

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Loyd isn't a big reader but he likes to tell his children stories, mostly about himself and the family. Other stories also come up—Paul Bunyan, Little Red Riding Hood, etc. How does this develop over the course of the book, as the narrator grows older?

Throughout *rough house*, incidents of hardship and abuse are often mirrored by moments of freedom or joy. What do you make of these connections? Is it healthy to associate joy with pain and trauma?

When Tina's mom goes to the market for Ben-Gay and finds \$20, she begins to plan to leave Loyd for good. What is the significance of that found cash and the sense of permission it seems to give her?

rough house engages with white poverty but also with white privilege, calling the dam across the Columbia River, "a monument to all we have stolen," and integrating the author's own participation in tokenism and appropriation. Why do you think these themes are included?

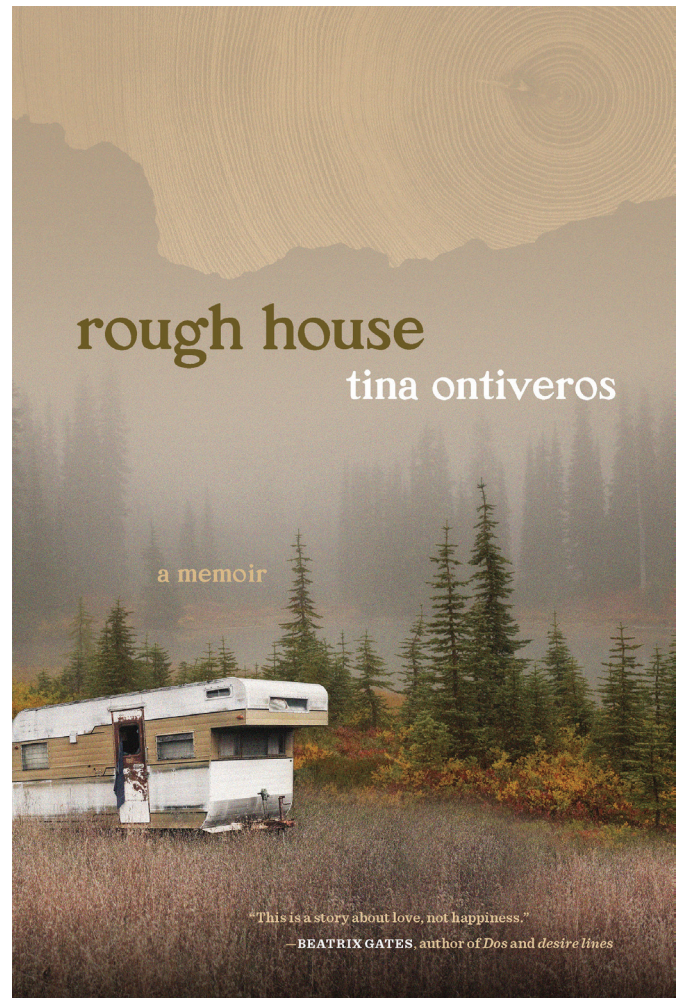
As a child, the narrator has a hard time telling the difference between Alcoholics Anonymous and the Kingdom Hall. Why is that?

When Tina, Jesse, and Mom flee Loyd, the author writes, "We could've driven off a cliff into the sea and no one would know. There's a particular sort of isolation that can erupt, like a chemical reaction, out of poverty. People disappear." What do you think she means? Do you agree?

Despite his violence, Loyd can be a tender father and brother. Why do you think he acts at these extreme poles in his personality?

Dogs are significant in *rough house*. Tina's first sentence is, "Shut up, Sloan!" In Yakima, Loyd adopts CC as a gift for Jesse and Tina, and then takes her away in a brutal way. The author also often thinks of Loyd's darker side as "the wolf." Did you connect these and other moments around dogs throughout the book? Are there other animal themes you noticed?

Reflect on the "Close Call" chapter. What do you think of the narrator's response to CC's death? Who do the children believe is responsible?



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rough house: a memoir

tina ontiveros

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***rough house* DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, continued**

One of Loyd's most monstrous acts is in Packwood, when he purposefully exposes his children to Linda's infidelity. What do you think motivated Loyd in those moments? Do you think this act is forgivable?

In the book, Loyd maintains two significant relationships with women—his relationship with Linda and with Tina's Mom. How do these connections play out through the story?

Do the women in *rough house* seem strong or weak? What parts of the story make those impressions?

rough house has a chapter in the center called "the worst thing." Why do you think this one chapter title is in parenthesis?

Loyd does not attend Tina's graduation or wedding. After Jesse's graduation, the narrator says, "it was an important truth he taught me—that love is not the same as dependability or stability or even safety. The only thing to expect from love is love." Can you love someone even if you don't show up for them? Can that be true of a parent?

After Tina yells at Loyd, her mother tells her a story, "about a girl who was always trying to be what her dad wanted . . . and about a man who never learned the right way to love people." After that, Mom would also say, "she'd messed it all up, kids should be raised by two parents, not just one." What do you think about the ways Mom takes responsibility for Loyd's abuse and neglect?

When Tina goes back to Camas as an adult, she is nervous about the way Linda might receive her when she walks into the Chalet Café. What do you think about Tina's relationship with Linda?

Do you find Linda's story remarkable at all? What kind of woman is she? How does she fit into Loyd's life?

What character in *rough house* do you feel is most like you? Does that change over the course of the book?

How do you think Tina was seen by her dad? Her mom? Her brother? What words do you think they'd use to describe her? Do you think Tina sees herself objectively?

Is anyone in *rough house* living the life they want to live? If not, do you think that life is possible for them?

Do you identify with this family?

When Loyd dies, Tina invites a Jehovah's Witness to speak at his graveside. Tina and Jesse make their own headstone and Jesse digs the hole to bury Loyd's ashes. What do you make of this patched-together funeral? Did it respect Loyd's wishes? Did it respect anyone's wishes?



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