

Discussion Questions

Two or Three Things I Know for Sure by Dorothy Allison (1996)

1. In *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Allison writes about life in her house as a child. Compare and contrast her experiences with the home experiences of Esperanza and Sally in *The House on Mango Street*.
2. Describe the various aspects of the narrator's identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.)? How do these elements contribute to our understanding of the text's theme(s)?
3. On page 51 of the text, Allison writes, "Women lose their lives not knowing they can do something different. Men eat themselves up believing they have to be the thing they have been made." Reflect on what this quote means in the context of gender (masculinity and femininity). Discuss the meaning of this quote in the context of the book.
4. On page 72, Allison writes "Two or three things I know, two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that to go on living I have to tell stories, that stories are the one sure way I know to touch the heart and change the world." Explore the role(s) of storytelling in this text. What are the different reasons Allison tells stories? Does it matter if they are true stories?
5. Throughout the text, Allison explores the link between sexuality and violence. Discuss the various ways these two topics are connected in the novel. Did this discussion make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
6. Examine the relationship between women and class in this text. What connections does Allison make between the behavior and feelings of the women in the book and their class status. How does poverty influence their lives?
7. Throughout the book, Allison discusses the changing ways she views her own body. Explain the ways she views and understands her body at different points in the text, and describe some of the things she does to create these changes and/or in response to these changes.
8. This book is a memoir. In what ways does this make it different from the texts we have read so far? What difference does it make to know that the things you are reading are based in reality rather than fiction?
9. What other themes and symbols do you find to be particularly interesting and/or important in the text? Why do these stand out, and how can we connect them to the larger theme of the text and/or the historical moment in which it was written?
10. Compare and contrast an element from *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* with one (or more) of the other texts we have read so far this semester.