

Study Guide Questions:

“At The Edge of Conquest: The Journey of Chief Wai-Wai”

- 1) Imagine yourself to be Chief Wai-Wai. Why would you take the drastic step of traveling into Brazil’s capitol from your remote village in order to defend your lands? Why not simply defend your territory as your people have defended it for centuries?
- 2) You are still in the role of Chief Wai-Wai. What have you had to learn about “the white man’s ways” in order to successfully negotiate on behalf of your people? Do you think that you had a clear idea of the size of the Brazilian population before arriving in Brazil’s capitol? How would you describe your first reactions upon arriving in Brasilia? What gave you the strength to take a trip of such epic proportions?
- 3) What is the real significance of this trip? Does Wai-Wai really expect to have an impact on proceedings? What can he learn for future reference? How do you think this first journey out of the forest will impact the future generations of his people?
- 4) How would the loss of the Waiapi’s Northern Territory impact the livelihood of the tribe? Would it affect hunting? How would impact their water supply?
- 5) What role does language play in the Waiapi’s ability to negotiate with the Brazilian government? Do you think that negotiations such as these will be easier for future generations of Waiapi leaders given that a school is now regularly teaching Portuguese classes?
- 6) Do you think that the Waiapi are right to mine for gold? What do you think will be the long term effects of their participation in a cash based economy? How else could they use money to help their people? What are the potential downsides of participating in a cash economy?
- 7) Imagine yourself as the representative from the Brazilian Indian Agency known by the acronym FUNAI? What is your impression of these Indians? Do you think that they should have made the trip? Do you think they have been treated fairly? Do you think that they have a

right to be in the meeting in which the fate of their lands is being decided?

- 8) What do you think about the role of the anthropologist Dominique Gallois? Do you think that she is overstepping her boundaries as an “objective scientist” by accompanying the Indians on this trip? Do you think she should have let them just fend for themselves? Do you think that she looks at the Indians differently from the way the Indian Agency officials do? If so, why do you think that is?
- 9) It is a well-known fact that the Brazilian government is in massive debt. Where do you think that the Waiapi can find the funds to establish boundaries around their lands if the Brazilian government is not able to do so?
- 10) Are there any similarities between the journey that Chief Wai-Wai undertook and those taken by Native American leaders in the second half of the nineteenth century? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Do you think the Indians living in Brazil will ultimately follow the same path of acculturation that Native American populations in North America have followed? Why so?

Bibliography

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