

READERS' GUIDE * Interpreter of Maladies * Jumpa Lahiri

1. The Treatment of Bibi Haldar

- a. What do you think is Bibi's diagnosis? What else might be wrong with her?
- b. How helpful are doctors? Alternative practitioners? What is the doctor's final "prescription" for Bibi?
- c. What role did her father play in Bibi's life? How is her life worse off now that he is dead? In what way do the other women try to fill this role? What might the author be saying about the function of community in healing?
- d. What do we learn about the stigma/contamination of disease when Haldar's wife becomes pregnant?
- e. Do you think that Bibi healed herself? Why or why not? In what sense did she take responsibility for her illness?

2. A Temporary Matter

- a. What is the loss that Shukumar (the husband) and Shoba (his wife) experience?
- b. What are your reactions to the physician?
- c. What are the different ways in which husband and wife cope?
- d. How is their relationship affected?
- e. What does the dark provide?
- f. What is the meaning of the game they play together?
- g. What did you think was going to happen? How did you feel about what did happen?
- h. Why does Shukumar tell Shoba the final secret? Why do they cry?
- i. What do you think will happen next?

3. Interpreter of Maladies

- a. What does the title of this story refer to?
- b. What is the irony of Mr. Kapasi's job? Why does his wife resent his job?
- c. What do you think about Mrs. Das' reaction to his job? Why do you think she has this reaction?
- d. Why does Mr. Kapasi develop his fantasy about Mrs. Das? What was his earlier world view? How does Mrs. Das' interest in him rekindle this?
- e. Do you think Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das understand each other or not?
- f. Why does Mrs. Das disclose to Mr. Kapasi about her son Bobby? What else does she disclose? What is she hoping will happen when she shares these things? What kind of "malady" would you say she has? In what sense has she become Mr. Kapasi's "patient"?
- g. What is the effect of Mr. Kapasi's "truth-telling" to Mrs. Das? What application might this have to the doctor-patient relationship?
- h. What is the narrative effect of Bobby surrounded by the monkeys? Why did the author choose this child, rather than one of the others?
- i. How does the relationship between Mrs. Das, Bobby, and Mr. Kapasi parallel and differ from the doctor-patient-family relationship?

4. The Third and Final Continent

- a. **What does this story tell us about the immigrant experience?**
- b. **What is the relationship like between the narrator and Mrs. Croft?**
- c. **What are the narrator's reactions to the relationship between Mrs. Croft and her daughter Helen? What do you think about their relationship?**
- d. **Initially, what is the relationship like between the narrator and Mala, his wife? How does this relationship evolve? What role does Mrs. Croft play?**
- e. **In what sense is this a story about personal journey? About coming to love somebody? About learning how to find meaning from relationships? About learning to love medicine?**