

Discussion Questions

Come Home, Indio by Jim Terry



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Sources: Knopf Doubleday Reading Group Center, knopfdoubleday.com/discussion-resources/#memoir; Scholastic, scholastic.com/graphix_teacher/pdf/Graphix%20Teachers%20guide.pdf

Memoir Discussion Questions from Knopf Doubleday

1. Many of the most popular memoirs relate the story of the author's experience growing up in a troubled or even tragic family situation—for example Frank McCourt's **Angela's Ashes**, Mary Karr's **The Liars' Club**, Dave Eggers's **A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius**, Kathryn Harrison's **The Kiss**, and Susanna Kaysen's **Girl, Interrupted**. What is most compelling about memoirs as a genre of nonfiction? Are true-life stories potentially more powerful than fictional ones? Why or why not?
2. Memoirs and fiction can be quite similar. Consider novels—such as Charlotte Brontë's **Jane Eyre** or Charles Dickens's **Great Expectations**—that center on characters who tell their own stories in first-person narration. How are the choices a writer makes in writing autobiography different from those made in writing fiction? Do writers themselves become characters, exactly as they would create a character in a work of fiction? How important to the reading experience is the idea that this really happened? How do we know that the memoir writer is telling the truth?
3. Consider the structure of the memoir. What decisions has the author made in shaping the story of his life? What is emphasized? What is left out? How is the passage of time presented? What is the relationship between the past and the present of the writer's life, and does the structure of the book depend upon moving between past and present?
4. Do you find the writer's voice appealing or unappealing? Which aspects of the writer's character do you identify with most and least? How does your reaction to the writer affect your experience of the book?
5. How does the author approach his own story? With a sense of irony, sympathy, distance, comedy, or something else entirely?
6. What is the role of fate and what is the role of desire in this life story? Does the author present himself as the main force in shaping life's events? Or is there a strong sense that the author is a victim of circumstances over which he has little control? Do characters in the story come across as active or passive? How much does the central character change over the course of the memoir?
7. Many book reviewers and culture commentators claim that in the past several years we have witnessed a "memoir explosion." Why has this genre become so popular with readers and writers alike? What are the benefits and drawbacks of writers sharing an intimate view of their lives with the general public?
8. What is the story's impact on you? How does the memoir you have just read change the way you think about your own life story?

Graphic Novel Discussion Questions from Scholastic

1. Can you find all the elements that make up graphic novels: panels, word balloons, sound effects, motion lines, narration, and background colors? If you take out any one of these, what do you lose? Can you still understand the story?
2. How do you read a graphic novel? Do you look at the images and words together, panel by panel? Do you read all the text on the page and then go back and look at the pictures? Do you look at the pictures first and then go back and read the words? There's no right way to read a graphic novel, and many readers go through them differently. Compare how you read an assigned graphic novel with how your neighbor does, and see if how you read it is different or the same.
3. Graphic novels use both words and images. Pick a page or a sequence from a graphic novel and think through what you learn from just the words. Then think about what you learn from just the images. Are they telling you the same information, or are they giving you different information? How do they work together?
4. Expressions and gestures are important to how we understand characters. Can you find an example of a particular expression or movement that you think shows a significant character trait?
5. Literary devices frequently featured in graphic novels include point of view, flashbacks, foreshadowing, and metaphor. Choose a graphic novel and see if you can find examples of a traditional literary device within its pages.
6. Many elements of graphic novels are similar to what you see in movies. A graphic novel creator can be the director in deciding what each panel and page shows. Think about the frame of each panel. What are you seeing? What are you not seeing? What about the camera angle? The distance from the subject of the panel? Are there any sound effects? Why did the creator make those choices?
7. On top of being a director, graphic novel creators are also editors. The action in comics happens "in the gutters," or in the spaces between each panel. Sometimes big things happen in the time it takes to turn the page. Looking through a graphic novel, can you find a specific sequence of panels or a page turn that you think is dramatic or exciting? Why do you think the creator chose that sequence of images or that page turn to emphasize that moment?
8. The pace at which panels change, and how much time seems to pass, is carefully presented. Time, in how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is important in how panels change. Can you find a sequence where the pacing is slow, observing a character or scene? How about a sequence when everything speeds up?
9. In prose works, details are given to the reader in the descriptions. In graphic novels, details are in the images in the background, character design, clothing, and objects. Take a look at this graphic novel and see if you can find five details in the way a person or object is drawn. What does each detail tell you about the characters? The place? The world?