

These Americans: Stories and a Novella

By Jyotsna Sreenivasan

Possible Discussion Questions

Thank you for reading *These Americans*! If your class, book club, or reading group would like to host a virtual Q & A session with me, please contact me at [jyotsna1sree@gmail.com](mailto: jyotsna1sree@gmail.com).

I work as a secondary school teacher, and after we read a story or poem in class, I generally like to ask the students for their first impressions, comments, and questions, before I jump in with my teacher questions. I would invite you to do the same with your group. Allow space for readers to voice their initial reactions, and to ask their own questions.

If you would like additional questions, I hope the ones below are helpful. And if you have suggestions for questions I could add, please let me know!

General discussion questions for any of the stories

1. What do you think of the title of the whole book? How does the title “These Americans” resonate with each story?
2. Talk about a favorite scene or moment in the story.
3. Ask about something that puzzles or intrigues you in the story.
4. Discuss the personalities of one or more characters.
5. Discuss any themes or messages that you noticed in the story.
6. Discuss something in the story that evoked a strong or unexpected emotion for you.
7. Choose a character who is unlike you. Find a point of connection or a way to be empathetic with that character.
8. No matter what your ethnic background, you may have connected personally with some aspect of the story. What characters, incidents, or themes resonated personally with you? Perhaps they reminded you of a feeling, person, or incident in your own life.

“Mirror”

1. Discuss the symbol of the mirror in this story.
2. How does Prema’s view of herself change during the story?
3. What do you think Prema’s life will be like going forward?

“At Home”

1. Amiya is a young child. What are some things about her situation and her family’s situation that she does not understand or is not conscious of?
2. Discuss the incidents that cause Amiya to believe that she is not “normal.”
3. What do you think of Amiya’s teacher? When, in your opinion, does the teacher do a good job? What mistakes do you think the teacher makes?
4. What do you think “home” and feeling “at home” mean for Amiya and other members of her family?
5. What do you think of the ending of the story? Were you surprised by it? Do you think Cheryl really wants to look just like Amiya?

“Revolution”

1. Discuss the meaning of revolution in this story.
2. Neel is desperate for male role models. Discuss what he might learn or internalize from the men in his life.
3. How do you think Neel’s life will be different (or not) once he returns to his home in the United States?

“Dreams”

1. Discuss the role of dreams in this story.
2. What are some things the family members do not understand about each other?
3. The story is told from multiple points of view. Whose point of view is not included? Why do you think this character’s point of view was left out?

4. What do you think the father will do after the end of the story? How will he interact with his family in the morning at breakfast?

“The Sweater”

1. How does Nandini (the daughter) seek to be like her mother and to distance herself from her mother at the same time?
2. What does Nandini learn from the process of making the sweater?
3. How do you think Nandini’s life will be different going forward?

“Mrs. Raghavendra’s Daughter”

1. Mrs. Raghavendra describes herself as a coward. Do you agree or disagree?
2. Discuss the “monster” that Mrs. Raghavendra imagines.
3. What is the turning point in the relationship for Anjana and for her mother? Is it the same turning point for both?
4. Do you agree with Mrs. Raghavendra’s definition of the purpose of life?

“Crystal Vase: Snapshots”

1. Discuss the symbol of the crystal vase.
2. Revati and Liz used to be best friends as children. Why can’t the women connect with each other anymore? Is it anyone’s fault?
3. The story is not told in chronological order. Why not? How does the structure of the story enhance (or not) the story’s meaning for you?
4. What do you think Revati and Liz’s relationship will be like going forward?

“Perfect Sunday”

1. Discuss the role of religion and/or spirituality in the story.
2. Do you think the main character has a strong marriage or not?
3. How do you interpret the ending?

“Hawk”

1. How are the two main characters, Bhagya and Manisha, alike and different from each other?
2. What do you think of Manisha as a teacher? Does she seem like a good teacher or not?
3. What did you learn about Bhagya’s career that was especially interesting or surprising to you?
4. The school administrator pushes Manisha to include more diversity in the classroom. Do you think Manisha goes too far? What does diversity mean to you?
5. Manisha says that in her next teaching job, she will try not to do anything that draws attention to her ethnicity. Do you think this is the right choice?
6. Do you think Bhagya makes the right decision for herself at the end of her life?
7. What do you think the hawk symbolizes in this story?