

A GROUP OF ONE: Teachers' Guide

GENERAL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS:

1) Individuality

- * the need for a teenager to establish an identity of her/his own apart from her/his parents and grandparents
- * peer pressure to conform
- * fear of being identified as different
- * finding oneself and being an individual (being true to oneself) despite the pressure to conform
- * the possible costs of being true to oneself and being labelled "different"
- * Issues of fitting in: defining being included or excluded, defining being part of the mainstream or apart.
- * the added challenges of establishing individuality for children of immigrants

2) Immigrants

- * second generation
- * sense of identity
- * search for a Canadian identity that includes immigrants
- * possibility of split loyalties
- * possible conflicts with family members regarding identity, culture, and acceptable behaviours
- * how identities shift and change
- * knowledge of one's heritage
- * subtle forms of racism and/or exclusion
- * balancing and integrating cultural heritage with Canadian identity/culture

3) Family estrangements

- * conflicts of children being caught between parents and grandparents due to old quarrels
- * estrangement due to cultural differences
- * Forgiveness

4) Generational differences between grandparents and grandchildren, and also similarities

- * How grandparents might have expressed their need to rebel in their time
- * Character traits that grandparents and grandchildren might share.
- * How cultural differences can exacerbate generational differences

5) Groups

- * the concept that each person is an individual, a group of one
- * boundaries and groups; how they include and exclude and how these boundary lines might shift
- * inclusion and exclusion

6) Family relationships and dynamics

- * how family members can share similarities and yet be different
- * sibling rivalries and affections
- * tensions between children and their parents
- * family loyalties and betrayals
- * the various roles within families
- * children observing tension between their parents and grandparents

7) Food

- * the dynamics of dinner table interactions
- * cooking together
- * food as a factor that binds and divides

8) Indian Independence movement

- * the historical facts
- * Quit India Movement in 1942
- * Effects of Colonialism
- * Mahatma Gandhi's ideals
- * non-violent protest
- * civil disobedience

9) Colonialism

- * the impact of colonialism on the self-worth of the colonised
- * the underlying assumptions of the colonialists
- * the systemic oppression of the colonised
- * the economic impact of colonialism on the colonised
- * the economic imperative to colonise

10) Canadian Identity

- * what it is to be Canadian
- * perspectives of Canadian identity
- * concept of who is a “regular” Canadian
- * Immigrants trying to establish a sense of Canadian identity

11) History

- * accuracy of text book history
- * impact of historical events on ordinary lives
- * who tells/teaches history
- * different perspectives of history

12) Conflict Resolution

- * Non-violent revolutions
- * Peaceful means of achieving goals

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1) Essay topics or classroom discussions:

- * Discuss the meaning of the title of this novel. Substantiate your ideas by referring to the book.
- * What did Tolly mean when he used the term “real Canadian”? Why did this bother Tara? What does it mean to you? Is this a concept that is shifting and what are some of the factors that might cause such a shift?
- * Why was Tara reluctant to share her grandmother’s story with the class? What were her feelings and do you think they were justified? What do you think the reaction would be to her story in your classroom?
- * Discuss, with examples, the subtle forms of stereotyping that are mentioned in this book. Have you experienced or observed these?
- * Discuss the concept of boundaries, groups and shifting lines mentioned in this book. What other kinds of boundaries, both real and psychological, can you think of?
- * Describe one of the characters in this book and elaborate on her/his appearance, actions, motives and feelings, as well as how she/he is perceived by others.
- * How are you different from your friends (the people you hang out with) and how you are the same? Are you reluctant to show certain aspects of yourself to others? Do you think most teenagers feel that they live divided lives? Does every teenager feel different, and/or excluded at some time or other?

- * Discuss the pressure on children to follow in their parents' or families' footsteps, eg: in values and opinions, religion, careers, culture.
- * Intimacy in families: discuss how the intimacy of the Mehta family is portrayed in this novel. How does this compare with the interactions within your family? What are some of the ways in which families can share intimacies and how can they shut them out? What roles do humour and inside jokes play in cementing family relationships, and how can they be divisive?
- * Discuss conflict resolution. What are positive ways of resolving conflicts, what are negative ways? Between individuals, groups (gangs?), religions, countries?
- * Discuss historical struggles for Independence and the methods used to gain Independence. Should ethical standards be adhered to in the struggle to free one's country from an oppressor, or does the end justify the means?
- * Discuss revolutions and their aims. What methods are justified? Tie into some of the violence currently going on in our world. Eg: Middle East conflicts.
- * Is violence ever justified? How does this relate to World War I and II?

2) Research and Writing Exercises

- * Research the Indian Independence movement and do a class presentation on it. How did the philosophies of this struggle impact on the work of Dr. Martin Luther King in the USA?
- * Research and write about the Indian Independence movement, with its core value of civil disobedience and non-violent protests, and compare it with any other Independence struggle or revolution. How were they different in the methods they employed?
- * Research colonialism and compare it to imperialism. How are they the same and different?
- * Research and present a history of British rule in India.
- * Interview an older family member and get his/her version of a moment in history. eg: when Trudeau was elected Prime Minister; when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated; any time during World War 2 or any other conflict, etc.
- * Describe where you were and what you were doing during a significant time in recent history. eg: Sept 11, 2001.
- * Writing exercise: write a journal entry from the point of view of one of the other characters (other than Tara) in this book during a particular day. Eg: Jeff after meeting Tara's grandmother for the first time; Erin after the telephone call with Tara; Nina, on the day that she hears that her grandmother is coming for a visit. Try and make the voice unique and believable and show the character's feelings and motives.

