

Book Club House Rules

- 1) You don't have to finish the book, or even have read it, to discuss it. Ask your own questions!
- 2) Spoilers! If you didn't finish the book, just accept that you'll hear spoilers.
- 3) Homework not required! But if you did some research, please share with us.
- 4) Play nicely. Express your opinions freely, and be considerate of others' opinions.
- 5) Controversy can be good. The best book discussions are when some hated the book and others loved it. All answers are correct, and there is no test.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Impression: what (if anything) in this book "struck" you - impressed you or annoyed you? Why? Read us a quote that stayed with you.
- 2) Characters: Fully-realized? flat? believable? cliched? "TSTL"? Too perfect? Could you empathize with or relate to some, all, or any of the characters? Which ones and why?
- 3) Point of view: how does the main character's point of view affect the story? How does the use of 1st/3rd person, limited/omniscient, affect the reading experience?
- 4) Plot: any twists that surprised, pleased, annoyed you? Pacing too fast/slow/just right?
- 5) Setting: Would this story be very different in another place, culture, or time? Why did the author choose this particular setting? Does it feel authentic?
- 6) Theme: What does the title mean? What is this book's "theme" ? (E.g. family dynamics, social justice, religion/spirituality, environment, etc.) How well do you feel the author portrays the theme? Is there controversy around this theme, in and/or beyond the book - why? Is the author trying to send a message or state a moral? How well did that work?
- 7) Writing style and quality: do present/past tense affect the reading experience? Any unusual structure to the book? Did the language strike you as insightful, lyrical, descriptive - does each word "earn its keep"? Is a "good read" the same as a "good book"? Why or why not? Is this book in a genre (mystery/thriller/adventure/romance/fantasy/sci fi)?
- 8) Author and Audience: Is any part of the author's life reflected in this book? Who was the author writing for? Who was the author overlooking? If a writer wants to write beyond their own experience/gender/culture/etc, what advice would you give them?
- 9) Comparisons and Adaptations: how does this book compare to others by this author? To similar books by other authors? Any movies (or other works) based on this book? Are they better or worse than the book? If none yet, how would you imagine this book as a film?
- 10) Personal relatability Does this book remind you of anything, or relate to anything, in your own life?

Resources

1. Author's website: <https://www.jeaninecummins.com/american-dirt/>
2. *"American Dirt" Reading Group Guide*,
By publisher Flatiron Books (undated)
<https://www.jeaninecummins.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019.11.20-AMERICAN-DIRT-RGG-Regular-Edition.pdf>
3. *Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature*
By Myriam Gurba, Dec 12 2019 [that started Latinx protest movement #DignidadLiteraria]
<https://tropicsofmeta.com/2019/12/12/pendeja-you-aint-steinbeck-my-bronca-with-fake-ass-social-justice-literature/>
4. Gurba's follow up article, after she joined Cummins on Oprah's show:
<https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/3/12/21168012/racism-american-dirt-myriam-gurba-jeanine-cummins>
5. *Wrapping Up the Conversation Around "American Dirt," a Lauded then Reviled Book*
By Ailsa Chang and Maria Hinojosa, NPR, Jan 30, 2020
<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/30/801323580/wrapping-up-the-conversation-around-american-dirt-a-lauded-then-reviled-book>