



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

Behind the Beautiful Forevers by Katherine Boo

1. The lives of ordinary women—their working lives, domestic lives, and inner lives—are an important part of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Do women like Zehrunisa and Asha have more freedom in an urban slum than they would have had in the villages where they were born?
2. As Abdul works day and night with garbage, keeping his head down, trying to support his large family, some other city-dwellers think of him as garbage, too. How do Abdul and his sort-of friend, Sunil, try to protect themselves and sustain self-esteem in the face of other people's contempt?
3. In Annawadi, Asha takes a series of calculated risks to give her daughter Manju a life far more hopeful than that of other young women such as Meena. What does Asha lose by her efforts to improve her daughter's life chances? What does she gain? Were Asha's choices understandable to you, in the end?
4. The kind of corruption *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* shows us is often described as "petty." Do you agree with that characterization of the corruption Annawadians encounter in their daily lives? Why might such corruption be on the increase as India grows wealthier as a nation?
5. Does Asha have a point when she argues that something isn't wrong if the powerful people say that it's right? How does constant exposure to corruption change a person's internal understanding of right and wrong?
6. How does being wrenched away from his work responsibilities at Annawadi change Abdul's understanding of the hardships of other people? Are terms like liberty and freedom understood differently by people who live in different conditions?
7. How has Fatima's personality been shaped by the fact that she has been defined since birth by her disability—very literally named by it?

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

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