

Discussion Questions for *The Last Tortilla and Other Stories*

The Last Tortilla and Other Stories, by Sergio Troncoso

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<http://sergiotroncoso.com/tortilla/questions/index.htm>

1. In the story "[Angie Luna](#)," Victor says: "I wasn't a real Mexican, and I wasn't an American either. . . . I was more like a shadow playing both sides of the game." How is this a story about self-identity, not only for Victor but also for Angie? How are they pulled toward different cultural identities as they live, literally, on the border between two worlds? Do they each resolve the struggle to define themselves? What do you think of the choices that Victor and Angie make?
2. "[Angie Luna](#)" is also a love story. What does this story say about love? Is there an 'ephemeral' quality to love affairs that dooms them from the start? Or is it this heightened passion --which just as easily can lead to a long-lasting relationship as it can to heartbreak-- that makes love an unforgettable experience? Why do Victor and Angie love each other? Would they have to change to stay together? Why or why not?
3. How is "[A Rock Trying to be a Stone](#)" a story about moral character and moral choices? The three boys, Turi, Fernández, and Joe, face crucial choices at different points in the story. What are those choices? How do those choices reveal their moral character? How are appearances deceiving when one is trying to determine somebody's moral character?
4. What beliefs help Doña Dolores and Don Epifanio, in "[Espíritu Santo](#)," overcome the evil and loneliness of living in El Segundo Barrio? Religious faith? Self-reliance? Faith in each other? Is one more important than the other? Why? How do those beliefs relate to each other? Finally, what is the author saying about the genesis and nature of evil?
5. Why does the author have two timelines intertwined in "[Remembering Possibilities](#)"? One in Carlos's present, and the other in his past? During the attack in his apartment, can Carlos find any measure of hope or redemption by remembering his love affair with Sofia? Describe the ways in which Carlos redeems himself through his reflections. How is this story about the power of storytelling itself? Compare it, for example, to Shahrazad's story in *The Arabian Nights*.
6. Why is twelve-year-old Tuyi Martínez, in "[The Snake](#)," an outcast in Ysleta? Describe how Tuyi chooses to be alone to explore the canals and irrigation ditches of Ysleta, and how he also does not quite fit into his neighborhood. What separates Tuyi from his home? His curiosity? His intellectual pursuits? His physical appearance? His shyness or boldness? What do you think the author might be saying about "the fat boy everybody ignored," and those like him?
7. What is Don Ignacio Aragón's "lack of character," in "[Time Magician](#)," and how does it often cause him to misplay the present moment? Explain the roles of the apparitions of Don Aragón's wife, Rosita, and the boy Rodrigo Peña. Why is the old man tormented by those ghosts? Why do you think Don Aragón possesses this problem of anger? What do you think the author is saying

about how to find, and not find, redemption when somebody is living a hard life, with bad luck, and his or her reactions cause only regrets?

8. In "**The Abuelita**," what is Lolita's philosophy about her pending death and how it should affect her life? Why do you think she does not lapse into despair? How do her views of her fragile mortality differ from what her grandson Arturo tells her about Heidegger's philosophy of Being-towards-death? If you have time, you could read a bit about Heidegger's philosophy of death, which appears at the end of *Being and Time*, although Heidegger is notoriously difficult without an introduction.

9. How does the relationship between Maggie Johnson and Don Chechepe evolve in "**The Gardener**"? What actions, first by Mrs. Johnson but also by Don Chechepe, prompt a reconsideration of their employer-employee relationship? How does their dialogue reveal the changing nature of their relationship?

10. What is the secret behind Adela Márquez's death in "**The Last Tortilla**"? How is this secret related to selfish behavior? After the mother's death, how does the Márquez family slowly disintegrate into relationships based on 'doing whatever anybody wants'? Why do you think this slow disintegration of the family occurs? Is anybody trying to stop it? What things are necessary to maintain a strong family? A giving and loving parent? Honesty? Sacrifice? Faith in God?

11. Discuss the ways in which different characters view God and religion in "**The Last Tortilla**." What does Juanito think of God's role in the world, and why has he reached those conclusions? What does Alejandra think of the Christmas festivities? How does Ofelia see the turn of fate that led to Adela Márquez's death? And how might Adela herself have seen her faith in God shattered? Did Adela's discovery cause her 'not to move'? What do you think the author is saying about a person's religious faith, the good or bad luck somebody might experience in the world, and what becomes of this faith in God?

12. How is the story "**Punching Chickens**" about thirteen-year-old Manny Padilla crossing the threshold between childhood and adulthood? How does his relationship with his mother change? His view of money and work? How does Manny change the way he displays, or hides, his emotions, even his pain? What part of his job is most important for pushing him across the threshold into adulthood?

13. In "**Day of the Dead**," why do you think Michael Ochoa turns himself in? Does he do the right thing? Describe Michael's relationship with his father, and how important it is when Michael has to make this crucial decision. What do you think the author is saying about those like Mr. Chicano, and how some Mexican-Americans see themselves in relation to Mexicanos?

14. How do you think Lupe's death causes her employer, Helen Rogers, to cross cultural, class, and other borders in "**Day of the Dead**"? Describe Helen's relationship with Lupe before her death. What is and is not praiseworthy about that relationship? Describe the decisions Helen makes after she hears of Lupe's death. Are they the right decisions? Why does she make them? Do you think those choices change Helen Rogers in a fundamental way?

15. In "[Day of the Dead](#)," describe and analyze the complex relationship between dreams and death. How does Doña Rosita, for example, use the death of Don Joaquín to give her something to hope for beyond her bleak existence? How is the 'dream' of Helen's prosperous existence shattered by Lupe's death? Is there a difference between an immediate death and a death long ago in terms of how they affect your dreams? Why might a poor person and a rich person see death differently? Or do they ultimately see death the same way?

16. How does the lack of God in the City, with its initial meaninglessness, affect the narrator of "[My Life in the City](#)"? For example, how does it affect his sense of time, his loneliness, and his desire to find somebody to be with? In what ways does the narrator need or not need God? What kind of life is left, according to the narrator, without God in the world? What do you think of this view? Is the nascent faith he and Becky have in each other an answer to his questions?

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