

Discussion Questions

THE SPANISH DAUGHTER by Lorena Hughes

These suggested questions are to spark conversation and enhance your reading of *The Spanish Daughter*.



1. It's not until after the death of her father that Puri learns he had three children in Ecuador – her half-brother and sisters. Are there any stories about discovering unknown family members in your own family history? If so, did that discovery change your relationships or your feelings toward certain family members?
2. Do you think Puri was justified in deceiving her family? Why or why not?
3. Have you heard true stories of women in real life who had to disguise themselves as men as a means of self-protection or to gain access to rights not available to women? What about other examples of people “passing” as an identity group other than their own, such as a different race, ethnicity, social class, or status? What are some reasons why a person would want or need to pass as a different race, gender, or other status?
4. Puri's experiences while passing as a man transform her in ways beyond just how she looks. What are some things she learns about herself and the opposite sex? How do her preconceptions regarding men and women change by the end of the novel?
5. What were your first impressions of Puri's half-sisters, Angélica and Catalina de Lafont? How did your opinions about them change over the course of reading the novel?
6. The story repeatedly mentions how each sisters' physical appearance greatly impacts how they are perceived (and received) within society. How do you think the dynamics within the story would change if each sister looked differently?
7. As a dynamic adventurer and business owner, the character of Puri can be seen as a feminist of her time. But dressed as a man in Ecuador she is able to closely examine, as an outsider, the strong social hierarchy among women. How might a contemporary interpretation of intersectional feminism have changed Puri's relationship with the women she interacted with every day – Angélica, Catalina, and Julia? Might considerations of class and race impacted some of the decisions Puri made?
8. How did you feel about the relationship between Catalina and Franco? Do you think Catalina was ever truly in love with him?

9. Martin tells Puri that his relationship with Angélica is complicated. Do you think they loved each other or were they just accustomed to one another? Do you think Puri is better-suited for Martin? Why or why not? Do you see a future for them together?
10. Despite his transgression, do you think Alberto had a true religious calling? What are your thoughts regarding the Catholic Church's expectations for young men who enter priesthood?
11. Don Armand's cacao farm in Ecuador is referred to as a "plantation," an accurate word to describe the land, but one that has come with a complicated history and negative connotations. While the word's official definition is "an estate where cash crops are grown on a large scale," it's strongly associated with slavery, racism, and subjugation, particularly for readers in the United States. In fact, there's an ongoing debate over whether plantation is a racist word, causing brands and landmarks such as Plantation Rum and the Cornell Plantations at Cornell University to change their names. What was your reaction to the use of the word "plantation" in this novel? What do you think about the ongoing cultural debate over the use of words that evoke the language of slavery and other historical atrocities?
12. In what ways does Puri's experience of inheriting "La Puri" and the cocoa fields mirror how her father's colonialism affects the family?
13. How do you think the blight that's killing the cacao trees can be interpreted as a metaphor for the colonization championed by Puri's father?
14. Did you know anything about Ecuador before reading this novel? How has your perception of this country changed since you read it? Were you surprised by any of the cultural and historical details that surprised or interested you?
15. When Puri arrives at the cacao plantation and sees the sign at its front gate, she learns her father had named his hacienda after her, "La Puri." Why do you think Don Armand made that decision? Do you think it was fair to Puri—or her siblings?
16. Family and jealousy are important themes in the novel. Puri always longed for an intimate relationship with her father, and when she learns about her half-siblings, she envies the closeness they had with him. Similarly, her sisters experienced a desire to meet her, but were also jealous of her. What do you think was the root source of their jealousies? Were you satisfied with the way their stories ended, or would you prefer a different outcome for them?