

Book Club Discussion Questions for
When Sorrow Takes Wing by Kelly Romo

1. At the beginning of the novel, Jenny tells Mariana that Señora Hernandez used to tell her, “The devil never noticed the garden until the peacock flashed his tail.” What significance does that saying have on the events of this story?
2. What is the significance of the quote by Jean Jacques-Rousseau in the beginning of the novel: “Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains”? How did that apply to the different characters in the book as well as the United States and Mexico in the time period of the novel? Do you feel that is still a true statement today?
3. Which character in the novel do you most identify with? What elements of their personalities made you identify with that character?
4. What struggles does Mariana’s papá, Hector Castillo, face trying to protect his family? Do you believe he made the right decisions in his circumstances?
5. How are the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship represented in the novel? Which aspects are due to historical perspectives of the times, family dynamics, and cultural expectations?
6. There are three different settings in the novel: A Southern California citrus ranch, Tijuana, and Guadalajara. How did each of these settings affect Mariana, both positively and negatively?
7. The female characters in the book have varying perspectives of men. Which character’s perspectives stood out to you and why?
8. Do you have any sympathy for Lázaro? Why or why not?
9. When her family is being deported, Mariana says, “There were not enough prayers in the world to stop powerful men from covering up their own evil.” Do you believe this statement is still true in the 21st Century?
10. What role does family play in the novel?
11. William preys on Mariana and misleads her. Have you ever experienced anything like this in a work environment or any in any situation where you were a subordinate?
12. *When Sorrow Takes Wing* illustrates the difficulties immigrant workers faced in the 1920’s. How has some of that changed and how has some of it continued?
13. Mariana’s papa punished her for allowing Jenny to cut off her braid, stating that, “The shrimp that falls asleep is carried by the current.” What difficulties does he face trying to raise his children to stand up for themselves, especially as immigrants in the United States?
14. Mariana’s mother worries about the opportunities for her children in Mexico, “With the churches closed, there were no schools for the children—unless they went to one of the public schools to be indoctrinated by the government.” Later, Mariana states, “She would not allow the government to indoctrinate her son—to turn him against his religion. Against God and the saints who could protect him. Her son would not bow down to Calles or to whatever puppet he put in as president.” That is the opposite view of public education in the U.S. What do you think of that?
15. Do you think Mariana’s mamá did the right thing when she did not tell her husband and nephew that she had been raped? Should she have admitted it to Mariana, who already knew that it had happened?

16. At the conclusion of the novel, Mariana convinces her family to move to Guadalajara to be with Carmina and their three male cousins: Leon, Lorenzo, and Alberto. Do you think this was the right move for the family? Choose one of the members of Mariana's family and tell how you think moving to Guadalajara would be beneficial to them and what challenges you think they will face there.
17. Americanization was a nationwide organized effort to help immigrants learn to speak English, help them fill out citizenship papers, and teach immigrants how to assimilate into the American cultural system. In which ways do you feel that the Americanization effort was helpful, and in which ways do you feel it was harmful to immigrants?
18. Tijuana is a border city, influenced by the politics and business interests of both the United States and Mexico. How does this affect the people of Tijuana? Do you feel this is still happening today?
19. Do you think there will always be conflict between church and state? Why do you believe that?
20. According to Jean Meyer, PhD in his book, *La Cristiada: The Mexican People's War for Religious Liberty*, the Cristero War, which resulted in the deaths of at least 200,000 people, was "expunged from the national memory and omitted from the educational curriculum" in Mexico. Mexico, like other countries, have suppressed history, saying that it is an attempt to not reopen the wounds of the past. What do you think about that?
21. In his research in 1965, Jean Meyer found that the Catholic church also kept their archives about the Cristero War closed to researchers. One of the Archbishops in Mexico told him, "The tragedy is too recent, the ashes are still hot and we do not want the fire to burst again." Do you agree that it is the right approach?