

All They Will Call You Reading and Discussion Questions

Themes to observe:

- The role of labor and migration/immigration.
- Historical sensibilities regarding border crossings.
- The tension between official narratives and the truths that those narrative often omit or pass over.
- The role of time and memory.
- The power of names and naming.
- The role of storytelling, especially as it relates to notions of space and place.
- The need to humanize those who are forgotten or overlooked.

1) One of the main themes in the book is the tension between official narratives and the messier, more complicated versions of events. How does Hernandez establish this theme in the Author's Note? How does the presence of archival material—images of newspaper articles and the like—function in terms of his storytelling?

2) Hernandez is careful to note the origin of many people—major and minor—involved in the story. He signals these origins consistently as a part of his storytelling practice. Why?

3) The section “Reconstructing Stories (La Huesera)” encapsulates Hernandez’s own storytelling process and establishes many of the themes throughout the book. What are his moves, his decisions, in it? The themes that emerge?

4) How would you describe Hernandez’s role as storyteller? How does he narrate his process, his relationship to “the story keepers”? How, too, does he manipulate time—where do you see him transitioning between different moments in time, between a now and then?

5) Map the journeys described in “The Stories” section. It helps to create a visual index for how much territory these individuals transverse. Look up the towns that are mentioned, too. Get a feel for the places that are described.

6) Chapter 5—“Los Enganchados”—does much work to examine the broader historical context in which these stories take place. How does Hernandez describe the geopolitical, economic, and social situation? How does he discuss the process of crossing the border, too? What is surprising in this chapter in terms of how he describes earlier notions of immigration and immigrant labor?

7) What, specifically, are the reasons and rationales why various men leave Mexico to travel to El Norte. How does knowing these reasons help to humanize these individuals? What, specifically, does Hernandez do as a writer to flesh out these stories, too, to elaborate the decision-making, the paths they take, their lives in Mexico and in the US? Which stories do you find most compelling? And why?

8) The anecdotes of border crossing, particularly with David P. Simmons, is telling, especially in light of current debates and rhetoric surrounding immigration. How do we perceive this notion: what do we in the current moment, bring to this?

9) The stories of Frank and Bobbie Atkinson seem to stand in stark contrast to the previous stories. In what ways, specifically? Move beyond the obvious (race and nationality). Think about the space devoted to the prior stories. Think about how the Atkinson section also helps us perceive race, class, nationality, labor and the like in a more comprehensive manner. However, what does their story have in common with the previous stories, too?

10) Section III does interesting things with space, time, and storytelling. How do you perceive this section to work? Do you find it effective?

11) How are the deportation proceedings like the initial (legal) border crossings? Compare the two. How would you characterize these events, especially for those who endured them?

12) Section III also deals the most with juxtaposing official records—material from the archive—with the narrator's intervention. Where do you see this happening? What are the effects of this back and forth?

13) How were the US citizens treated posthumously? The Mexican nationals? Be specific as possible.

14) What do sections IV and V add to the story? What, for instance, does the story of the Woody Guthrie's song and recordings of it have in common with those laborers who died in the plane crash, especially regarding Martin Hoffman? How do you feel about the book's conclusion, too?

15) How does the book help you to conceive of local history and local industries differently?