



Book Club in a Bag Discussion Questions

Boat People by Sharon Bala

1. What is the significance of the title?
2. Bala has said that she wrote the novel as a “meditation on empathy.” Discuss how the novel explores both the need for empathy as well as how it is tested.
3. The novel is told through the perspectives of three characters: Priya, Grace, and Mahindan. What do you think the reader gains by having access to these different points of view? What do each of these perspectives bring to the story?
4. Examine the relationships between the parents and their children. What sacrifices have these parents made for their children? What expectations do the parents have in turn for their children?
5. Kumi is suffering from Alzheimer’s. In what ways does her illness reflect some of the book’s themes?
6. Has your perspective on immigrants and refugees changed after reading this book? Is there anything you now see differently?
7. Did you think Mahindan should be allowed to stay throughout the novel? At what points did you waver one way or the other? How do you feel in the end?
8. Consider the book’s epigraph by Martin Luther King Jr.: “We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.” How does this epigraph relate to the plot or set the stage for the themes explored in the book?
9. Discuss the book’s ending. Why do you think the author chose to end the book when she does?

The above questions were adapted from <http://sharonbala.com/discussion-questions/> to enhance your discussion of the book.

Book Club in a Bag

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