

Experiential Activity - Rewriting the Past

Book

Divakaruni, Chitra. (2010). *One Amazing Thing*. NYC, NY: Voice/Hyperion.

Book Summary

The story *One Amazing Thing* by Divakaruni (2010) took place in a passport and visa office. One morning, while everyone in the office waited restlessly for their visa to travel to India, an earthquake rumbled through the building. The earthquake quickly destroyed the building and left nine people trapped inside. The nine survivors went through several psychological and physical challenges as the unsteady building shifted, and the need for food and medical supplies increased. After a particularly stressing series of events, one of the survivors suggested to the group that they start telling stories about their lives to pass the time and to learn about each other. All of the survivors took turns and told the group *one amazing thing* from their life that had a profound effect on them. Each story unfolded to reveal the culture and personality of each member of the group. The story ended with a glimpse of hope of being rescued, as the last member of the group revealed her story.

Experiential Activity

Read the description below of one of the stories told by three members in the novel. Reflect on the story and think about an alternative ending. Think about a different decision that each person could have made in their lives that could have profoundly impacted their outcome. Please write down a new ending to your story, compare your stories within your group, and then share the group differences with the class.

Group 1: Cameron Grant (African American male, mid 30's)

Cameron grew up as an impoverished orphan that lived with his aunt. His parents died in a car accident when he was 12. Cameron was a first generation college applicant as a teenager, who dreamed of becoming a doctor. He met his future wife, a girl named Imani, at a highschool party. She sang for everyone at the party, and Cameron fell in love with her that night. Their romance grew quickly for each other as they graduated from highschool. One day Cameron came home to tell Imani that he got accepted to a prestigious college. Imani replied that she was pregnant with his child. Furious at the situation that he put himself in, Cameron suggested that Imani get an abortion. Imani walked off that day and never spoke with him again. Cameron learned later on that she had an abortion.

Cameron attended college, but ended up quitting after he struggled with asthma and received poor grades. He was the only black student at the school and had few friends. He quit school and joined the army during the Vietnam War. He deployed overseas where he ended up killing several men. He returned home the war with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, insomnia, and anxiety. These symptoms were also exacerbated by the guilt he felt for killing so many men, and the death of his unborn son. He took a job as a head security guard and volunteered at a local hospice. He volunteered relentlessly to make amends for his wartime acts, but he could do nothing to compensate for the abortion of his unborn child. One day while volunteering at the hospice, Cameron met a Buddhist priest named Jeff. Jeff listened to Cameron's life story and suggested that he adopt a child from India. He quickly agreed and contacted an adoption agency. The agency said he could start sponsoring an Indian girl, named Seva. He lovingly sent letters and money to Seva in India. After a couple of years, he requested that he gain full custody of

Seva. He made arrangements to visit her in India, hoping things would work out. He went to the visa office to get his paperwork when the earthquake struck....

Group 2: Jiang Feng (Elderly Chinese woman, mid 70's)

Jiang grew up in the Chinatown area of Calcutta, India. She lived a pleasing but sheltered childhood within her family home, as her family and many Chinese in general kept a separate identity from the Indian population surrounding them. At the age of 25, Jiang was allowed to manage her father's shoe store, much to the disapproval of her grandmother, who insists Jiang's father was a "soggy noodle in his daughter's hands." Jiang was superb at her work, combining polite customer service with a shrewd business ethic. All was well until a dashing young Indian man named Mohit comes to the shop. Jiang was smitten, and following a few dates, she had fallen in love. The couple was soon broken up by family pressures as it was seen unfit for an Indian man to be with a Chinese woman, and vice versa. Mohit was determined to remain true to Jiang, despite his family's protests.

The Sino-Indian War of 1962, setting India against China, forever halted their relationship. India became a police-state for the Chinese, businesses were destroyed out of fear, and the Chinese were being put into internment camps. Jiang tried for weeks to contact Mohit, and when she finally did, this was his response, "Forgive me, I love you but I can't fight a whole country." Jiang was devastated. There was little time to grieve as she had to flee the country amongst thousands of Chinese. There was little to no availability in transportation with so many people leaving, so the only alternative was for Jiang to be arranged to marry a friend of her brother's in exchange for a place on a boat to America. Jiang grew closer to her new husband over time and they started a family, though it could not compare to her one true love. Jiang's business sense helped start a bustling supermarket that helped to support her children

comfortably. Recently, her husband passed away, and soon afterward her brother contacted her to see if she would like to return to Calcutta, to which she agreed...

Group 3: Tariq Hussein (Muslim / Indian male, age 25)

Tariq met the love of his life, Farah, through a close family friend while in college. Farah had traveled from India to America on a prestigious college scholarship. Her family agreed to let her attend college in America if she stayed with members of the Hussein family and only mingled with other Indian Muslims. Tariq was assigned to escort Farah around for safety, and he hesitantly fell in love with her. Farah has since returned to India, but keeps regular contact with Tariq. Tariq was excited over the prospect that he would be going with his family to India in a few months for the wedding of Farah's sister.

Tariq grew up in America and he is devout in his practice of Islam, a fact that he considers central to his identity. This identity is shaken to the core when he receives a distressed phone call from his mother Ammi. His father Abba and a friend from a fellow business have been abducted with no trace of where or why they have been taken. Friends of Tariq's family had put them in touch with a high-priced lawyer that specialized in these kinds of cases. After three nerve-racking days, Abba reappeared at the doorstep of his business from which he had been taken. He had no details for where or why he had been taken, and was soon back in good spirits after close care from Ammi.

However, soon afterward Abba had a stroke, disabling the left side of his body. Tariq and his mother returned to the lawyer, seeking counsel. He advised them not to pursue a case as Abba had no visible signs of physical duress and all similar cases the lawyer was part of had yet to be resolved. The lawyer informed Ammi "as a fellow Muslim" to return to India and retire there as there was no use pursuing the case. He advised Tariq and his family that they could be

anonymous in India, while in America, they would draw undue attention, stating to Ammi, “They’re watching your son right now.” Ammi consulted close friends and ultimately decided to move the family to India. Farah pleaded with Tariq to move to India with his family, but he felt it necessary to stay. Tariq moved in with a Muslim friend, who held similar beliefs that they needed to protest against the current plight of Muslim people in America. He anxiously awaits his trip to India to see Farah again when the earthquake hits...