



Questions and Topics for Discussion

We are Not Free by Traci Chee

For a printable copy of these questions, visit: beclibrary.org/book-discussion-questions

Please be aware that this discussion guide will contain spoilers!

1. Why do you think the author chose to write each chapter from a different character's first-person perspective?
2. How is each character's "voice" different from the others? Some use swear words, while others are more refined, for starters.
3. Which character did you identify with the most, and why?
4. Keiko's chapter when she is eighteen years old is the only one that's written in the second person: "This is the last night you'll be together. This is not the first time you've thought that." Why do you think the author switched from first to second person just for this chapter? How does the change in perspective affect the impact of this chapter?
5. What did you think about Tommy's chapter toward the end of the book, which is written in pairs of poems labeled "Japanese" and "American"? How do the two styles of verses differ from each other?
6. The story in eighteen-year-old Stan's chapter about the man who was shot and killed by a guard while walking his dog is based on an incident that happened at the Topaz camp. How would you react if you witnessed the shooting?
7. Do words matter? There are subtle word choices in *We Are Not Free* that show how language evolves over time. Traci Chee explains in her author's note that she uses the then-accepted euphemisms "internment" and "evacuation" in the book even though today, the more accurate terms are "incarceration" and "forced removal." She also notes that she uses a term for African American (black) in the book that is acceptable today, but was not then. What do you think of her choices with these terms?
8. How would you feel if you and your family and friends were told that you would need to leave your homes and businesses and be taken somewhere else to live without knowing where or for how long? If you were forced to leave your home and business or farm behind and had to throw away or sell at low prices most of your belongings, how would your family adapt?
9. After the war, when Japanese Americans were released, some returned to the West Coast but many went to cities such as Chicago. They still faced racism, and at first it was difficult to even find a place to live. How would you react if you were told you couldn't live or shop someplace because of your identity?
10. How much did you know about the Japanese American incarceration before reading *We Are Not Free*?



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11. Has what happened to Japanese Americans during WWII happened to other people in the United States, either before or since?
12. Can what happened to Japanese Americans happen again to another group?

Questions found at: www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides

Do you have a good question to add to this list? Contact: reference@blueearthcountymn.gov