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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

We Heard It When We Were Young by Chuy Renteria

Summary

Most agree that West Liberty is a special place. The first majority Hispanic town in Iowa, it has been covered by media giants such as Reuters, Telemundo, NBC, and ESPN. But Chuy Renteria and his friends grew up in the space between these news stories, where a more complicated West Liberty awaits. *We Heard It When We Were Young* tells the story of a young boy, first-generation Mexican American, who is torn between cultures: between immigrant parents trying to acclimate to midwestern life and a town that is, by turns, supportive and disturbingly antagonistic.

Renteria looks past the public celebrations of diversity to dive into the private tensions of a community reflecting the changing American landscape. There are culture clashes, breakdancing battles, fistfights, *quinceañeras*, vandalism, adventures on bicycles, and souped-up lowriders, all set to an early 2000s soundtrack. Renteria and his friends struggle to find their identities and reckon with intergenerational trauma and racism in a town trying to do the same. A humorous and poignant reflection on coming of age, *We Heard It When We Were Young* puts its finger on a particular cultural moment at the turn of the millennium.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the book overall? Did you enjoy reading it? Why or why not? Did it hold your interest?
2. Discuss your favorite or least favorite parts of the story. Did anything about the book surprise you? Or was it too predictable?
3. Share a quote from the book. What about this quote was meaningful to you?
4. What did you think of the way the author told the story? Was there a balance of humor and sensitivity?
5. Have you visited West Liberty? How did your own experiences compare to the author's perspective? What did you learn about Hispanic cultures in Iowa? Do you think the author's experiences were reflective of Hispanic life in Iowa or were his experiences unique?

6. Could you relate to the author's experiences? Were they similar to or different from your own experiences growing up?
7. Share your thoughts about the title of this book. Did you find it appropriate or would you have chosen something else?
8. Do you often read memoirs? If so, did you find this book typical of the genre? If not, did this book inspire you to read more memoirs? Do memoirs differ from autobiographies? If so, how?
9. Were you satisfied by the ending of this book? If not, how would you have wanted the author to wrap it up?
10. If you could ask the author one question, what would it be? Would you read other books by this author? Why or why not?

Summary from GoodReads.com
Discussion Questions from the Johnston Public Library staff