

Reader's Group Guide

Retablos: Stories from a Life Lived Along the Border by Octavio Solis

Published by City Lights, October 2018

1. Solis describes the stories as disconnected and yet thoroughly interconnected. How do you think this impacts time throughout the book?
2. *Retablos* inescapably deals with identity, and the many “firsts” of a young boy living near the border. What event did you find most important in the transformation of the “young boy” in the book?
3. Which section of the book did you find the images to be “painted” most vividly? Discuss the images and why they stood out to you.
4. Does there seem to be a specific audience Octavio Solis is trying to reach? If yes, why do you think he might be trying to reach out to this audience?
5. How does the language and imagery of the memories within *Retablos* combine to create the overall tone within the book? Which details help you to understand this?
6. Solis describes a retablo as “an old beaten tin” on which a life-changing event is depicted. Can you find specific moments within the text where a trauma followed by a transformation can be seen? Give examples.
7. *Retablos* is essentially a book of memories, but Solis says “even the most authentic memory became imbued with the same strange unreality.” How did this impact your reading and interpretation of the events?
8. What is the relationship between past and present within *Retablos*, and how does that affect the structure of the book?
9. What is the impact of *Retablos* on you? How has this story influenced the way that you approach and think about the themes of the book in your real world experiences?
10. Looking back over the book, what did you learn about trauma and the divine and gratefulness?