

## **Discussion Guide for Infinite Country by Patricia Engel**

1. How does the title "Infinite Country" resonate with the themes and experiences depicted in the novel? What symbolic significance can be attributed to the idea of an "infinite country"?
2. The story unfolds through multiple perspectives and timelines, with a focus on characters like Talia, Mauro, and Elena. Why do you think the author chose to present the narrative in both the present and the past? Additionally, what do you think about the delayed introduction of Karina and Nando's viewpoints?
3. Think for a moment about Talia's decision to throw hot oil on the man who killed the cat and its recurring impact on the narrative. What role does moral ambivalence play, especially in light of Talia's reflection on people who do horrible things as both victims and victimizers (page 8)?
4. Consider the evolving notion of "home" for Mauro and Elena's family. Choose a character and trace their shifting relationship with Colombia and the United States. How does each character's connection to "home" change over time and with different experiences?
5. Why did Mauro and Elena decide to move to the U.S.? How does their decision reflect broader themes of seeking safety and opportunity?
6. Throughout the novel, characters grapple with the question of whether life in the U.S. is better than staying in Colombia. How does the narrative explore the failures and challenges of the American Dream for this particular family?
7. Talia's actions leading to her placement in a correctional facility are tied to her defense of a cat. What do you think about this narrative choice, and how does it contribute to the overall themes of the story?
8. Reflect on the heightened feelings of uncanniness and displacement experienced by Elena, Mauro, and others in the diaspora. How might events like the 9/11 attacks contribute to these emotions, especially considering Elena's momentary disbelief while watching the planes (page 37)?
9. Explore the dynamics of Mauro and Elena's relationship, particularly in relation to the strength depicted by Adrian Pennino-Balboa. How does their relationship demonstrate the strength required to navigate personal evolution? At the start of the novel, who does Mauro think he's supposed to be, and who does he become?
10. Dive into Talia's encounters with the three men who assist her on her journey back to Bogotá. What insights do these characters share about her upcoming journey north? How do these encounters shape Talia's character and her perspective on the world?

11. The novel includes memorable quotes, such as "I often wonder if we are living the wrong life in the wrong country." How does this sentence encapsulate the family's experience in the U.S.? Share other quotes that resonated with you.
12. Karina questions whether she can truly feel connected to a country without familial history. What, in your opinion, defines a place as a true home? How is one's identity linked to their place of birth?
13. The novel delves into the undocumented experience in the U.S. How does this perspective contribute to a nuanced understanding of the immigrant experience?
14. Think about the contrasting imagery of lush Colombian landscapes and urban North American settings. How do these descriptions evoke emotions, and what do they reveal about the characters' experiences in each environment?
15. Elena's nightmares were full of symbolism, especially the dream involving the Nevado del Ruiz eruption. How does the dream, particularly Elena's perspective as "a bird or a cloud watching from above" after Mauro's deportation, reveal aspects of her psyche during this challenging period (page 85)?
16. Explore the theme of maternal energies through characters like Elena, Perla, Tracy, and the community of women in New Jersey. How do these maternal figures influence the novel's network of characters?
17. Karina revealed herself as "the author of these pages" in chapter 19. How does this revelation affect your reading of the novel, and what emotions arise from Karina and Nando's palpable anger?
18. Discuss the impact of Mauro's deportation on the family dynamics. How does it shape their individual journeys and collective experiences?
19. What emotions do you think a young Mauro might have experienced looking out at the "veined mountain lights" while smoking a cigarette. Why is his connection to his homeland so emotionally charged, especially given the indecipherable expression he meets Elena with when she says his name (page 166)?
20. Consider Talia's plotline in the context of the novel's varied experiences. Discuss the significance of her feelings of waiting for something and the uncertainty about the origin and endpoint of her journey (page 179).
21. What do you think everyday struggles and triumphs Karina might portray if she continued writing the "book of our lives" beyond the novel's conclusion (page 190). What challenges and victories could the reunited family face in an uncertain future?
22. What are your thoughts on the family's reunion at the end of the story? What do you envision happening next for the family?