

Chapter One Discussion Questions:

- *Do you believe literacy is a moral obligation? Why or why not?*
- *Have you ever felt like your job as a teacher was not meaningful in the eyes of others in the community?*
- *After the Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign, a volunteer asked, “Why had we barely alphabetized 75 percent? Could we have done more?” How is this similar to our feelings as teachers even today?*
- *Are time pressures needed to show success in education?*
- *What do you think are the most critical issues in schools today?*

Chapter Two Discussion Questions:

- *An author at one point says that life in Latin America is surrounded by fear and death. How do you think this life affected the people?*
- *In search of what God wanted of him, Fr. Cardenal was greatly assisted by the encyclical of Pope Paul VI (*The Development of Peoples*) parts 30 and 31. Part 31 the most significant part for Fr. Cardenal: “Revolutionary uprisings engender new injustices, introduce new inequities and bring new disasters, except where there is manifest, longstanding tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country.” Would Fr. Cardenal have pursued the literacy crusade without having knowledge of “*The Development of Peoples*” Part 31?*
- *Do you think an outsider could have understood the atrocities in Central America or their experiences without being there her/himself? To what degree are we able to sympathize with people without understanding the context of their lives?*

- *What do you think about the negative viewpoints on the U.S. throughout the chapter? How does perspective effect this?*
- *Do you think the literacy crusade will be a war on ignorance? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think the parents that allowed their children to teach in the campaign considered the political commitment they were making?*
- *Why do you think some of the impoverished people may not have wanted to be a part of the literacy campaign?*
- *It seemed like a lot of social issues caused delays in learning. How much should you intervene in school/family issues that affect your students?*

Chapter Three Discussion Questions:

- *How can the work of Fernando Cardenal apply to your teaching philosophy?*
- *How do you think the “profe” felt at the beginning of the crusade and why?*
- *The author describes the paintings as “the primeval vision of the world.” What do you think this means and what does it say about the people living in Solentiname?*
- *Do you think teaching the peasants and urban poor to read with propaganda from the revolution was the most effective way to teach them to read? Why or why not?*
- *In some ways, the brigadistas are children and in other, they are adults. What do you think of that assessment?*
- *“How simple it would have been to process all this information by computer, but there were only 15 of them in the whole country.” Why is this quote so significant? How does it impact the literacy rate?*
- *What parts of the brigadista lessons were good and why? What parts were bad and why?*

- *What was the most interesting aspect of the brigadista training having gone through formal teacher education?*
- *Do you think there is any way that the US could create a strong union between people of different SESS or political parties, like occurred in Nicaragua after the literacy campaign?*
- *During June/July of the campaign, the brigadistas were kicked into overdrive due to the impending closure of the campaign. Do you feel that same push at the end of the school year?*
- *The brigadistas described a “click” around lesson 8 or 9, where learning is starting to make sense. What has been the best “click” moment or “lightbulb moment” you have experienced with a student?*
- *What would be an effective, attainable, and sustainable plan?*
- *One brigadista said, “But I am sorry to say I knew that day in my heart that I would rather be a live coward than a dead hero.” What do you think she meant by this?*

Chapter Four Discussion Questions:

- *Thinking about how some of the arts played a role in the Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign, where does the US incorporate the arts into their curriculum for literacy other than poetry units?*
- *Should literacy have more emphasis on the arts in the U.S. curriculum?*
- *How can Freire’s idea of raising consciousness, as well as Cardenal’s use of vocabulary pertinent to the campesinos lives be applied to our current classrooms?*
- *One book said, ‘This was really new: campesinos raised for centuries to keep silent were being begged to rise and speak.’ This made me wonder if we need to restructure the way*

we run our classrooms. Are we teaching students to stay silent and just listen and learn?

How do you structure your classroom to encourage the sharing of ideas and

collaborative discussion?

- *The books states learning to read is an endless process. How do you set up goals with your students?*
- *Do you think the methods and lessons organized in the instructional manuals and primers were a good pedagogical practice? Why or why not?*
- *How would you compare the brigadistas' teaching process to ours?*
- *One brigadista, Miguel, talks to his fellow brigadistas about how their duty goes beyond teaching the campesinos to read and write and how they need to encourage their families to discuss politics. Should we do the same kind of thing in our classrooms? Meaning, should we not shy away from the harder topics, but rather go beyond simply reading and writing?*
- *"The transformation of the whole damned society from passive to active. And it has to come from within or it will never be real." What does this quote mean, and how does it apply to what or how you teach your students?*
- *Freire said, "You learn to read and write so you can identify the reality in which you live, so you can become a protagonist of history rather than a spectator." This made me wonder, how many of us are still spectators despite all that we have learned and have been given. How can you become more of a protagonist in your own life and less of a spectator? How can you reinforce this idea in your classroom?*
- *One head teacher said, "And every brigadista I found not giving his class seemed to weigh so much heavier than those who did." In other words, she was focusing on her*

students that were failing, not on all of the successes of her other students. Does this ever happen to you as a teacher?

