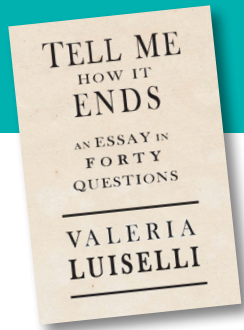


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DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1 Author Valeria Luiselli describes migrant children's stories as "always shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order" (2). And yet, the essay insists that these stories must be told, even before they can be understood. In your own words: if a story has no end, and cannot make narrative sense, why tell it?
- 2 "I recall every nuance of the first story I heard and translated in court [...] perhaps because it's a story condensed in a very specific, material detail that has continued to haunt me [...] the image of that piece of paper came back to me, insistently, with the strange power of symbols" (43). What images and symbols stay with you after reading this book? Why do you think these moments had such an effect on you?
- 3 This book is full of incomplete stories, unknowns, absences, and voids, such as the two blanks in the following question: "Where is the child's mother? ____ father? ____" (11). In our age of immediate information, how are truths forgotten, omitted from public record, and obscured?
- 4 How does Luiselli's perspective—as a writer, translator, and mother—frame and anchor this essay?
- 5 "The family tree of migrant families is always split into two trunks: those who leave and those who stay" (49). How might the fracturing of a migrant family affect a child's ability to 1) survive their migrant journey, 2) transition to life in the U.S., and 3) tell their story in a clear, honest way?
- 6 Luiselli calls for personal, national, and international accountability in response to refugee crises and political crimes. In the book, what are some examples of a lack of accountability? Can you think of other historical situations in which governments have perpetuated, exacerbated, or created crisis by refusing to admit responsibility?
- 7 [Almerisa](#), the subject of artist **Rineke Dijkstra**'s portraits at the ICA, met the artist at a refugee center in Amsterdam for Bosnian asylum-seekers. When she moved with her family, she was six years old, the same age as some of the migrant children Luiselli meets. How do Dijkstra's portraits reflect Almerisa's experience of growing up and adjusting to life in her new home? How do these photographic depictions compare to the experiences Luiselli describes?



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- 8 “It’s strange how concepts can erode so easily, how words we once used lightly can alchemize abruptly into something toxic” (16). This book notes the strange “alchemy” of words: their power, their weight, their ability to insinuate and transform. Choose one of the following words: *immigrant, refugee, alien, illegal, undocumented*. Analyze this word from several different perspectives. What might this word mean to the migrant children Luiselli interviewed? To the American-born children of immigrant families? To other U.S. citizens, or to politicians, lawyers, and media in the U.S. and Mexico?
- 9 **Wangechi Mutu’s** *A Promise to Communicate*, now on display at the ICA, creates an irrational interpretation of the world. In this world—rough and textured and composed of gray rescue blankets—all nations are part of a tapestry of interconnected crisis and aid. In *Tell Me How It Ends*, Luiselli remembers listening to the song “Straight to Hell” by the Clash, and how, in that moment, another country’s struggle became hers. Consider how certain stories can echo across time and space. Does *Tell Me How It Ends* remind you of other political realities—current, historical, or from your own personal history?
- 10 In a 2017 interview, Luiselli states: “My work is always about *mapping*...The novel that I’m writing now has to do with mapping a series of children and their stories travelling alone together, and putting it in a single space in order to understand it as a kind of common phenomenon.” Compare how Luiselli uses mapping in her writing and how Mutu does in her visual art. How might these connections lead to greater understanding and/or empathy between people and nations?
- 11 When a child is taken into the custody of Border Patrol officials, they are quickly placed in a detention center, commonly known as the *hielera* or “the icebox” (21). Compare how blankets are alluded to in Luiselli’s description of the *hielera* and in Mutu’s artwork at the ICA.
- 12 Luiselli recalls the strangeness of the translation process, how she found herself “not knowing where translation ends and interpretation starts” (62). What distinction is the author drawing between translation and interpretation? In your own words, what is the distinction?
- 13 Mutu states: “[The] realization of Earth being a shared space has pushed us into a crisis of communication and crisis of our shared space.” How does this statement apply to your reading of *Tell Me How It Ends*?



Image 1

1. **Rineke Dijkstra, *Almerisa, Asylum Seekers' Center, Leiden, The Netherlands, March 14, 1994, 1994/1999***. Chromogenic color print, 24 3/8 x 20 1/2 inches (61.9 x 52.1 cm). Gift of Sandra and Gerald Fineberg. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. © Rineke Dijkstra

2. **Wangechi Mutu, Installation view, *Wangechi Mutu: A Promise to Communicate*, ICA/Boston, 2018**. Courtesy the artist. Photo by Charles Mayer Photography. © Wangechi Mutu



Image 2

This ICA Reads Discussion Guide was co-developed by GrubStreet and the ICA. Contributing writers include Sara Rivera, Julia Cohn, and Monica Garza.



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