



SPIRIT RUN

A 6,000-Mile Marathon Through North America's Stolen Land by Noé Álvarez

Reading Group Guide & Discussion Questions

1. Nature is often romanticized in literature. How does Noé Álvarez approach nature writing differently, especially in the early chapters about his childhood in Yakima (the “Palm Springs of Washington”)?
2. Moving from the world of Yakima orchards and laborers to college was not easy for Álvarez. Has there ever been a time in your life when you’ve experienced a similar dissonance as a result of geographic, cultural, class, or racial differences?
3. Early on, Álvarez writes, “As soon as I was old enough, I awoke from the delusion that nature was good to my people.” Where did this delusion come from, and does his perspective change over the course of the book? How does this compare to your own experiences in nature?
4. The Peace and Dignity Journeys (PDJ) wind through several urban communities, including East Los Angeles, and often follow freeways and busy thoroughfares. What role do cities play in *Spirit Run* to revitalize the connection between native communities, marginalized peoples, and the land?
5. Álvarez’s story doesn’t always follow a familiar narrative arc of beginning, middle, and end. How does Álvarez experiment with the narrative structure of PDJ, as both a runner and a writer?
6. Spiritual and personal differences between the PDJ runners threaten at times to break up the run. How does Álvarez come to understand those with whom his personal belief system differs? How do your own spiritual practices or personal beliefs address suffering and/or hope?
7. *Spirit Run* begins with the stories of three women Álvarez encounters on PDJ: Crow, Chula Pepper, and Zyanya Lonewolf. Zyanya mourns a cousin killed in British Columbia along the Highway of Tears, an isolated stretch of road where many murders of Indigenous women remain unsolved. How do Zyanya’s and the other women’s experiences on PDJ differ from Álvarez’s and the male runners? What reasons does Zyanya give for leaving?
8. In addressing disputes between the runners, PDJ organizer Andrec says that “to be a warrior is to know how structures of power work . . . It is to sacrifice and dedicate one’s life and energy to something bigger and greater than oneself” (108–109). Do you agree with Andrec’s definition of a warrior? By his definition, who are the warriors you look up to in your own life?
9. By the end of his journey, Álvarez returns to college, finishing two degrees in the pursuit of personal and spiritual truth. “But within myself,” he writes, “I believe that these truths can be achieved without a college education. The world tells me that achievement has to look one way, but I struggle with that” (195). How do you define achievement for yourself, and have you ever struggled with this?
10. Many of the native runners Álvarez encounters in PDJ carry their own histories of white settlers forcibly separating their people from the land that sustained them. Álvarez writes, “I had lost touch with the world around me, and it would be through my touch of animals, people, and the land that I would move toward recovery” (151). How does PDJ aim to heal some of these wounds? How do you think PDJ helps Álvarez?