

***The Queen of Water* Discussion Guide** (book and questions by Laura Resau)

VIRGINIA'S GROWTH

1. What were Virginia's expectations of how her life would be when she left her village? What were her fears? In what ways were her expectations and fears realized? What were some surprises?
2. Throughout the book, Virginia has fantasies and dreams of how she'd like her life to be. What were some of these dreams and fantasies at the beginning, middle, and end of the book? What were the challenges and obstacles to realizing her dreams? How did she overcome them?
3. "Freedom is terrifying and fear is familiar." Virginia describes feeling this way when she comes close to leaving the Doctorita and Carlitos. What does she mean by this? Have you ever been scared to leave a bad situation? Compare and contrast your feelings to how Virginia felt in her situation.
4. "*Querer es poder.*" What does this phrase mean? How does this idea influence Virginia's attitude and actions? Have you used this idea in your life? If so, explain. Is there a situation in your life now that you could apply this idea to?
5. Discuss the ethnic categories of *mestizo* and *indigenous* in Ecuadorian society, based on what you read in this book. How do these groups relate to each other? Can you compare and contrast this situation to ethnic relations in your own country?
6. What are Virginia's conflicting feelings about her ethnic and social identity (*mestiza* vs. *indigena*, poor vs. well-off) throughout the book? Discuss her shifting feelings in terms of culture, food, education, economic class, society, clothing, traditions, etc. How does she resolve her internal conflict by the end of the book?
7. What were some ways in which TV had a positive effect on Virginia's life? How did it affect her thoughts and actions? Do you think TV has more positive or negative effects overall? Why?
8. What part did you find most exciting? Saddest? Happiest? Which part made you angriest? Discuss your feelings about these scenes and why they impacted you.
9. Discuss how Virginia's attitude toward education changed throughout the book. What incidents prompted those changes? Compare and contrast her experiences and attitudes about education with your own.
10. How did learning to read affect how Virginia saw the world? What opportunities did education open up for her? How would her life have been different if she hadn't learned to read?

11. What helped Virginia find courage to take action to improve her life at various stages of her journey? Think about changes you've made in your life. What motivated you to improve the situation?
12. Discuss some of the pivotal moments in Virginia's life, where she had to make a decision that would have major consequences? Do you think you would have made the same decision? Why?

RELATIONSHIPS

1. Describe how Virginia's parents and Carlitos and the Doctorita hurt and/or betrayed her. Do you think she was right to forgive her parents? Do you think that she ever forgave Carlitos and the Doctorita after the book ends? Would you have forgiven them all? Why or why not?
2. The Doctorita felt justified having Virginia work as an unpaid servant because she felt it was considered acceptable in her society. In your opinion, is that an excuse? Is there something in your society that you feel is morally wrong, but that is considered acceptable? How do you deal with this?
3. Despite her suffering, Virginia took away some positive things from her time with the Doctorita and Carlitos. In what ways was the Doctorita a positive role model for Virginia? What were some benefits of Virginia's life with the Doctorita and Carlitos? Do you think it was worth the suffering?
13. How were Virginia's feelings about her sister Matilde mixed? In what ways did Matilde help Virginia improve her life? Compare/contrast Virginia's relationship with Matilde to your relationship with your brother/sister/best friend.
14. Describe Virginia's relationship with her parents at the beginning, middle, and end of the book. Have you ever been in a situation where you loved/liked someone who hurt you or betrayed you? How did you handle the situation differently or similarly to Virginia?
15. How did you feel about Virginia's relationship with Antonio? What did she gain from their brief romance? How do you think things would have worked out if she'd managed to escape with him? Do you think he'll ever come back into her life? How do you think she'll react if he does?
16. How did Virginia think her friends would react if they discovered she was indigenous? Has there ever been something you hid from your friends because you were worried how they'd react? Explain, and discuss what you feared their reaction would be. Did they ever find out? Did they react how you thought they would?

CHARACTERS

1. Describe Carlitos and the Doctorita. How did you feel about each of them when Virginia first met them? How did your feelings about them change as the story went on?
2. Describe Virginia's personality. In what ways is she similar to you? In what ways is she different? Does she remind you of someone you know? How?
3. List the important male figures in Virginia's life. Discuss her relationship with each of them, and in what ways they were positive and/or negative influences. Which of these characters did you like best? Least? Why?
4. List the important female figures in Virginia's life. Discuss her relationship with each of them, and in what ways they were positive and/or negative influences. Which of these characters did you like best? Least? Why?

For further research

1. Oppression of indigenous people has been common throughout not only Latin America, but the entire world. Choose an indigenous culture (in Latin America or elsewhere) and discuss the challenges they've faced historically and in current times. Also, discuss the successes they've had and ways they've resisted oppression.
2. Virginia was an unpaid child servant, which is a situation that still occurs throughout the world, especially with indigenous children. Pick a country where this is an issue. Research forms of child labor and/or slavery in that country.
3. Virginia mentions her indigenous Quichua customs, holidays, clothing, food, holidays, healing, beliefs, folklore, etc. Focusing on either Quichua, Quecha, or another indigenous culture in Latin America or elsewhere in the world, research these topics.
4. Virginia mentions several foods native to the Americas, like potatoes, corn, and quinoa. Research these foods and other native foods and discuss the significance they've had in indigenous cultures (including religion and folklore).
5. Virginia mentions some Quichua folklore related to the gods of the mountains. Pick an indigenous culture—either Quichua, Quechua or another group—and research their mythology and folklore. If applicable, discuss how the myths relate to the landscape and the way of life in the culture.

For fun

1. Have an Ecuadorian feast! Assign different members of your book club or class to make different dishes, including cortido salad, popcorn, quinoa soup, ceviche, jugo de melon (you can forgo the roasted guinea pig). You can find links to Virginia's own recipes here: <http://lauraresau.com/fun.html> .
2. If there's an Andean musician, band, or dance troupe in your community, invite them to play for your group. Ask them to discuss their music, instruments, and dance. Or, take a group trip to an Andean music/dance performance.
3. Eat popcorn (traditional Ecuadorian food!) and watch an episode of *MacGyver*, imagining you're Virginia (but try to resist the urge to build any dangerous booby traps!)