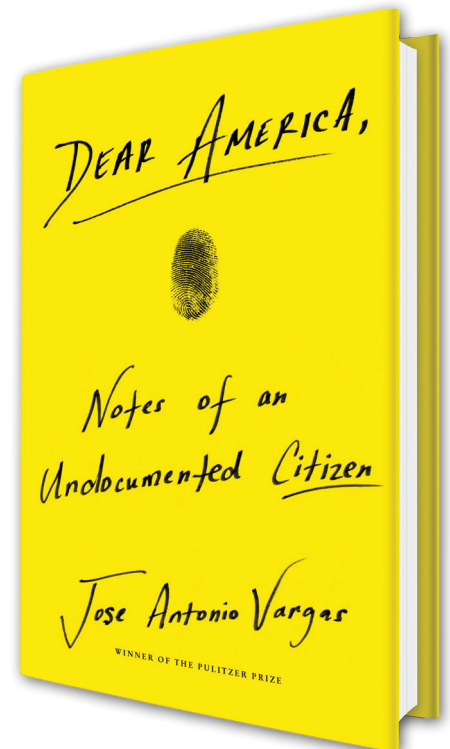


# DEAR AMERICA,

## READING GROUP GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What drew you to read *Dear America*? Had you heard of its author, Jose Antonio Vargas, before reading the book? If so, what was your impression of him before reading the book? Why do you think the author gave the book this particular title? Who is he addressing? What is the significance of the fingerprint on the front cover?
2. America once prided itself on being “a nation of immigrants.” How has the national view of immigrants and immigration changed since the founding of the nation, and especially over the past fifty years, since the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act? Do you believe that America is (still) a nation of immigrants? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to be an American? What makes an individual a citizen? Who should get to choose who is allowed to become an American and live here and who is not? In learning about Jose, is he any less an American than those who are born here? Why or why not?
4. Jose opens *Dear America* with the words, “I do not know where I will be when you read this book.” What emotion did you experience when you read that sentence?
5. Why doesn't Jose think of himself as an activist? Would you consider writing—perhaps even reading—*Dear America* as activism?
6. Jose explains that the book is not about immigration, but about homelessness. How does he separate the two? What makes a place a home for someone? What does it mean not to have a home? Do you think you could endure living in limbo—choosing not to put down roots, moving from place to place, fearing that you will be arrested?
7. What does it take to survive as an undocumented person in the U.S. today? How has living a lie and hiding shaped the person Jose is and the profession he chose to pursue? How did he pass to those who did not know his secret before he came out as undocumented?
8. Jose touches on race in the book. Why is race a charged issue for Americans? Why do many Americans feel the need to identify foremost by race? How do race, nationality, and immigration influence each other?



**9.** How many generations of your family were born in the United States? Do you know when the first generation of your family arrived in America and where they came from? Do you know any immigrants today? Do any live in your town? What are your impressions of them?

**10.** Why do many Americans seem to dislike immigrants, both those who hold green cards and those who are naturalized—and especially those who are undocumented like Jose and the other Dreamers? Do you think America’s immigration laws are too restrictive, or not restrictive enough? Do you know what changes the Trump administration is seeking to our current laws? Or what they are currently doing without new legislation?

**11.** What do you think would happen if we deported all undocumented immigrants in the country (around 11 million, the size of the population of Ohio)? How would we find them and “round them up”? Does the use of language like “rounding up” people remind you of any other time or place in history? If so, how?

**12.** Should Dreamers, who have never known any country but the United States, be deported too, or be allowed a path to citizenship? Why or why not?

**13.** What did you discover about Jose Antonio Vargas from reading *Dear America*? Did anything you read surprise or shock you? What does his story say about the plight of the millions of other undocumented men, women, and children in the United States today?

**14.** How has reading *Dear America* affected your opinion about immigration, migration, citizenship, and being an American? What are some common misconceptions he dispels about “illegal immigrants”? Did you know that the process of citizenship was as difficult as it is?

**15.** *Dear America* explores how the media often distorts the lives of every day immigrants. How do your interactions with immigrants compare to what you see in the media? Is America as divided about immigrants as the media says? What is it like in your community? **#factsmatter**

**16.** *Dear America* delves into how anti-immigrant hate groups have successfully used mainstream media to legitimize hate speech. How can you combat dehumanizing and inaccurate phrases like “illegal immigrant” or “alien”? What other words do you see the media using to describe immigrants that are dehumanizing? **#wordsmatter**

**17.** In *Dear America*, the author explores how the media often refers to and quotes organizations—which the Southern Poverty Law Center has designated as hate groups—in order to substantiate the government’s anti-immigrant policies. How can you help hold journalists accountable when quoting sources? Does the media have a responsibility to its audience to avoid citing hate groups in their coverage of immigration? Why or why not? **#sourcsmatter**

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