



Discussion Questions
The Tortilla Curtain
by T. C. Boyle

1. The book *The Tortilla Curtain* was published in 1995. What themes and issues are still relevant today, 17 years later? What has changed?
2. Undocumented immigrants represent one of the groups most vulnerable to human rights violations in the United States. What is some evidence of this in the book?
3. “My people are going to need access” (p. 242). This was stated by a foreman who was referring to Mexican day laborers who were at Delaney’s house to build the wall. What is the irony of this, and why do Delaney and Kyra, and others in the community, not see new developments are driving the need for labor?
4. Discuss Boyle’s metaphor of the coyote: “The coyote is not to blame – he is only trying to survive, to make a living, to take advantage of the opportunities available to him” (p. 214).
5. There are several forces, including natural disasters, that seem to represent a powerlessness felt by all parties involved. What is the author driving at, and who holds power in this book?
6. In an argument between Jack and Delaney, Jack states: “[T]his society isn’t what it was – and it won’t be until we get control of the borders” (p. 101). What is Delaney’s reaction, and how is the wall around Arroyo Blanco symbolic of other borders?
7. The racism and fear among members of Arroyo Blanco are manifest in Jack Jr., the wall, and the post-fire scene that escalates into threats of violence and racist slurs: “Spic!” “Go back to Mexico!” “Wetbacks!” (p. 289). What are the real and perceived threats to this community? How does lack of familiarity feed fear and perceived threat?
8. How does Dominick Flood’s monitoring device and widespread acceptance by his community, juxtaposed with the outrage over undocumented day laborers inform our notions of crime, particularly civil crime?
9. While looking at a purse and briefcase and contemplating stealing them, Candido is confronted with the owner of the vehicle, who hands him some change. “He had never been more ashamed in his life...” (p. 202). What is the source of Candido’s shame?
10. Both Candido and America express regret about coming to the United States several times in the book. How was their dream different than the reality they faced?
11. Does *The Tortilla Curtain* offer any clues of what a sound immigration policy might be? What are some tenants of an immigration policy that would respect fundamental human rights?