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Reservation," and the use of whiteness prepare the reader to read both "Hand-Me-Down Halloween" and "Why I Hate Raisins?"
2. How does the setting of "Hand-Me-Down Halloween" off of the reservation contrast with the way "Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Reservation" portrays life on the reservation?
3. What does the absence of the speaker's brother in these poems about the speaker's childhood suggest?
4. How do poems like "Tortilla Smoke" and "The Red Blues" interact with and deepen the meaning of profile poems like "Reservation Mary," "A Woman with No Legs," and "The Gospel of Guy No-Horse?"
5. Does "Tortilla Smoke" use religious imagery differently than poems like "Abecedarian"? Why or why not?
6. How does the poem "A Woman with No Legs" change the meaning of the parents trying to stand without legs at the end of "When My Brother Was an Aztec?"
7. How is the way Diaz reframes Christian mythology in "If Eve Side-Stealer & Mary Busted-Chest Ruled the World" similar to the way she frames a fairly iconic children's toy in "The Last Mojave Indian Barbie"? How is it different?
8. Does it change the way you read the collection to think of the sister from "Mercy Songs to Melancholy" as a figurative representation of indigenous women generally, rather than the speaker's literal sister?
9. "If Eve Side-Stealer & Mary Busted-Chest Ruled the World" reframes Christian mythology through a Native American lens, but it also focuses on the notable female figures in Christianity. How does gender play a role in the way Diaz's poems try to reframe the world?
10. "The Facts of Art" is one of several poems in this section which recounts a direct conflict between white and Indigenous culture. Others include "The Last Mojave Indian Barbie" and "Hand-Me-Down Halloween." How is "The Facts of Art" similar to these other narratives? How is it different?
11. "Jimmy Eagle's Hot Cowboy Boots Blues" refers to the FBI as the cavalry. What do the cavalry represent in this collection so far?
12. The speaker's parents have often been presented in the narrative as a united front, but in "Zoology," they fight. What does the conflict in "Zoology" say about their relationship? Do any of the poems in the collection so far connect to this conflict?
13. What does the speaker mean when she says she is glad her brother does not appear for dinner dressed "as a green god" (16)?
14. How do the three poems that begin Section II differ from the poems in Section I?
15. The references to history and art in the collection, as well as the use of words from other languages, means that many readers will not immediately grasp what the poems are communicating. Why might Diaz have chosen to write this way?

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16. "Downhill Triolets" and "Formication" deal with events that seem to take place around the same time as each other, and between the same group of people. However, the tone and events in the two poems are very different. Why do you think they were placed in the collection in the order that they were?
17. "As a Consequence of my Brother Stealing All the Lightbulbs" is written in a similar style to "How to Go to Dinner with a Brother on Drugs," and seems to take place at about the same point in time. How do these two poems contrast with each other?
18. "Soirée Fantastique" and "No More Cake Here" seem, on the surface, to be about two very different parties, but what do they have in common?
19. The three guests at the "Soirée Fantastique" are Antigone, Houdini, and Jesus. What do these three guests represent for the speaker?
20. "A Brother Named Gethsemane," and "Soirée Fantastique" both talk about burying the speaker's brother. The last poem to feature a shovel was "How to Go to Dinner with a Brother on Drugs." What did the shovel represent there? What does it represent here?
21. "Dome Riddle" and "I Lean Out the Window and She Nods Off in Bed, the Needle Gently Rocking on the Bedside Table" both use long lists of colorful, evocative imagery to create an emotional atmosphere. Does one of these poems express these images more clearly than the other?
22. "Toward the Amaranth Gates of War or Love" talks about attraction and sensuality in a very specific way. Is this the same as the way the speaker talks about attraction in "I Watch Her Eat the Apple," or is something about it different?
23. "Monday Aubade" and "Apotheosis of a Kiss" both dwell on the end of a relationship, but "Monday Aubade" focuses on the lover who the speaker has lost, whereas "Apotheosis of a Kiss" is about the speaker's own feelings. Why do you think these two poems were included in the collection in the order that they were?
24. "Of Course She Looked Back" is one of the few poems in Section III which is not written in the first person. What does the addition of this perspective add to the emotional landscape of the collection at this point?
25. Much of the collection is written in free verse, but "Lorca's Red Dresses" is written in the complex form of the ghazal. Why might this formal choice be significant for the collection?
26. "Love Potion 2012" is published in a book which came out in 2012. What do you think the poem and the title are saying about the time it was written?
27. This final section of the book returns to the speaker's brother. How do the poems about the lover in Section III influence the reading of these later poems about the brother?
28. "Orange Alert" focuses on an airport security environment which came into being in the aftermath of 9/11, an atmosphere which also heavily influenced army recruitment around that time. How does the speaker's point of view on airport security intersect with her brother's time in the army?

Discussion questions adapted from BookRags.com.

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