



## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A MINKE WHALE IN THE AMAZON

Dispatches from the Brazilian Rainforest  
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## Discussion Questions

1. In the introduction, Zuker writes, “What strikes me is the way a text always seems insufficient when faced with a reality that stretches our narrative capacity to grasp it.” [2] How does this “friction” set the tone for *The Life and Death of a Minke Whale in the Amazon*, a book of translated reports and stories?
2. Zuker mentions the scientific theory that we have entered a new geological era called the “Pyrocene” in which fires and burnings are more common than ever. How does the chapter “A Forest in Flames” [3-13] capture the geopolitical corruption and profits of Brazilian Rainforest fires, logging, and crop farming in comparison to the culture of the Tupinambá people tied to the land?
3. How does the titular chapter, “The Life and Death of a Minke Whale in the Amazon” [37-53] touch upon Indigenous rights, environmental conservation, and folktales?
4. “They are characters in a story they’d rather not be writing.” [59] Describe the approach Zuker uses when writing about the lives of Venezuelan refugees in Brazil.
5. In the chapter “Poison Fields” [89-90] Mr. Manioc was forced from his land by corporate soy farms buying up acres of neighboring land. These corporations would even spray their fields with toxic pesticides when his children were playing outside: “His family’s health and livelihood were under attack.” [90] Do you know of similar stories of family farms working to survive in the face of corporate agriculture?
6. On the topic of Indigenous medicine, Zuker quotes, “‘Our experts were compared to witches,’ says João Paulo. ‘Our knowledge was categorized as profane. We were demonized and persecuted.’” [139] Discuss the Tukano ways of medicine and care in comparison to practices you are familiar with. Explore the notion that Indigenous medicine is “bodily rebellion” [151] against colonization.
7. Reflect on the life story of the first Indigenous person to die of COVID-19 in Brazil, Dona Luisa dos Santos Lobato. How did the pandemic affect the people of the Amazon and highlight the inequality they face?
8. The chapter “Anamã: Six Months Underwater, Six Months on Dry Land” [128-145] portrays a city in which climate change is not something that will occur in the future, but it is already shaping people’s lives in the heart of the world’s biggest forest. Can you perceive signs of climate change in the city where you live? How do older people around you reflect on the changes in climate?
9. In the epilogue, Zuker writes, “I wanted to try to understand what life means in this part of the planet, which is so much discussed and yet so poorly understood; to understand life and its powers of creation—powers that impressed me more and more with every conversation, every boat trip, every visit.” [181] Highlight the moments where you saw life and power in a new way while reading *The Life and Death of a Minke Whale in the Amazon*.
10. Throughout the collection, Zuker emphasizes the need to focus on the people themselves, not the statistics they fall into. Which people and their lives stuck out to you?
11. Reflect on the impact of journalism during times of geopolitical, humanitarian, and environmental crisis. Which outlets and journalists do you regularly turn to?

