

Barefoot Heart Discussion Questions

Barefoot Heart is a memoir that tells the story of Elva Treviño Hart's migrant childhood. Each chapter begins with a Mexican *dicho* (proverb) that sets the stage for the vignette from her life which follows. Using the storytelling tradition of her family and culture, Hart invites readers into a truck of migrant workers on their way from Texas to the fields of Minnesota and Wisconsin for work, into the fearful heart and mind of a four-year-old girl who must spend the summer away from loved ones, to the local Texas school where Elva experienced academic success and discrimination. Determined to see his six children graduate from high school, Elva's father taught his children about work, dignity and the quest for more. *Barefoot Heart* adds another layer to the face of the U.S. migrant worker.

1. The *dicho* (proverb) that begins Chapter 2 states that "Adversity teaches more than ten years of university." What kinds of adversity did Elva experience living in a family of migrant workers? What did she learn from that adversity? What impact did that learning have on her later successes and/or failures? What kinds of adversity have you experienced? What *dicho*, or favorite saying, has provided motivation for you during difficult times?
2. In school, Elva preferred to "work hard, lay low, and be quiet." It was her formula for being successful. In your experience, what do teachers expect from students? What has your formula been for handling school? How has it helped or hindered you in learning?
3. Elva's study of planaria for her science fair project illustrates an amazing curiosity and desire to learn. Why was the project so fascinating for her? Give an example of a learning experience that you have had that you found exciting.
4. Why was Mr. Derderian so important to Elva? Have you ever had a teacher that had a profound impact on your desire to do well and to learn? How did that happen? Have you ever been applauded for doing something? Why did applause make Elva feel "joyful and free"? What made the act of writing so important to her?
5. Elva loved her parents, but had issues with both of them. Elva came to view Apá differently after their trip to Mexico. She said he was "transformed" while he was there. How was he different in Mexico? What did she realize about him as she saw him in the neighborhood of his childhood? How much does where we are impact who we are?
6. The act of reading opened new worlds to Elva. She said it became her "adolescent rebellion." How did reading constitute rebellion to her? In what ways did her

boundaries expand? How did her feeling about Pearsall change as she discovered other worlds in books? What is your relationship with reading? How has it impacted you?

7. Elva includes many details about her family and their lives. In what ways did she value her family? What influences, both positive and negative, did they have on her? She shared favorite family stories in her memoir. What do you learn about her family from those stories? What stories are valued in your family? What do those stories illustrate about who you are? What role has your relationships with your family members played in making you who you are today?

8. In Mexico, Elva and her family saw examples of extreme poverty. She realized that there are worse things than being a migrant worker. In the end, do you think Apá made the right decision? Was it a loving choice to turn his family into migrant workers? Use examples from the book to support your answer. In your mind, what are the pros and cons of using migrant workers to harvest crops in the U.S.?

9. *Barefoot Heart* is, at least in part, about embracing exactly who you are. As Elva struggled to integrate her childhood back into herself, she found peace. Is it possible to truly let go of the past? What is the advantage of embracing who you have been? What might the impact of letting go of the past and moving on?

10. Hart's story takes us into a world that may be very different from our own. While reading *Barefoot Heart*, did you find yourself amazed at how much you knew or did not know on this topic? Give examples. How does learning about another group's life experiences inform our life experience? Why do you think learning about diversity and understanding is a viable academic pursuit?