

Study Guide Questions

Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child by Elva Trevino Hart

To prepare your initial reading of the book, or to jog your memory and get ready for the faculty discussion about the book on August 28 at Convocation, the following questions are provided. You will be expected to discuss these questions:

1. How is a memoir similar to a diary or personal journal? How does it differ?
2. How did the author view herself as a child? Why did she feel this way? Be ready to cite specific situations from her memoirs that demonstrate her reasons for this view point.
3. The author's siblings were Rudy, Luis, Delia, Delmira, and Diamantina. What roles did each brother or sister play in Elva's life? In your opinion, which sibling had the most influence on her? Why? Compare your own family to Elva's. If you have siblings, what roles do your brothers and sisters play in the dynamics of your family?
4. Explain the role that oral stories and books played in Elva's life. What parallel or different experiences have you had with books and story telling in the oral tradition? Are these two aspects part of your life? Why or why not?
5. Each chapter of the book begins with a Mexican dicho. What is a dicho? Select a chapter dicho that has special meaning or significance to you personally and be prepared to tell why.
6. Think about the games and activities of the author and her friends as they grew up. What was recreation like for this migrant family? How would you categorize Elva's "growing up" experiences? How are your own experiences alike or different?
7. What conditions of the migrant workers and their families did you find most compelling, overwhelming, or difficult to accept in this memoir? What jobs, tasks, or chores have you had that required intense physical labor – or difficult working conditions?
8. How did Elva's life experiences as a migrant child, and those of her family, impact the choices later made by the author?
9. There is an angry tone and a tone of loneliness throughout this book. In your opinion, what is the basis for Elva's deep anger and loneliness? How did the author overcome it? Or has she? Be ready to explain your point of view.
10. In Chapter 2, Elva recalls a pleasant scene with her mother making tortillas. She reflects, "I bit into my childhood. It tasted sweet and salty and hot and clean. It tasted of my mother. Of her hands and her love for me. It tasted pure and clean and good." What other images or metaphors does the author use in the story to capture important elements of her life?
11. As a high school student, Elva commented that her teachers came in two basic flavors (p. 175). What did she mean? Then think of your own schooling experiences. Identify the flavors or types of teachers you have encountered. Which ones were most significant to you? Why?
12. How did the author's parents view discipline? What unusual practices did they use? Do you agree or disagree with their approaches. Why?
13. Elva has personal "heroes" in her high school career. Why were these people heroes in her eyes? Now reflect on your own high school years. Who was a personal hero from your high school experience? Why? (Writing option: write a diary entry about someone you admired.)
14. From the author's viewpoint, what does "home" mean? Do you agree or disagree? Be ready to support your response with examples from the book that reflect your choice.
15. Why did the author and/or her editor divide the book into three distinct parts? How would you define or describe each individual part?