

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri

- What's in a name? Discuss how members of the group feel about their own names and how they got them.
- How is Gogol named? (p. 28)
- How does he like his name? (p. 28 at birth, p. 59 in kindergarten, p. 66, 75, 91 in school)
- Why is it so important to him to change his name? Read aloud p.101 (and see also p. 96, 100, 102, 103)
- What is the transition from Gogol to Nikhil like for him? (p. 112) How does he experience it?
- Gogol thinks that changing his name will change him – does it?
- Why does Ashoke wait so long to tell Gogol his story of the accident? (p. 28, 49)
- Might Gogol have felt differently about it if he had? Discuss Gogol's reaction when he does find out (p.122-123).
- Ashima and Ashoke each have a different perception of Gogol's place in America. Ashoke calls him a lucky boy (p. 24) and Ashima pities him (p. 25). Why the difference?
- At some point (p. 54) the perspective of the novel changes and we begin to see events and people through Gogol's eyes. Discuss how this changes the way we experience the book.
- After Ashoke dies, Ashima remakes her life. She learns to drive, gets a job, makes new friends. Her name means "without borders" (p. 278); discuss how her name defines and explains her character.

- What makes a place home?
- When does Pemberton Road become home for Ashima and Ashoke?
- How do they integrate their Indian ethnicity and their American experience? (Read p. 64)
- How does Ashima comfort herself?
- Why does Gogol feel New Haven home more than Pemberton Road (p. 108)?
- What kind of architecture does Gogol want to do?

- How do Ashima and Ashoke adapt to American culture and customs?
- How do they resist? Does this book expand our understanding of American culture?
- Read p. 49 on being a foreigner.
- Why does Gogol feel that his immersion in Maxine's family is a betrayal of his own? (p. 140, 141, 142)
- Food is such an important part of this book. Talk about how food relates to the Gangulis experience of being Indian and being American. (p. 1, 26, 38, 64, 65, 274)

- What is a self? Of what is it made?
- Trace the development of Gogol's identity in light of his names, where he lives, his women.
 - Memories (p. 52, 185); the lighthouse.
 - Chance and necessity (p. 287-291).



Skokie Public Library

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