

Unpacking *Boxes*

Spirituality Discussion Guide

1. Angelica and Tim are practicing Roman Catholics in a predominately Roman Catholic neighborhood. How do their religious beliefs influence their actions?
2. Father Hu describes his views by paraphrasing two scriptures: Jeremiah 17:9 and John 8:7. “The heart is desperately wicked; who can know it?” and “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” What does this tell us about his beliefs?
3. Father Hu mentions doubts about the Roman Catholic Church, such as “being on a pedestal,” “scandal in the priesthood,” and “being out of touch with the local community.” What do you think of these observations? What about in the years since 1998 when the novel is set?
4. Based on how Father Hu prays and ministers to his community, how would you describe his faith? How does he live out his faith in the Hatbox kitchen? Discuss the differences between faith and religion.
5. Raymond Ramirez describes “I’toi, the Great Spirit and Provider” and how we should live in harmony with each other and Mother Earth. How is Raymond true to his faith? How might those spiritual concepts apply to you?
6. Raymond Ramirez mentions sacred places that are at risk. What do you think of the concept of sacred spaces in native cultures and major religions?
7. Raymond Ramirez and Tim agree on the vital importance of living in harmony and finding peace. They disagree on how to achieve that goal. Discuss the role faith plays in their viewpoints.
8. Did Raymond’s spirituality influence Tim’s decision to return to his family? Why or why not?
9. Explore the author’s use of religious symbolism in names and descriptions, especially in the names of Dante family members and in the Garden of Gethsemane.
10. Is the author’s depiction of spirituality in everyday life accurate? Do you have a sense of spirituality or faith in your life? If so or not, how would you describe it? How did your beliefs or views develop?