

DIY DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAKE YOUR BIG READ DISCUSSION A BIG SUCCESS

First time leading a book discussion? No problem. We have some tips to help make your Big Read book discussion of *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri a big success with this Do It Yourself Discussion Guide.

- **Make it fun.** Meet somewhere that's comfortable for everyone. Keep it casual by enjoying drinks and snacks while you discuss.
- **You know your group best.** Feel free to skip questions or ask them in a different order based on the members of your group and how you think they'll participate.
- **Go off-script.** If your group was really interested in one aspect of the book, feel free to focus on that. Ask your own questions to dive deeper and let other members ask questions, too.
- **Pause.** Be sure to give members time to think and answer before you jump in with your own answer to every question.
- **If your group is quiet,** talk about related topics that don't deal directly with the book. For example, let members tell a little history about their own first names, then ask question 4 to relate this conversation back to *The Namesake*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1-4 stars, how many stars would you give *The Namesake* and why?
2. What one word or phrase do you think best describes the book? Feel free to expand.
3. Like the characters in the book, have you found yourself in a new place before? Share about the experience.
 - In what way was your experience similar, and in what way was it different?
4. How does Gogol try to remake his identity after trying to rename himself? What are the results?
 - How do our names define us, both in our families and in society?
 - How important is a name to you?
 - How are names in your family chosen?
5. How does Ashima try and make over her home in Cambridge to remind her of what she's left behind in Calcutta?
 - Are her efforts successful, or does this make her long more for India?
6. Ashima finds that people take a sudden interest in Gogol's birth. How do children change our place in the community?
 - Have you ever connected with someone you may have otherwise never spoken to through children?
7. Ashoke is saved from a massive train wreck in India in his youth. Is Ashoke's love for his family more poignant because of his brush with death?
 - Why do you think he hides his past from Gogol?
 - What moments define us more: accidents or achievements? Mourning or celebration?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT.)

8. What do you think Gogol wants most from his life?
 - How is it different from what his family wants from him, and what they wanted when they first came to the U.S.?
 - How have expectations changed through generations in your family?
9. Lahiri said, “America is a real presence in the book; the characters must struggle and come to terms with what it means to live here, to be brought up here, to belong and not belong here.” Did *The Namesake* allow you to think of America in a new way?
 - Do you agree that America is a real presence in the book?
 - How is India a presence in the book?
10. Ashima and Ashoke’s marriage is arranged. Gogol’s romantic relationships are very different from his parents. What draws Gogol to his lovers?
 - From where do we take our notions of romantic love: family, friends, society, media, a combination?
 - How does your cultural heritage define your ideas of love?
11. How does the death of Gogol’s father turn him back to his family?
 - How does it change Sonia and Ashima’s relationship?
12. What do you imagine Gogol might do after the book ends?
13. What is your main “takeaway” from *The Namesake*?
 - What will you remember months down the road?
14. Would you read other books by Jhumpa Lahiri?

READ ON

Jhumpa Lahiri’s works include:

- *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999; Pulitzer Prize winner)
- *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008)
- *The Lowland* (2013)

If you enjoyed *The Namesake*, you may also like:

- *A Good Indian Wife* by Anne Cherian (2008)
- *Arranged Marriage* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1996)
- *Secret Daughter* by Shilpi Somaya Gowda (2010)
- *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini (2013)
- *Atlas of Unknowns* by Tania James (2009)



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