- *How did the brigadistas connect the students' learning to their personal lives?*
- *Could you compare their 3-step lesson process, #1 conversation, #2 the reading, #3 practice and exercise, to the lessons you teach in your own experience?*

Chapter Five Discussion Questions:

- *What would you ask the brigadistas that are still alive today about their motivation for participating in the literacy campaign?*
- *It seemed like there were many times that people wanted to give up. The struggles outside of the classroom became overbearing and difficult to deal with. Does this at all relate to your feelings as a teacher?*
- *A few of the brigadistas had to change houses and were sad to leave their campesino families. Do you ever feel this at the end of the year towards your students?*
- *In your classroom, how do you deal with obstacles such as family or child illness, poverty, death, and differences in politics?*
- *Do you think the adolescent teachers considered the political commitment to their cause?*
- *How do you feel the adolescent teachers felt about the conflict between generations?*
- *If you were a brigadista and your students did not reach their goal, would you want to stay to have them achieve their goal, or go home?*
- *There were brigadistas' homes that showed the same signs of poverty that they saw among the campesinos. What stereotypes about the brigadistas could this knowledge have broken? (ex. class issues, privilege, etc.)*

- *What are some of the similarities between the brigadistas' attitudes about supplies and modern US teachers' attitudes about supplies?*
- *If you were a brigadista, how would you feel if you didn't help your family reach their goal? Even if there are external forces that you cannot help?*
- *How did the environment influence the students' learning of literacy?*
- *Do you think it was right for the brigadistas to stop working with the struggling students towards the end of the campaign?*
- *Towards the end of the campaign, a brigadista said, "The exercises began to take on new meaning and the whole process was infused with the excitement of discovery." What does this quote mean to you?*
- *What do you think someone meant by "this is going to hurt them for the rest of their lives" when discussing the dismissal of the two brigadistas?*
- *What did the insurgents hope to gain from murdering brigadistas?*
- *One brigadista stated, I taught the campesinos how to read and write, and they taught me how to be a person." In what ways have your students transformed you throughout your experiences with teaching, in either positive or negative ways?*
- *Brigadista training emphasized being "open to all the things your students will teach you." Why do you think that is important?*
- *Why do the campesinos, who don't know enough about their own bodies to properly treat sickness, keep having many children?*
- *We have read about the differences in literacy levels between city residents and urban residents. How can you compare this to your own experiences with students?*

- *Do you think the campesinos understood the importance of the revolution and literacy campaign, or do you think they were too far removed from the implications of what was happening living in the countryside?*

Chapter Six Discussion Questions:

- *Would you continue to teach in the face of rape, violence, death if it meant liberation for your country?*
- *What might be the differences in attitude and work ethic between the male brigadistas and the female brigadistas?*
- *If you were in Father Cardenal's position, what would you have done when literacy volunteers started dying?*
- *How do you think the fact that women had little contact with the outside world affected their wanting to learn literacy? Did they feel there was a need?*
- *What does the involvement of the women in the communities in the efforts after the crusade say about the impact of the crusade on the campesinos?*
- *Seeing the emotional toll that was taking place on the teachers, could anything have been done ahead of time to prepare them psychologically for the challenges ahead?*
- *The men are originally against learning to read, but then change their ways. Do you ever see this reluctance with your students or parents?*
- *What gender stereotypes have you experienced in your personal life and/or school?*

Chapter Seven Discussion Questions:

- *Do you think there is a relationship between Cardenal's love for the youth and his success? What about millennials? Gen Z?*

- *Literacy is seen as a national responsibility. Lowering literacy rates was something people left their lives behind for and risked their lives for. Do you feel like we need the same fervor and intensity regarding education in our own country? What educational cause do you think we should be willing to fight for like the youth of Nicaragua did?*
- *Teaching the campesinos to read will not fully get them involved in society. What other steps do you think need to be taken to involve them in Nicaragua, to participate and understand the issues?*
- *What is being done to combat adult illiteracy in the United States? What should be done?*
- *Something that I hadn't thought about was the effect weather and geography had on the attendance of classes. Is there anything that you have learned as a teacher that has surprised you or that you hadn't thought about?*
- *As you learn about literacy campaigns, do you think that the U.S. needs a literacy campaign currently to help with literacy problems?*
- *Some governments suppress literacy in parts of the population. During the time of slavery in the US, it was illegal for slaves to be taught to read in certain areas. Why would some governments forbid literacy while others, like Castro's in Cuba, encourage it?*
- *What do you think was the United States' motivation for trying to stop a movement toward Nicaragua's freedom when we're a country known for fighting for our own freedom?*