



IAM READERS GUILD

Discussion Guide

***Unaccustomed Earth* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

August 2010

1. What did you think of the book's structure? In the novella near the end, did you find the storytelling method to be effective? Which stories in the book stuck with you?
2. Lahiri nearly always writes about the experience of being Bengali-American (she also wrote "The Namesake", which was made into a film several years ago). However, her perceptions of what it is to be an outsider in a culture that is still your own - to straddle two worlds - is common to many people. Did you find yourself identifying with any characters or situations in the stories, even if you are not Bengali?
3. These stories are also about the relationship between parent and child, particularly in a shifting cultural context. The epigraph from Hawthorne's "The Custom House" in the title story relates to this. When do the children manage to "strike their roots into unaccustomed earth"? Who can't put down roots, and why?
4. People have difficulty forming attachments throughout these stories - to cultures, customs, families, relationships, each other. To what extent are these symptomatic of their situation, and how much of this is universal to all people?
5. Did you find the final three stories to take an unexpected turn? Do all three, taken together, add up to more than each individually?

The questions below are merely prompts to get your discussion going. Keep a brief record of the most interesting ideas that come up during your discussion, and after the meeting, send us a summary (around a paragraph long) to post to the Readers Guild blog! (Email your summary to readersguild@internationalartsmovement.org.)