

A Reading Group Guide to

Ticket to India

By N. H. Senzai

About the Book

As Maya sits in a plane flying to Pakistan, she has no idea that the trip will change her life forever. She is headed to her grandparents' home in Pakistan due to her grandfather's death. As she watches her grandmother grieve, Maya realizes she must help her through this difficult time. Before she knows it, she is on another plane, this time headed to India with her grandmother and sister. There, they plan to retrieve her grandmother's family's treasure chest that includes a ring for her husband, and has been lost to her for more than half a century. But soon Maya is separated from her grandmother and sister and she faces kidnapping, thievery, street children, and corrupt police. She uses her quick wit and available resources to find the treasure that's so important.

This coming-of-age story incorporates cultural and historical information about Pakistan and India. It is a great introduction and explanation of the cultural differences between the two countries and why some of these differences exist.

Prereading Question

Before reading and discussing *Ticket to India*, write down and/or discuss any information you know about India and Pakistan. Where did you learn this information? After reading the book, was the information and/or your impression of the two countries the same or different as before you read the book? Provide examples to support your answer.

Discussion Questions

1. People react differently to death. How did each family member react to Nanabba's death? Was Naniamma's desire to go to India immediately one of her ways of dealing with her husband's death? Did her reaction change the way others responded to his death?
2. Memories are important in *Ticket to India*. Discuss why it's important to the family to remember Nanabba. How do sounds, smells, and places affect memories? What did Maya mean when she was comforted by the words that were bringing her grandfather back to life, even if just for a moment? Discuss Naniamma's memory map and the importance of the accuracy of the map in their quest. When Maya was kidnapped, what memories did she have to help her plan her escape? Over time what happened to Naniamma's memories of her parents?
3. When Maya left San Francisco to go to Karachi, Pakistan, she had an assignment from her teacher to keep a journal. What were Maya's thoughts about this assignment? In Maya's journal she described India as a land of contradictions: extreme poverty and wealth, charity and greed, beauty and ugliness, prejudice and tolerance. What did she mean by these descriptions? Could

these descriptions also be attributed to other countries such as the United States? Why or why not?

4. Discuss the sibling rivalry between Zara and Maya. Who has the strongest personality and why? What changes, if any, happened between the sisters?

5. What do you believe the rose symbolizes? How does the color of the rose change what it represents? What did Naniabba tell Maya the rose signifies?

6. What is your impression of the living conditions of the people in India as described in this book? Are they similar to or different from what you are used to seeing? Consider the shanty towns, street children, elegant boutiques, trendy restaurants, renovated colonial buildings, etc.

7. What is in a name? Maya was constantly being reminded of the meanings of her name. Discuss Maya's name and its many meanings. How did the author use these meanings to help Maya during her quest?

8. Why did Zara and Maya decide to journey to Naniamma's childhood home in India? What crisis happened on the first part of the trip to India? Who decided to continue the quest to Naniamma's childhood home without her accompanying them? When starting on their journey, Maya and Zara overheard travelers talking about the need to be careful of the food and water they ate and drank. Was this important information for the girls? Why or why not? Does this information apply to countries other than India? How did Zara and Maya get separated at the train station? What did Maya learn about street children and policemen in India?

9. How did Jai feel leaving his sister behind with the kidnappers? Could he have done anything differently considering the circumstances? If you were Jai, would you trust Maya to help rescue Guddi after they reunite Maya with her mother?

10. Both Naniamma and Sir Arthur Cecil Labant lived through the same turbulent time in India. How did the history lesson on India as told by Sir Arthur Cecil Labant compare to Naniamma's? Were they the same or different? If they were different, what would be the reason for the differences?

11. Would Jai and Maya have been safer staying with Sir Arthur Cecil Labant than stealing his money and taking a bus to Maurya Hotel? Was it right to leave without letting him know they appreciated his hospitality and that they would repay him for the money they stole?

12. What was the Gulabi Gang, a.k.a. the Pink Rose Gang? Why were Babu, Ladu, and Pinto scared of this gang? How did this gang help Maya and Jai?

13. "Maya stared into Jai's childish face, his eyes those of a man who'd seen too much." What does this sentence tell you about Jai?

14. As Naniamma gave Maya and Zara each a gold bangle inlaid with emeralds, she told them they were her mother's: "Whenever you look at them, remember that you are connected to her

and our family.” How important is a family? Who or what constitutes a family? Do you have any heirlooms that connect you to past generations? How important are these items to you? Do you have any photographs of generations past? Do you or any of your family members resemble these people?

Extension Activities

1. Research the Partition of India in the library or online. How does your research compare to Naniamma’s description in the book?
2. It was a tradition in Naniamma’s family to have rings made for the daughters. They were betrothal rings. What were the stones Naniamma’s family used? Research this stone. Is it a rare/precious stone? What colors do these stones come in? Research the average price of this stone. Remember the rings were large enough to fit on a man’s finger and the ring was to be Naniamma’s dowry.
3. How much is 1,000 rupees? That’s the amount of money Jai stole from an old lady who was going to pay for her granddaughter’s medicine. It was also the amount of money Maya and Jai stole from Sir Arthur Cecil Labant. What would 1,000 rupees buy in your country?
4. At the end of the story it was learned that Naniamma’s doctor was on the board of Railway Children. Research this organization. Does it exist? What is its purpose? Is it the same as in the book?
5. Who was Mahatma Gandhi? Research what the connection was between Mahatma Gandhi and the Dandi March.
6. There are at least two sides to every story. What was the background story for Ladu, Pinto, and Babu? Choose one of these characters and write their story using first-person narrative.
7. How good is your memory? Draw your own memory map of a place that is significant to you. Be sure to add sights of interest and landmarks to ensure another person could follow it. The map does not have to be global or cross country, it could be local.
8. Maya noticed a difference between the writing on the billboards and signs that were written in Hindi and those written in Urdu. Hindi script is more square, different from the flowing letters of Urdu. Research the different styles of the scripts on the Internet. Try writing some of the letters from each style.
9. Naniamma found her family tree in her family’s Quran. What is a family tree? Make a family tree of your own family. How many generations can you document in your family tree?

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