

The **OTHER SIDE** of the **RIVER** DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. At the end of *Barefoot Dreams of Petra Luna*, the Americans hesitated to open the gates because of a smallpox scare. In *The Other Side of the River*, smallpox is a threat in the refugee camp. How should officials in charge balance the risk that immigrants will bring in disease versus the risk that the immigrants may die if they're not allowed to cross the border? Why was Petra so scared of being sent back to Mexico if the soldiers saw Amelia's rash? How does this speak to the greater good theory?
2. Petra's journey mirrors the many stories of immigrants traveling hundreds of miles through difficult conditions to get to the United States. People from all backgrounds and from all over the world have left everything they know behind and risked their lives to get to this country. Why do you think they make this journey? What is it about the United States that makes people risk everything to come here? Does learning about Petra's journey make you wonder about your own family's journey to America? Does it make you reconsider how you feel about being born in this country?
3. As the camp is shutting down and refugees are forced to find work or be sent back to Mexico, some choose to return to their homeland, but Petra chooses to stay in this new land. How would her story have been different if she had returned to Mexico? Why did she choose to stay? What choice would you have made in her situation and why?
4. As Petra enters San Antonio, she enters a world unlike anything she has ever seen, with many new features and experiences that are totally foreign to her. Have you ever experienced anything that was totally different from anything you had ever known? How did that make you feel? How did you react? Did you enjoy that feeling?
5. On Day of the Dead, Petra is torn between going to work at the chili stand and being with her family. Why does she feel duty bound to go to work? Ultimately, she decides to stay with her family. Why is this important, especially on Day of the Dead? Would this conflict have arisen if Petra lived in her hometown in Mexico? How does this highlight the difference in the pace of life in San Antonio and a small village in Mexico? Why do these differences exist?
6. Even though Petra and Sister Nora are from different backgrounds they had many similar experiences immigrating to the U.S. How are their stories similar and how are they different? Why do you think they are so strongly drawn to each other? Do you think their experiences are common to many immigrants? Do you see examples of this today?
7. When Sister Nora reads the sign on the bridge that describes Americans as people who dislike paying fines, Germans as rule followers, and Mexicans as fearful people, Petra gets angry. Sister Nora goes on to describe the Irish as superstitious. These descriptions are stereotypes. Why does the stereotype of Mexicans as fearful anger Petra? Why do we use stereotypes? How can they be useful? How can they be harmful?



The **OTHER SIDE** of the **RIVER** DISCUSSION GUIDE



8. When Petra shares with Abuelita what Sister Nora has taught her about the universe, Abuelita gets visibly upset. Why do you think Abuelita has this reaction? For all the changes Petra has been through, these changes are much bigger for Abuelita. Does Abuelita feel threatened by these changes and this knowledge? If so, why? Have you ever considered what it would be like if everything around you changed quickly and all your beliefs were challenged in the same way? How would you react?
9. Petra has two mentors in this story, the chili queen and Sister Nora. Each teach her valuable lessons. Why do you think she is drawn to these two women? What are the lessons she learns from each? How are the women themselves similar? How are they different? What traits does each woman possess, and how do these traits represent the world in which they live?
10. Victoria and Elena flee the revolution like Petra but under very different circumstances. How does Petra initially see them, and how does her opinion change? How did Victoria and Elena view Petra? Why was this their view, and how is America supposed to be different from other countries when it comes to this aspect of culture?
11. Sister Nora does not fit the stereotype of a nun. Her character, just like people in real life, is much richer and more complex than we may imagine. Did her character surprise you in any way? How does this make you reconsider stereotypes you may hold about other people in your life? How can we discover complexities in others as well as within ourselves?
12. Throughout the story, people who do not have much always seem to sacrifice for those around them. What drives us to want to help others, even when we barely have enough for ourselves? How does this willingness help make communities stronger? What happens to communities when people stop offering to help their neighbors? Is there a correlation between how much one has and how much they are willing to help others?
13. When Amelia asks Pablo to tell her about how he got from Mexico to San Antonio, he tells her that the god of wind, Ehecatl, delivered him across the Rio Grande instead of the horrors he had really gone through. Why does he do this? How are mythologies useful in stories we tell, and how do they embed in our culture? What are some examples of this from your family's culture? How are these stories the same through different cultures?
14. Petra seems to have a lot of responsibility for a twelve-year-old girl, but this was not uncommon in her time. How has this changed over the years? Do you think most twelve-year-olds would be able to do the things Petra did? Why or why not? How does society change, and how do expectations change when our basic needs are met?
15. At the end of the book, Petra enters the office of Mr. Knox for her interview for a teaching position. How does this exemplify the American dream? What do you think happens? How does Petra's story continue?

