

***What the Moon Saw*****Discussion guide questions:****Characters:**

1. The main characters have strong feelings about their fathers. Compare Clara's, Helena's, and Pedro's feelings about their fathers. How do Clara's and Pedro's feelings about their fathers change by the end of the summer?
2. Helena gives Clara a *limpia* to clean her spirit. Describe this ritual. How did it affect Clara? How did her attitude change after the *limpia*? Have you ever done a ritual that changed your feelings or attitude? Can you think of rituals in our society that mark a change in a person's life?
3. Clara says that in Walnut Hill, her outside self didn't fit with her inside self, like a shoe that was too loose or too tight. How do you think her "inside self" feels to her? Her "outside self"? Describe your inside self and your outside self. Are they the same or different? How?
4. Clara's spirit animal is a heron. What characteristics about her are like a bird? If you had a spirit animal, what kind of animal would it be? What traits would you have in common? We don't know if Pedro has a spirit animal. If he did, what would it be? Why?
5. Helena says you can tell a lot about a person just by touching them. What did she feel when she touched Doña Three Teeth's hand? How does that contrast with what Doña Three Teeth looks like on the outside? How can you tell what a person's like on the inside even if it's very different from the outside appearance?
6. Clara tells Pedro she is "someone who swims in the forest when everyone else is asleep." Pedro says he is a listener: "I listen to things and turns them into music." How else do they describe themselves? How would you answer the question, "Who are you?"

**Setting:**

1. Discuss Clara's impressions of Yucuyoo when she first arrives. Contrast those feelings with how she feels about Yucuyoo by the end of the book. Why did her feelings change? How would you feel living in Yucuyoo? Have you ever had a first impression of a place that changed over time? Talk about what made your feelings about the place change.
2. Helena says that she felt connected to her home as though ropes were tugging her, holding her to the land she loved. She says, "This land was a part of me, as much as my legs and arms and fingers were part of me." Pedro has similar feelings about his home. Have you ever felt a special connection to a place? Describe the place and how it made you feel.

3. Contrast Clara's home in Walnut Hill, Maryland, to her grandparents' home in Yucuyoo.
4. Clara's grandparents live a life without many material possessions. What are advantages and disadvantages of this lifestyle? How do you think you'd feel if you spent a summer without the material possessions you're used to?
5. Clara draws pictures in her sketchbook to create visual images and communicate her feelings. How do the author's words make visual images in your head? Discuss how you picture these people and settings: Yucuyoo, the marketplace, the cave, Abuelita, Abuelo, Pedro.

### **Theme**

1. How have Clara's feelings about her relationship with her father changed over her lifetime? Describe their relationship when she was a young child, and as a teenager, and then, by the end of the book. Has your relationship with your parents or adults in your life changed over time? What made it change?
2. How do you think the title *What the Moon Saw* relates to the important ideas in the book?
3. Several images appear throughout the book, such as the moon, the plastic doll, and the heron. What special meanings do you think these images could have? Give examples of other important images in the book, and discuss what they might mean.
4. Describe Helena's healing knowledge and techniques. Are you familiar with any holistic healing practices (like massage, acupuncture, aromatherapy, etc.)? Do you think holistic healing practices are useful? Why or why not?
5. In what ways has Helena overcome racism and sexism in her life? What was her societies' attitude toward indigenous people? Toward women? Have you or anyone you know ever experienced racism or sexism? How did it make you or them feel?
6. Why do men from Yucuyoo emigrate to the U.S.? How would their lives be different if they stayed in their village? In the book, how do people feel when a family member emigrates to the U.S.? What are some challenges immigrants might face working and living in the U.S.?
7. Clara describes her grandmother's eyes as "black, like shiny beans," and her grandfather's eyes as looking "like bits of wet sea glass, one brown and one green..." Find more examples of similes or metaphors in the book.

**For further exploration:**

1. Do you have a relative or friend who is originally from another country? Interview him or her and ask why she came, what her first impressions were of the U.S., and how she feels living here now. Ask her to contrast her home here and in her native country. You can ask about shopping, food, housing, jobs, bathrooms, etc. Is it important for her to stay connected to the culture she left behind? If so, how does she do this?
2. The Mixtecs are just one of many indigenous groups in Mexico. Research another indigenous group's lifestyle. Discuss where they live, how they make a living, what they wear now, what they wore in the past, what food they eat, their festivals, healing practices, spiritual beliefs, and any social or political issues that are important in their lives.
3. Immigration from Mexico to the U.S. has affected the lives of all the main characters in this book. Research the topic of Mexican immigration to the U.S. Try to find out information such as how many adults and children immigrate from Mexico, how they cross the border, how many deaths occur as a result, what challenges they face once they arrive here, and what current social and political issues surrounding immigration are being debated now.
4. There are many sensory descriptions in the story, especially with smell and taste. Make a list of the things that evoke smells and tastes. Try to find: mint, chamomile, oregano, garlic, cinnamon, chocolate, *copal* (or pine sap), a wet wool sweater, freshly polished shoes. Smell each of these things and discuss the significance of each smell in the book.
5. Look at the words in Spanish that appear in the book. Without looking at the glossary in the back, discuss what you think the words mean based on how they're used in the sentence. What are some clues that tell you what the word or phrase means?
6. The author is a cultural anthropologist. Research what a cultural anthropologist does. Pretend you're a cultural anthropologist spending a summer in Yucuyoo. What observations would you make about people's daily lives? What do they eat, do for work, do for fun? Describe their housing, clothing, education, and transportation. What are their spiritual beliefs and practices? What are important issues and challenges in their lives?
7. The book quotes songs by two Latin American singer/songwriters, Silvio Rodriguez and Violeta Parra. Research their music and lives and beliefs. Listen to their music. How does it make you feel? How do you think these singers and their values relate to the themes of the book?
8. This book includes some folklore, such as the rabbit in the moon and the spirit woman in charge of healing and death. Research other Mexican folktales.

9. Clara knows almost nothing about her family roots before her trip to Oaxaca. Research your own roots. Find out when your ancestors immigrated to the U.S. and why. Try to find out what their lives might have been like before and after immigrating.

10. Clara Luna's name means Clear Moon in Spanish. How does her name reflect who she is? Research the origin of your name. Do you think it reflects who you are? Why or why not?

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