

INDIAN COUNTRY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is sometimes necessary to reveal certain aspects of the storyline. If you have not finished reading *Indian Country*, you may want to do so before reviewing this guide.

1. *“Sagar was looking at her, but he was thinking about sediment. What moved it from one place to another? Erosion. And what was erosion but the wearing away of something? Something you might’ve believed in all your life? ‘It’s not that easy,’ he said.”*

As readers, and as human beings, we all have to give up illusions, adjust to change, and sometimes even wake to the wholesale negation of our belief systems. What challenges do we, and Sagar, face when confronted with this kind of erosion in our lives? From a human standpoint, is erosion necessarily a bad thing?

2. *“What he knew—he saw his dead wife, he saw Jena—was that each of us carries it within us, this heaviness, this stone.”*

What is “this heaviness, this stone” that Nasir knows? Is it tied to the losses in our lives, or to our memories, or is it simply the human condition and tied to our knowledge of our own mortality? Brainstorm ways in which we can counteract or counterbalance “this heaviness, this stone.”

3. *“‘It was an insult to him to say no and that insult could get a lady killed.’*

Renny said, ‘Not much changes, does it?’

‘Sure doesn’t,’ Alex said. ‘Women die for saying no and men continue to build countries on top of those noes.’”

Many, if not all, conflicts involve violence and aggression toward women. There is a Cheyenne proverb: “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors or strong its weapons.” What does this proverb, and Alex’s words, say about the resilience and strength of women and how necessary it is for a tribe or a nation to honor its women?

4. *“She could follow them. She could bring her back. And it would be Spring.”*

What is the end of this story, “Leela and Avni,” alluding to? How, if at all, do mythology and the fates of the characters in these mythologies, lend our lives meaning and comfort? Is there a place and a relevance for mythology in our contemporary lives, or are they simply interesting stories from long ago?

5. *“Consequences don’t come for all of us in the same way. For some, they don’t come at all.”*

What is Alex Mendoza saying here about the moneyed (and thereby the powerful)? Do you believe what he says—that consequences don’t come for all of us in the same way, or that sometimes they don’t come at all? If you do believe him, how do we make sense of this imbalance?

6. *“He saw them as Renny’s people must’ve seen them, hundreds, thousands of years ago. And he saw that though the bison, undeniably, were beacons of light, beacons of a wild and untamed country, they would soon be extinguished. Their magisterial brown bodies would be massacred. And in a moment, in two, their skulls would be piled high like fruits in a market, their skins stacked, one on top of the other, like Persian rugs, in that same market.”*

What does Sagar’s glimpse into America’s past, into a landscape long gone, and animals long ago slaughtered, say about the enduring, inescapable power of history? How do you feel the past, personally and nationally, impacts who you are today?

7. *“What was it? It wasn’t marriage, no. What was it? The thing that woke in our breasts every morning and decided to love?”*

What does the institution of marriage have to do with that “thing in our breasts” that wakes and decides to love? After all, Janavi’s sister, Rajni, is also married and yet is facing violence in her relationship. Do you think Janavi’s understanding of love and marriage is impacted by Rajni’s relationship, and if so, how do they lead her to these questions?