

**Discussion Guide for
Anita de Monte *Laughs Last* by Xochitl Gonzalez**

1. In the opening chapter, Anita de Monte's artwork is debated by two white men, including her future husband Jack Martin. How does this scene establish the power dynamics within the art world and foreshadow Anita's struggles throughout the novel?
2. Reflecting on Jack Martin's character, how does his behavior towards Anita evolve over the course of their relationship? Can you identify key moments where his actions contribute to Anita's sense of marginalization and frustration?
3. Anita's death is shrouded in mystery, with conflicting accounts and suspicions surrounding her husband Jack Martin. How does the novel build tension around Anita's demise, and what impact does this unresolved mystery have on the narrative?
4. What were your initial impressions of Anita and Raquel as characters? Did your perception of them change throughout the story?
5. Analyze the significance of the dual timelines in the novel, particularly in juxtaposing Anita's experiences in the 1980s art scene with Raquel's journey in the late 1990s. How does this narrative structure enhance the reader's understanding of both characters' struggles and aspirations?
6. Discuss the theme of identity and belonging in the book, particularly in relation to Anita and Raquel's experiences as women of color.
7. How do you personally perceive the power dynamics and sense of belonging in the social gatherings attended by Anita and Raquel? How did these scenes resonate with your own experiences or observations?
8. Reflect on your engagement with the characters' perspectives, considering the alternating first-person and third-person narrative styles. How did this storytelling approach affect your emotional connection to Anita, Raquel, and Jack?
9. Reflecting on the portrayal of relationships in the novel, compare and contrast Anita's marriage with Jack Martin and Raquel's relationship with Nick Fitzsimmons. How do these romantic dynamics shape the characters' personal growth and trajectories?

10. Thinking about Raquel's deep connection to hip hop and art history, how do these influences mirror or diverge from your own passions or interests? How did they shape your understanding of Raquel's character?
11. The novel explores the power dynamics within relationships, both romantic and professional. How did these dynamics influence the characters' decisions and actions?
12. What role does art play in the story, and how does it contribute to the overall themes of empowerment and recognition?
13. Reflect on the portrayal of societal issues such as racism, sexism, and classism in the book. How effectively were these issues addressed?
14. Consider the significance of memory and remembrance in the narrative. How does the novel challenge traditional notions of history and who gets to be remembered?
15. Discuss the role of humor and magical realism in the story. How did these elements impact your reading experience?
16. Consider the impact of the non-linear storytelling on your reading experience. How did the glimpses into Anita's past enhance your understanding of her journey and the themes of the novel?
17. Drawing from your own experiences or observations, how did the romantic relationships of Anita and Raquel resonate with you? In what ways did they reflect common challenges or dynamics in relationships?
18. Raquel Toro's journey at Brown University intersects with her discovery of Anita de Monte's art and legacy. Can you discuss the pivotal moments where Raquel's research into Anita's life influences her own identity and ambitions?
19. The portrayal of the "Art History Girls" clique provides insight into the racial and economic dynamics within academia. How do these characters contribute to Raquel's sense of belonging, and how do they reflect broader issues of privilege and exclusion?
20. Discuss the racial and economic dynamics depicted in Raquel's college experience, particularly in her interactions with the privileged "Art History Girls" and her relationship with Nick Fitzsimmons. How do these dynamics shape Raquel's perception of herself and her aspirations?

21. Reflecting on the portrayal of Anita's artistic career, how does the novel critique the art world's treatment of women and artists of color? How does Anita's story shed light on broader issues of representation and recognition in the arts?
22. Reflect on the portrayal of the Art History Girls and their influence on Raquel's sense of identity and belonging. How did their interactions with Raquel evoke any memories or reflections on your own friendships or social circles?
23. Reflect on the significance of Anita's transformation into a bat and its implications for her storyline. How did this supernatural element affect your interpretation of her character and her journey?
24. Which moments of reclamation in Anita's artistic journey resonated with you on a personal level? How did they inspire you to reflect on reclaiming your own narratives or achievements?
25. How did the various perspectives on Anita's death shape your understanding of her legacy and the challenges faced by women artists? Did any of these perspectives remind you of similar situations in your own life or in history?
26. Think about the role of family in shaping Raquel and Nick's decisions and actions. How did their familial backgrounds prompt you to reflect on your own family dynamics and their influence on your life choices?
27. Consider the guidance provided to Raquel by John Temple and Belinda Kim. How did their mentorship styles resonate with your own experiences of receiving advice or guidance from mentors or role models?
28. Choose a theme from the novel that deeply resonated with you, such as feminism or artistry. How did this theme personally affect you or prompt you to reconsider your own beliefs or perspectives?
29. Analyze the relationships between the main characters, including Anita, Raquel, and Jack. How do these relationships evolve throughout the novel?
30. What were your overall thoughts on the book's ending? Did it leave you satisfied, or were there unresolved questions or themes that lingered for you?

31. Reflecting on the parallels between Anita's life and the real-life experiences of Ana Mendieta, how does the novel navigate the blurred lines between fiction and reality? In what ways does the novel pay homage to Mendieta's legacy while also offering a fictionalized interpretation of her story?