

Lucía and the Sombra Trees, Discussion Questions, Exercises, Activities



Pre-Reading Questions

1. What does Lucía's name mean and what expectations does her name set up in the novel? Consider the other characters like Victor, Mama Clarita, or even Malo and Reina. How do their names create expectations for how the characters might behave?
2. Have you ever had a pet bird or other pets? What is your relationship with your pets? How did you decide on their names? Are you responsible for their care? How much care have your pets required?
3. If you have siblings and cousins, what is your relationship with them like? What would you say your most important relationships have been? Who have been your biggest supporters or champions? Who have you supported or championed?
4. What is a folktale or fairytale? What examples of such stories have you read?
5. One conflict in this novel concerns the wants of an individual versus the needs of a community. Have you ever had to sacrifice your own individual wants in favor of what is best for your family or a larger group? How difficult was that to do?

Post-Reading Questions

1. How did the characters' names reflect their personalities and actions? Consider the primary characters of Lucía and Malo, but also Victor, Mama Clarita, and Reina. Were the expectations you had about the characters met? How did the characters surprise you or behave differently than you expected?
2. Discuss the choices Lucía makes and why. Consider her decision to brave the fog, or leave Malo's cage unlocked, or disregard Lupe's request that she leave the fruit from La Sombrita behind. What are the consequences of her decisions?
3. Discuss the relationship between Victor and Lucía in the early chapters. Why aren't the cousins as close as they once were? What has pushed them apart? What eventually brings them together?
4. In what ways do the characters sacrifice their individual wants in favor of what is best for the community? You might consider Lucía and Victor and the choices they make, but also Andres and Lupe.

5. Some of the characters in this story are obsessed with the fountain of youth. When Lucía asks her grandmother, Ma'lita, about this, Ma'lita presses her hand over her heart and says, "The only fountain of youth is here." What does she mean by this?
6. In the market, Lucía says that "there were so few children on the island that they often greeted one another like distant cousins, or bitter rivals". Discuss examples of competition and cooperation in the novel. What are the benefits of competition and cooperation, and what are the drawbacks of both?
7. In the oasis, Malo finally has access to palm fruit, which is part of his native diet. Lupe says to Lucía, "In a world that's in balance, your bird would eat like this every day, wouldn't he?" What does he mean by this? What would a world that was in balance do for plants, animals, and humans?
8. What decision does Lucía make about Malo in the end and why does she do it?
9. How does the dialogue or writing help you understand the Spanish words and phrases? What does the use of Spanish accomplish in the story? What would be lost if there were no Spanish words or phrases?
10. Fairy tales and folktales are often meant to teach valuable lessons, or warn against certain behaviors by showing their consequences. What lessons does this story teach? What warnings does it offer?

Extended Exercises and Activities

Biodiversity.

The Sombra Trees on Coquí Island are an invasive species that have devastated the landscape and changed life for every living creature. What are the arguments in the book for and against planting the trees? What happens in the end and why? The novel is a fantasy but it's based on the actual flora and fauna of Puerto Rico. Investigate the Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona Vittata* or *Cotorra Puertorriqueña*) or the seventeen different species of coqui and their fascinating history on the island to learn more about their history. You might also look at your own community and the relationships between endemic and invasive species. What are the effects of those species on plant and animal life? What are the effects on humans? What happens when a species goes extinct?

Animals and Communication.

Malo is a bi-lingual talking parrot with sass, but in real life he's one of hundreds of species of parrots that can 'talk' or mimic human speech—a feat that isn't isolated to birds. Koko, a western lowland gorilla, was made famous because he learned to use sign language. Common bottlenose dolphins might not use human language, but they also communicate using sounds and clicks as a form of echolocation. Research an animal's form of communication, including sound bites and images to present to your peers. Or, write a scene or a story from the perspective of a plant, a tree, or an animal. What would they say if they could speak?

Aphorisms.

The book is full of sayings, including, Better to be determined than desperate, or Caution is not cowardly. Carelessness is not courage (La precaución no es cobarde. El descuido no es coraje), or Older than cold (Más viejo que el frío), or, Where there is hope, there is life (Donde hay vida, hay esperanza). Pick one of these sayings and explain what it means in the book and also from your own experience. Another option is to write about a saying that's from your own family or community and discuss how it relates to your experience or to the characters in the novel.

Fairy Tales / Folk Tales

Consider writing your own fairy tale or folk tale based on where you are from or your favorite places. Or consider rewriting a fairy tale or folk tale from the perspective of another character (for example, from the point of view of the wolf, the troll, or the witch).

VOCABULARY

English Words

- Barter
- Canopy
- Cavernous
- Charred
- Coconut
- Collateral
- Elixir
- Flora and Fauna
- Foliage
- Fungus
- Grubs
- Hammock
- Mango
- Mirage
- Mother Tree
- Oasis
- Palm Fruit
- Phosphorescent
- Plumes
- Poultices
- Rogue
- Star Fruit
- Wares

Spanish Words

- Colmado

- Corazón
- Corazoncito
- Diablo
- El Jardín
- Guineo/guineos
- Guanabana
- Guayaba
- Hola
- Jefe
- Joyel
- Luz
- Malo
- Mango
- Mija
- Miercoles
- Prima/o
- Sancocho
- Señora
- Sombra
- Sombrita
- Te quiero
- Tía/Tío
- Titi
- Viejo