

Discussion Questions for *American Dirt*

1. This book begins with a graphic depiction of violence. Let's discuss the beginning of the book. How did it strike you? Further, discuss how the imagery Cummins uses evokes a sense of suspense in especially tense moments. What scenes come to mind?—**Elana Zambori**
2. Why did the author choose to make the lead character an upper-middle-class bookstore owner who has an affair of the heart with a man of unknown background? Was she more than naive? **Barbara Shamp** asks. Was this construct believable? Echoing her question, our facilitator **Elana Zambori** asks, do you think Lydia made the right choice to continue this relationship after she became aware of La Lechueza 's identity as head of the cartel? (Was this believable?)
3. In a book dealing with so many painful and troubling issues, what techniques did the author use to keep her readers reading? asks **Sarah Barnett**, and along those lines, **Paul Dyer** wonders if it was too much—the constant unrelenting threats/tension on every page.
4. Perhaps related to the above, if you were to draw the story arc, **Jackson Copley** asks, what shape would it take?
5. Why did the author choose to use an omniscient point of view and how did it help/ hurt the book? Would a more traditional first or third-person account have worked better for you? It's not just Luca and Lydia's POV but: Javier's POV **pg. 72**; a migrant girl at a shelter, **pg. 84**; three other migrants at another shelter (Neli, Julia, Isobel) **pg.126-127**; Sebastian **pg.122-123, 143**; Soledad **135,197**; Javier's wife **pg. 90**; the nurse who is caring for Rebecca and Soledad's father. There is even an omniscient narrator reporting information that no single character can know (page 9, bottom of page 103, bottom of 178: She'll never know how narrow their escape really was, that two of Javier's men opened the door to their room at the Hotel Duquesa Imperial just as she and Luca were entering the lobby of the hotel next door."—**Jackson Copley, Elaine Oakes, Maribeth Fischer**
6. There are A LOT of characters in this book. Did we need them all? Do any especially stand out to you as crucial to the story? Two minor characters (and the scene they are in **pg. 62-65**) Carlos and his wife Meredith, seem especially significant. Meredith—who happens to be from the United States and happens to be more well-off than many of those who do help the migrants—is one of the people who does not want to risk helping Lydia and Luca. Why did Cummins include this scene? Do you feel she is making a statement about people's willingness to get involved?—**Maribeth Fischer**

7. “So he’s unaware of the way Newton’s third law can resonate in a place like this: for every wickedness, there is an equal and opposite possibility of redemption” (pg.337). Let’s discuss the competing instances of hostility and hospitality the characters encounter on their way to El Norte?—**Elana Zambori**
8. Borders, both visible and invisible, tangible and mental, are a central part of this book. What scenes come to mind when considering the aforementioned types of borders Lydia, Luca, and the sisters are faced with? Are some borders more impenetrable than others? Are borders a necessary evil?—**Elana Zambori**
9. Why did Cummins receive such intense criticism for writing this book and was it justified?”—**Karen Schneiderman**