



Radical Empathy Book Club

Discussion Questions for *The Lesbiana's Guide to Catholic School* by Sonora Reyes – July 2023

'Radical empathy...means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will. It is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it' – Isabel Wilkerson in *Caste*

1. A number of characters in the novel were outwardly racist and/or homophobic while others were allies. Did any of the characters stand out to you and why? What were your reactions to the following?
 - a. Yamilet and Cesar navigating their own sexuality and coming out to each other.
 - b. The difference between Yamilet's parents finding out about their sexualities.
 - c. Bo's parents and their acceptance/celebration of Bo's sexuality and racial identity.
 - d. The students and staff at Slayton and their reactions to Bo and/or Yamilet.
2. How do you define being an "ally" to someone (or a group) that is marginalized? Have you ever been an ally and why? Have you ever had an opportunity to be an ally and didn't? Why?
3. Christianity (specifically Catholicism) is a theme throughout the novel. What are your thoughts on the intersectionality of Christianity and the LGBTQ+ community? What was your reaction to the scene in chapter 6 when Bo confronts the Priest during confession? What other aspects of Christianity or Catholicism surprised you (either positively or negatively) and why?
4. The Mayan Code of the Heart and poem by Luis Valdez (*In Lak'ech Ala K'in*, found in chapter 3) is important to Cesar and Yamilet; why is it important to them? Why do you think the author chose to title the first 22 chapters using language similar to the Ten Commandments and then use language from the poem for the final 5 chapters?
5. Mental health is also a theme in the novel. Did you connect with Cesar as he struggled with his mental health? Why? Did you connect with any other characters and their reactions to his mental health? Why? What was your reaction to Yamilet's mom initially blaming her for Cesar's mental health crisis?
6. Radical Empathy encourages us to "listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. It is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will." In what ways does this book help you understand:
 - a. What it's like to identify as LGBTQ+ as a young adult?
 - b. What it's like to identify as LGBTQ+ in a religious family?
 - c. What it's like to be a person of color in a school that has predominantly white students?
 - d. What it's like to have a family member that needs mental health support?