

FOLGER BOOK CLUB



Discussion Questions: *You Dreamed of Empires*

Folger Book Club—November 2025

1. What did you think of this novel? If asked, what would you say this book is about?
2. Were you familiar with the historical time period covered in this book? If so, what about Enrique's telling was familiar to you? What was surprising? What does it do to our understanding of history to have such alternative narratives?
3. In his 'Note to English Language Readers,' Enrique writes "Don't worry too much about the Nahuatl words you come across . . . Let the meanings reveal themselves: the brain likes to learn things, and we're wired to register new words." (pg. xiv). Were you able to immerse yourself in the language? Did you find your relationship to the unfamiliar words had changed by the end of the novel?
4. There are multiple instances of the Castilians missing a key piece of context when considering Mexican culture, such as not understanding people are holding flowers because these newcomers smell. What does this say about how the Castilians approach this new-to-them culture? Have you ever caught yourself making similar assumptions?
5. On page 46, Tlilpotonqui reflects on the role of festivals in Tenoxtitlan as a tool of pacification, but such moments can also provide protest and a sense of community. Do you agree with his assessment? What makes them one or the other in society?
6. Later, on pg 107, Tlilpotonqui ponders what could be considered "the beginning." How do we mark beginnings within history? Is this novel telling the story of a beginning? If so, of what?
7. Moctezuma sees the Castilians as a resource he wants to control (pg. 118), thinking they could be a great asset if they can be civilized and taught to be brave. How do you think the Castilians would feel about being assessed in this way?
8. Two-thirds through the book the narration becomes conscious of its own fiction. What did you think of this shift? Did it change how you considered the characters to have one be acknowledged as fictional?
9. Caldera "has to be a learned conquistador . . . for this novel to work" (page 146). Why? Do you agree? How does Enrique use Caldera as a character?
10. Caldera's experience of the temple is affected by his dress (pg. 149). Why? What other conditions might affect how someone experiences a different culture? Have you ever had a similar experience?