

## One Amazing Thing Book Group Online Project Meeting, March 13, 2012



### Background Information:

**Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:** A series of linked narrative poems (and prose pieces) by Geoffrey Chaucer, composed during the last two decades of the 14th Century. The tales are told by a group of pilgrims on the road to Canterbury.

**Karma:** In Indian tradition, the principle that a person's actions have consequences meriting reward or punishment. Karma is the moral law of cause and effect by which the sum of a person's actions are carried forward from one life to the next, leading to an improvement or deterioration in that person's fate.

**Sino-Indian War (1962):** A conflict over two areas of the Sino-Indian border which had not been agreed in a formal treaty and where the maps used by each side differed considerably. In the east is an area of 35,000 square miles called the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which is shown as part of China on Guomindang maps but has never

been administered by China. In the west is the Aksai-Chin plateau, mainly desert and uninhabited, which India claimed as part of Ladakh. It was shown as part of British India on maps of the Raj but was never administered by Britain or by India after independence.

Trouble arose as a result of the Tibetan revolt against China in 1959, when India discovered that China had built a road through western Tibet and across the Aksai-Chin plateau. China said that the border, never defined, should be fixed by negotiation and proposed a compromise which would give the Aksai-Chin to China and NEFA to India. The Indians would not accept this and in 1962 attacked Chinese troops in NEFA. The Chinese reacted forcefully and won an overwhelming victory, leaving India humiliated and bitter. They expelled India from the whole of the disputed area but did not go beyond the territory China claimed. China then announced a cease-fire and handed NEFA to India, thus giving India two-thirds of the disputed territory. There was no agreed settlement and Sino-Indian relations remained sour for the next 20 years.

### Pre-reading Questions:

1. Where does prejudice come from? What prejudices do some people hold today?
2. How do a group of strangers form a community?
3. How does the telling of secrets or stories affect people's relationships?
4. How do traumatic experiences shape people's personalities or behaviors?
5. To what extent do people get what they deserve?
6. Why might some writers choose to have ambiguous endings to their stories? How does this affect the readers' experience?

## Themes:

Border crossings*	Habits*	Prejudice
Community	Heroism	Secrets
Control	Immigrant experiences*	Storytelling
Disaster	Incompleteness*	Trauma
Diversity*	Karma	

\* starred items were added during discussion by book group members

## Discussion Questions:

1. What parallels can you draw between Divakaruni's novel and the first year college experience?
2. What is the significance of naming in *One Amazing Thing*? Select one character and explain his/her name.
3. Are the narrators reliable? Why or why not?
4. To what extent do the characters form a community?
5. Which characters grow or change over the course of the novel?
6. Which of the characters have special talents? What do the talents reflect about their character?
7. How does the setting of the novel affect our understanding of the text?
8. How does the novel depict marriage or family life?
9. To what extent do the characters overcome their prejudices? How do they overcome prejudice?
10. The characters often analyze or interpret each others' stories. What does their analysis reveal about their own character?
11. How do you feel about the ambiguous ending? What do you think is going to happen?
12. Do the characters get what they deserve? Why or why not?

## Potential Assignments:

- Finish one of the incomplete stories
- Research one of the issues discussed in the novel
  - Adoption
  - Cultural Expectations (dress, profession, behavior, etc.)
  - Disaster Response
  - Immigration
  - Medication
  - Suicide
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
  - Treatment of Muslim-Americans
  - Visas\*
- Have students draw connections between the novel and the first year college experience
- Impromptu (unannounced) in-class food pool: empty your pockets and bags; what do we have?\*
- Theme Assignment (handout—see next page)

\* starred items were added during discussion by book group members

Names:

## Theme Assignment: *One Amazing Thing*

*Instructions:* Your group has been assigned the theme of control.

1. Write your own definition of the theme.

2. Review *One Amazing Thing* to find three quotes that relate to your theme. Copy the quotes into the table below. Then, explain why you selected those quotes.

Quotes:	Explanations:

3. Use the quotes to make a claim about the theme. What conclusion could you draw about the novel based on your evidence?