

THE KING OF ALOE VERA READING GROUP GUIDE

1

As the novel opens, Rey creates a to-do list of things he needs to accomplish, and later in the novel, of things he wants to accomplish. Discuss the difference. Can you come up with a list of your own: things you need to do and things you want to do?

2

Rey Calderón has just a month to leave his home and move into a retirement home. Why do you think he is dreading this move? What emotions come up for him over the course of the novel?

3

Rey volunteers at his local library, recommending books to residents in his community. Why do you think Rey chooses to volunteer? What volunteer work have you done in the past, and how did that make you feel?

4

When the novel begins, Rey has been mourning the death of his wife, Juliet, for eight years. Do you feel like you have a good understanding of the type of person Juliet was, even though she only shows up in memory? Why or why not?

5

The King of Aloe Vera is set in the Mission District of San Francisco, a historically Latinx neighborhood that has experienced rapid rates of gentrification and displacement of residents. Rey mentions how he's noticed his neighborhood change over the decades he's lived there. Are there signs of gentrification in your neighborhood or a place you visit often? What do you think about those changes?



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6

Reina, or “Q,” is also a resident of the Mission District, and is facing obstacle after obstacle in her young adult life. What do you think draws her to Rey? And why do you think Rey feels a pull to help her? In what ways are they different, and in what ways are they similar? Do you relate to one character more than the other, and why?

7

The novel is set over the course of a month, October, leading to Day of the Dead. What did you think of this structure and why do you think Moniz chose to construct the book in this way? Why do you think this month is significant for the themes of the novel?

8

Toward the end of the novel, Q sets up an altar in Rey’s house for loved ones who have passed. What does the altar signify for Q? For Rey?

9

In what ways does grief play into the characters’ personas and their motivations? Have you felt grief in the ways that Rey and Q have?

10

In the lead-up to his move, Rey grapples with taking pills he has stashed to take his life. In the final pages, he puts the pills in his pocket and heads outside. What do you think happens next? Why do you think Moniz chose to leave the ending up to interpretation, and what effect did this have for you as the reader?

