

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The Iron Bridge by Anton Piatigorsky

1. Are Piatigorsky's imagined early lives for these infamous figures believable?
2. How might Idi's mother, the soldiers, and the major have influenced Idi's decision to become a leader? How might their influence have been a corrupting as well as a motivating force?
3. Sâr's struggle between desire and shame persists throughout his story; even at the end, his apparent certainty is laced with doubt. Do you think he will return to the dancers' house and let his desire win, or will his shame prevent him from repeating the mistake?
4. Is Tse-tung's struggle with his father merely a display of his internal character? How may it also help to shape him into the figure that he eventually becomes as both a great leader and a devastating dictator?
5. Why does Tse-tung fail or refuse to engage in *yuan fang*, in other words, to consummate the marriage?
6. Soso sees himself as powerful and superior to the other seminarians despite his physical and financial limitations. Do you see this self-assessment as accurate, or is it misleading?
7. In what ways does Rafael use the omens of his superstitions to make events happen in the way he expects them to happen? Does he ultimately believe in them, or does he merely use them to explain his actions?

8. In what ways do secondary characters such as Gustl and Iremashvili provide support for their friends the main characters? Do they also hinder them?
9. Do nicknames like Adi and Soso make it easier to sympathize with the characters? If so, in what ways does this help or hinder the reader's interpretation of the stories?
10. There are numerous differences between the lives of these future dictators. Are there any similarities between some or all of them? If so, do these similarities prepare them for their positions of rule?
11. Do the actions and decisions of these dictators in their early years occur as a result of their character or do they form their character? Might they also show some redemptive traits?
12. How do determination and leadership manifest themselves in the main character of each story?
13. Are the characters defined more in their moments of weakness or their moments of strength? Which of those are their strongest traits, according to Piatigorsky's writing?