

Questions for Discussion

How We Disappear by Tara Lynn Masih

Published by Press 53

1. Discuss how the title of the book and the book's epigraph by Pamela Ball inform your reading of both the full collection and the individual stories.
2. What do you think of the cover art? In terms of symbolism, does it work as the overall image to encapsulate the many diverse stories in *How We Disappear*?
3. Explore the definition of "disappearance" in terms of how it relates to each story.
4. In your opinion, which characters struggle the most, and which overcome their need to escape, physically or emotionally?
5. Many of the narrators are women. If you identify as a woman, can you relate to any of them in some manner? If you do not identify as a woman, how does your identity help or hinder your processing of the issues these women face?
6. After reading their stories, what is your reaction to the BIPOC narrators and characters in this collection who lend their own voices to the theme of disappearance?
7. The history of the "Landless Indians" in Montana is complex. Do some research into their heritage and their long fight for legal status, which was finally achieved in December 2019 when Congress granted federal recognition to 5,300 Little Shell tribe members. How do you think this history affects the Métis characters in *How We Disappear*?

8. Some of the characters in the collection suffer different forms of abuse. How does physical, emotional, and/or social abuse serve to lay a foundation for trauma? Are there ways to recover?

9. In “Agatha” and “Notes to THE WORLD,” female characters choose to disappear. How does their having a choice differ/not differ from the situations of the other characters who are taken against their wills?

10. Wilderness and rural settings abound in Masih’s stories. Is this effective? What role do you think nature plays in our psyche, even in urban landscapes?

11. Traditionally men have been celebrated as explorers of the wilderness and for laying claim to their own territory and destiny. Depicting isolation and exploration, our language is full of male terms such as *hermits*, *cowboys*, *backwoodsmen*, *frontiersmen*, *mountaineers*, and *Mountain Men*. How might that tradition and language be altered in this collection?

12. Masih experiments with different styles and structures. What does this add to your reading? Detract? Which experimental stories worked best for you, and why?

13. Think about your own life and the possible ways it’s been affected by the disappearance of others, either emotionally, physically, or metaphorically. How has reading *How We Disappear* changed your perception of how you look at others or how you interpret death, the ultimate act of disappearing?