3) Drama

- * Group activity: write a script of a conversation between family members at a dinner table and perform it. Create your own characters and remember to "show" what your characters are like through their dialogue.
- * Write a script showing a scene at the airport when Dadiji, Tara's grandmother, leaves.

4) Class Enrichment Activities

- * Have a class smorgasbord with each person bringing a favourite food to share for lunch. Include a brief story of why this food is significant to your family.
- * Explore some of the foods of India. Here are some recipes you might enjoy making.

RACHNA GILMORE'S ONE-POT BHAJI

(Note: Bhaji, in Hindi, which is the main language of India, means vegetable mixture, or something like that)

All measurements are approximate. To enjoy cooking something like this, it is best to be flexible about the quantities and to be willing to experiment.

Pour small amount of cooking oil in a large pot (1-2 tablespoons or less) A non-stick pot minimizes the oil needed.

When the oil is heated (medium heat) add approximately: 1 tablespoon grated ginger, 1 tablespoon minced or pressed garlic, 1 hot green chili finely diced. (The ginger and garlic and chili can be whizzed together in a food processor).

Stir a minute or so, and add 1 ½ teaspoons whole cumin seed, 2-3 whole cloves, 2-3 cardamoms, about ½ inch whole cinnamon. Stir about half a minute or more until the cumin seeds brown slightly.

Add approximately 3-4 baby turnips peeled and cubed, 3-4 new potatoes cubed, 1-2 onions cut in chunks. Stir for several minutes and then add: 1-3 teaspoons ground coriander, 1-2 teaspoons ground cumin, ½ teaspoon turmeric, crushed red chilies to taste, 1-2 bay leaves, salt and pepper to taste. (At this point you can add some more ginger/garlic puree if you like).

Stir for a minute or so until the spices darken slightly and are fragrant.

Add 5-8 chopped or pureed tomatoes, and 1-2 cans rinsed chick peas.

Cover and simmer on low until the potatoes and turnips are nearly cooked, stirring occasionally.

Add in order of time taken to cook: ½ - 1 cauliflower, broken into florets, 1-2 cups okra (tops cut off and cut into half or quarter). Cook until the vegetables are all tender. Add, if you like, a handful of fresh green coriander leaves, chopped. Adjust salt and pepper as needed.

Note: if you don't like okra, you can replace it with something like spinach or rapini or green beans. Any of the vegetables can be changed around to taste. Add more tomatoes or hot water if the bhaji seems too dry.

Serve with whole wheat pita and mango pickle and natural yoghurt.

ENJOY!

MANGO ICE CREAM

1 lb ripe mango flesh, liquidised
half pint double cream, whipped till getting thick
4 ozs caster sugar
juice half lemon or 1 lime

Mix all ingredients well and pour into ice cream maker; or pour into ice cream container and put in freezer but mix every half hour till it begins to get thick.

DAHL (Indian Lentil curry or soup)

Thoroughly rinse 1-2 cups red lentils in a sieve, under running water.

In a large pot add a small amount of cooking oil and heat on medium.

Add approx. 1 - 2 inches grated ginger and 5-6 chopped cloves of garlic

Stir for about half a minute and add 1-2 teaspoons whole cumin seeds and 1/4 teaspoon whole fenugreek seeds.

Stir for a few seconds until seeds start to darken.

Add red lentils and enough water so the level of the liquid is about an inch or so above the lentils.

Add 1 teaspoon turmeric

Bring to a boil and lower heat and simmer until lentils are very soft (approx. 30-60 minutes).
Add more water as necessary.

If you like, puree the lentils with a hand held blender.

Add salt to taste and coarsely chopped, half of a peeled cucumber and 2-3 firm fleshed tomatoes.

Simmer for 5 minutes.

Serve with plain rice or as soup.

(Note: if you would like this to be spicy you may add a whole green chili at the beginning with the ginger and garlic, or crushed red chilies. The recipe is flexible and the quantities may easily be doubled; but do not increase the quantity of fenugreek much beyond 1/2 teaspoon as it makes the dahl bitter.)

KULFI (Indian Pistachio Ice Cream)

½ pint double cream

1 can (410 g) Carnation evaporated milk (unsweetened evaporated milk)

4 oz caster sugar

2 - 4 oz green pistachio nuts (or half flaked almonds)

Few drops vanilla essence

½ teaspoon cardamom seeds

Few drops green colouring for food – optional

Whip double cream till beginning to thicken Mix with evaporated milk Crush nuts to medium-fine consistency (can be done in food processor or an electric grinder) Crush cardamom seeds in mortar & pestle (can be done in food processor or an electric grinder) Add nuts, sugar, vanilla essence, colouring and cardamom seeds to cream mixture and stir well. If possible chill in fridge for few hours

Pour mixture into ice-cream maker or Pour into ice-cream container and put into freezer Mix every ½-1 hour till stiff consistency.

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