



**Discussion Questions: *The Moor's Account***  
"Words, Words, Words" Book Club—February 2021

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Were there any passages that stuck out to you?
2. Laila Lalami based *The Moor's Account* on an actual account of the 1528 Narváez expedition—the first known travelogue of life in North America—written by the real Cabeza de Vaca. Why do you think she chose to take this story on as piece of historical fiction, rather than a non-fiction research project?
3. What role do stories and storytelling—from rumor to legend to fairytale—play in the novel?
4. After being stripped of his name, Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori, our narrator is careful about reporting the names of those he meets on his journey and the given names of places that are changed by the Castilians. What significance do names have in this story, and for our narrator? Did it cause you to think differently about the names of places around you?
5. How does Mustafa's relationship to his religion change over the course of the novel? How do you think he would identify his spirituality by the end of the story?
6. Mustafa notes at one point that Cabeza de Vaca had altered details in his accounting of their travels "because he was the one who told the story—he wanted to be its hero." What other characters in this story intrigued you? Who else's "hero journey" would you be interested in hearing about?
7. The conquistadors consider themselves to be more culturally and technologically advanced than the Native American tribes they encounter in Florida and beyond. Does this prove to be a true assessment? What surprised you about the mores, beliefs, and customs of the indigenous characters in the novel?
8. What did you think of the complex relationships Mustafa has with his three Spanish companions? What affect do you think this experience had on them?
9. What did you think about the roles of the women in this story?
10. In interviews, Laila Lalami notes that despite growing up in Morocco, she never learned about the historical figure of "Estebanico," who is thought to be the first African explorer of America. Why were people of color—non-Europeans—left out of historical accounts of New World exploration? How does the idea of this omission develop, particularly near the end of the novel? What was omitted from the "official" version, and why?
11. How did this novel confirm or upend any previously held ideas about the Spanish conquistadors and their colonization of the Americas? Do you feel differently about the common narrative of this period in history? Why or why not?