Into the Beautiful North by Luis Alberto Urrea
Lewis & Clark Library NEA Big Read
Community Discussion
Thursday, January 21, 7:00 pm

We'll be discussing the following questions / ideas (as well as any others that arise!):

1. As Toby Lichtig writes in a piece for *The Guardian*, "A good epigraph should be more than mere adornment. Better to think of it as a lens – or a sucker punch." Urrea starts out *Into the Beautiful North* with the following epigraph from the Aztec poet Xayacamach of Tizatlán:

   > *O friends, I have come searching for you,*
   > *I crossed over flowering fields,*
   > *And here, at last, I've found.*
   > *Rejoice.*
   > *Tell me your stories.*
   > *O friends, I am here.*

   If this is our lens—or our sucker punch—what is it telling us?

2. What does this text say about the desire to *escape* home? See: "Nayeli was dreaming of leaving town again. She wanted to see anything, everything" (8). How does the idea of escape relate to your own understanding of home?

3. What does this text say about the need and desire to *return* home? See Nayeli telling Tacho "We're home!" in the Mexican restaurant where they're later rejected (278-281). Again, how does the idea of return relate to your own understanding of home?

4. What does this text say about *comfort*? See Nayeli's feelings about Atómiko: "She did not like him, but she did not believe he would allow them to be harmed" (179). What other examples of unlikely comfort do you see in the novel?

5. *Into the Beautiful North* is often lauded as a feminist novel due to its strong female characters. What makes a story a feminist story? And if we understand feminism in its plurality, what is at stake in defining this novel in such a way?

6. Urrea's novel brings us a story about the borderland and border crossings that highly contrasts mainstream narratives that center on the dangers of the Mexico/U.S. border and the horrors of crossing (family separation, internment, harassment, death). How does his story upend or complicate the narratives we are so accustomed to? What is upheld?