

## **Let Their Spirits Dance** by Stella Pope Duarte

- 1.** How does Alicia Ramirez's "call" to journey to the Vietnam Memorial Wall open up family wounds and unresolved conflict? What are some of the struggles the family faces? How has Jesse's death changed each family member?
- 2.** What circumstances, both social and political, lead to the turmoil of the story's setting in the '60's? In what ways is the structure of the Chicano family threatened by war and discrimination?
- 3.** To what extent does Pope Duarte use the theme of Teresa's near drowning to uncover the Chicano's sense of helplessness during the Vietnam War? How does this theme connect to what happens at the Chicano Moratorium demonstration in 1970 and the killing of Rubén Salazar in east L.A.?
- 4.** In what ways does faith shape the journey to the Wall? How do belief in El Santo Niño and La Virgen de Guadalupe contribute to Alicia's confidence, and Teresa's changing attitude towards the unknown?
- 5.** How does Alicia's promise, *la manda*, fulfill itself, and in what manner does it affect family and friends? What characteristics do the *doñas*, Alicia and Irene share in common? What characteristics do the Vietnam vets, Chris, Willy, Gates, and Yellowhair share in common?
- 6.** How does Pope Duarte handle the theme of betrayal by men as it relates to Teresa's life and that of her mother? On a larger scale, how does betrayal happen during wartime? What types of betrayal did the soldiers fighting in Vietnam experience?
- 7.** What is the importance of Jesse and Don Florencio's prophetic messages in revealing a timelessness in the story that transcends earth time? What other dreams, prophecies and premonitions occur? What is their purpose? How do Michael's speculations about universal parallels and the movement of light draw on this theme?
- 8.** In the first page of the novel, the passion-flower is described as depicting the suffering of Christ. How does the theme of suffering continue to surface in the novel? What does Teresa learn about the suffering of indigenous peoples, and the possibility that if "We're pursuing (pain), does that make us more powerful than pain?" How is the flower, *yołoxochitl*, identified with suffering?
- 9.** In what manner does Pope Duarte link the ancient custom of human sacrifice and the Aztec god of war, *Huitzilopochtli*, to the modern-day custom of drafting young men to war? In what ways was the Vietnam experience different for men of Chicano/Latino descent?
- 10.** Don Florencio believed in *Aztlán* as the birthplace of the Mexicas, or modern-day Chicanos. What reflections does Teresa make throughout the novel that are related to the search for *Aztlán*? What is the meaning of her statement, "Are we moving closer to *Aztlán*, or did we already pass it by?"
- 11.** What are the similarities between *Palmira*, the *curandera*, and Don Florencio, the *tlachisqui*? How do their powers help Teresa and her mother?
- 12.** In what manner does guilt play havoc in the lives of the characters? How is guilt linked to practices of the religious cult of penitentes in Albuquerque? What does Chris reveal about his own guilt as related to Jesse's death?



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- 13.** What does the Ramirez family learn about America on their cross-country trip? What does the nation learn about them?
- 14.** What information is revealed in Jesse's letters about the Vietnam War? What attitude has Jesse formed about the Vietnamese, and most specifically about the woman he loved? When does he show a premonition of his own death?
- 15.** How is Jesse's character revealed in Chris's explanation of how Jesse died? What do we know about how battles were fought through Jesse's experience?
- 16.** Altars play a prominent role in the novel. What meaning do they have for Alicia and Irene? How might the Vietnam Memorial Wall be described as an altar? What is the significance of the term "America's wailing wall"?
- 17.** How is transfer of la manda done from Alicia to Teresa? What occurs between Teresa, Priscilla and Paul after their mother's death? How is each changed by the journey?
- 18.** The uniting of Chicano and Vietnamese families at the end of the story creates a new understanding of how pain is suffered by both sides. What are some of the factors that kept Thom alienated from Jesse for so many years?
- 19.** At the end of the story, Teresa reflects, "I've learned not to doubt the impossible." To what, specifically, is she referring?