

Discussion Questions for MONSTRESS

1. The stories in *Monstress* feature characters who have immigrated from the Philippines to America. In these stories, what does it mean to be Filipino? What does it mean to be American?
2. The Beatles, comic books, and B-movies, and are featured in many of these stories. What does western popular culture represent to the characters in these stories?
3. We never learn the names of the narrators of “Superassassin,” “L’amour, CA,” and “Help.” What is the significance of namelessness in these stories?
4. In the title story, the narrator, Reva Gogo, resents her ex-boyfriend, Checkers Rosario, for making her play monstrous roles in his B horror movies, and longs to play beautiful leading lady roles. In “The View From Culion,” Teresa only recognizes her own true face after seeing Jack’s leprosy-damaged appearance. How does the author deal with the idea of beauty, of outward appearances, in these stories? What does it mean to be “beautiful?”
5. In a review of *Monstress*, *Publishers Weekly* states, “The tales are tragic, but Tenorio makes the most of his gift for black humor.” How do tragedy and humor work together in these stories?
6. How are sexuality and gender identity portrayed in “Save the I-Hotel” and “The Brothers?” How does the characters’ status as immigrants (or the children of immigrants) complicate these themes?
7. On the stories in *Monstress*, the writer Peter Ho Davies (*The Welsh Girl, Equal Love*) says, “Each story is a confession of love betrayed.” What kinds of betrayals do you see happening in these stories? Why do these characters betray those to whom they are closest?
8. The stories in *Monstress* take place in America and the Philippines. How are these countries portrayed in the individual stories? What do the narrators in these stories lose and gain by moving from one country to another?
9. How are parent-child relationships (and grandparent-grandchild in “Felix Starro,” uncle-nephew in “Help”) portrayed in these stories? How do the goals and aspirations of the older generation conflict with those of the younger?
10. “Save the I-Hotel” moves back and forth between two storylines. The first takes place in 1977, on the night Fortunado and Vicente face eviction from the International Hotel. The second spans forty years of their friendship, from the 1930’s to the 1970’s. How do these storylines work together? What single story do they tell?

11. How do you view the character of Uncle Willie in “Help?” Is he heroic in his devotion to The First Lady? Is he foolish? And how do you view the way his three nephews treat him?
12. In “L’amour, CA,” the young narrator states, “It’s the difference, I think, between all of them and me; even when I was gone, I was here.” What does he mean by this, and why does he feel this way? In other stories, are there characters for whom this might also be true?
13. Which characters do you sympathize with the most? Which do you sympathize with the least? Why?
14. What does Hollywood represent for the three main characters in “Monstress?”
15. How are sibling relationships portrayed in “The Brothers” and “L’amour, CA?”
16. “Felix Starro” features three characters who might be considered scam artists: the narrator, Papa Felix, and Flora Ramirez. In what ways do these characters deceive other people? How do they deceive themselves?
17. At the conclusion of “Superassassin,” the narrator stands on the edge of a building rooftop late in the night, slingshot in hand, and states, “I aim, ready at any moment to let go.” What does he mean by this?
18. In “The View From Culion,” a black curtain separates the narrator, Teresa, and Jack, the AWOL American soldier, from seeing each other. How does this meaning of this curtain evolve over the course of the story? How does it reflect their relationship?
19. How does *Monstress* portray the immigrant experience? How does this portrayal compare with story collections that also deal with this theme, such as Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*, Junot Diaz’s *Drown*, and Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Middleman*?
20. How does the title “Monstress,” reflect the individual stories? How does it serve the entire collection as a title?