

Book Club Questions Incident at San Miguel

1. The central theme of Incident at San Miguel is our responsibility to family and how that responsibility can affect our lives. What do you consider to be your responsibility to family and friends? How far would you go to protect them?
2. Did Aaron do the right thing by helping Moises to evade the Batista regime? How would Moises's life have been different if he had been arrested by Batista's forces?
3. The author writes about ordinary people faced with extraordinary circumstances. What do you think you would have done if faced with a situation like that of the Cohan brothers, and Cuban Jewry in general, in 1960. How would you react to the unexpected or the unthinkable today? What would cause you to flee your country?
4. Aaron and Moises's father, Raphael, rejects Ana Teresa because she isn't Jewish. The fact that she's a communist is a secondary problem. Yet having a close relative in a high position in the new government could help the family. What are your thoughts about this?
5. The Cuban Jewish community, unlike those in Europe during the Nazi period, was secure and only rarely experienced antisemitism. They were not targeted by the Castro regime for their Jewish identity, rather for being part of the entrepreneurial class. Given the political currents in the United States today, and the commensurate rise in antisemitic incidents in the past few years, should American Jews be prepared to seek alternatives? What can we do to stabilize and defend our position in American society?
6. Was Aaron set up by the communist regime when he received permission to leave? Could you imagine making the tough decisions he was forced to make concerning his wife's and child's status?
7. Do you think Fidel Castro's communism brought any positive changes to Cuba and at what price?
8. In the end, despite his dedication to the cause for more than forty years, was Moises satisfied with what Castro and communism brought to Cuba? Did it serve him and his family well? Did he regret the choices he made?
9. Raul learns about his heritage and decides to make Aliyah. What do you believe is the eternal pull of Jewish heritage, especially to those not raised with its traditions? Consider those who discover they are Jewish through DNA testing or through uncovered documents, or the case of Latinos whose ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition and 500+ years later rediscover their Jewish roots because of unusual traditions they've kept up for generations.
10. In my debut novel, Forgive Maximo Rothman, the title character meets Rafael Trujillo. In The Interpreter, the protagonist, Kurt Berlin meets Adolf Hitler. Che Guevara plays a pivotal role in both the book and the true events behind this story. What do you think it would be like to have actually met a giant of history?
11. When Aaron and Beatriz emigrated to the United States they faced many challenges and became more religiously observant out of necessity. How difficult do you think that was for them? What would you have done in this situation? Did they miss their Cuban Jewish way of life?

12. Why do you think the older generation and others stayed in Cuba, despite the extreme changes brought about by the revolution?
13. Considering the fact that the family was separated for forty years by the US Embargo against the Cuban government, can the reader differentiate which parts of the story are fiction and which are factual?
14. Consider your own school education and current knowledge about the island nation of Cuba, only ninety miles from Florida's Keys and a quick forty minute flight from Miami. Did you know much about the political turmoil between the countries and how each American President has dealt with this issue? Do you know about the 1980 exodus of the Marielitos or remember the 1999 Elian Gonzalez custody case? Do you think the relationship between the USA and Cuba could or should be different today?
15. Were you satisfied with the novel's ending or would you have preferred reading more about whether or how the relationship between Aaron and Moises continued?