DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND WRITING EXERCISES

for

SHINE, COCONUT MOON by
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1. In the opening paragraph, we read, “There is a man wearing a turban ringing our bell. I stop a safe, short distance from him . . . ” Why is Samar wary of a man wearing a turban? What would you do in this scenario?

2. What kind of relationship do Sam and her mother have at the beginning of the novel? What is the picture you get of how they get along at this point?

3. How does the reader’s perception of Uncle Sandeep change by the end of the first chapter? How do you start out viewing him, and how do you view him by the end of chapter one?

4. “The Saturday morning that Uncle Sandeep rang our doorbell had one of those endless, frozen blue skies hanging above it; the same kind of frozen blue sky that, just four days earlier, had borne silent witness to a burning Pentagon and two crumbling mighty towers in New York City.” What thoughts, images, feelings came up for you as you read the last paragraph of chapter one?

5. Sam’s mother encourages her and Molly to “go be teenagers” in response to the onslaught of media images of the attacks in New York City. What do you think of this response? Is this a useful way to respond to the repetition of scary images? Why, or why not?

6. When we first meet Molly and her family, we learn that Sam is envious of her best friend’s family and longs to be part of something similar. Can you relate to this in any way? Does the media, i.e. television shows or commercials, magazine ads, etc., support notions of an “ideal” family?
7. When Uncle Sandeep first steps into Molly’s house during Great Aunt Maggie’s birthday party, Sam thinks, “Part of me wants to say, ‘Um, I just met him . . . I don’t really know him that well.’” What do you think she means by this? What might be the inner conflict Sam is experiencing in this moment?

8. After Uncle Sandeep picks the girls up from the family birthday party, Molly and Sam have a big fight. Molly is amazed that Sam might attribute the tension in the room when Uncle Sandeep walked in to possible prejudice from members of Molly’s family. She says that her family would have had the same response if any strange man had walked into the room. Could Molly be right? Do you think Sam is over-reacting?

9. What are your first impressions of Mike? How does your opinion of him change over the course of the novel? What do you think Sam saw in him when they first started dating? What changed that? Why does Mike respond to Uncle Sandeep the way he does?

10. Balvir’s life, in many ways, could be Sam’s if circumstances were just a little bit different. Compare and contrast Sam’s family life with Balvir’s. What are the most obvious differences (i.e. clothes, friends, parents, etc.)? What might be some of the not-so-obvious differences (i.e. self-esteem, sense of belonging to a community or family, sense of identity, etc.)?

11. In chapter four, during Lesiaik’s class, many of Sam’s classmates share their views on what happened on September eleventh. Which of these views, if any, most closely resembles your own?

12. After having garbage and debris thrown at his car in chapter five, Uncle Sandeep talks about not being afraid and not letting “them” win. This strikes Sam as being funny—why do you think this is the case?

13. While sitting in the gurdwara, the Sikh temple, Sam realizes how “…wrapping a turban, speaking the language of your parents’ parents’ parents, and celebrating the same holidays that everyone before you celebrated are all like little thank-yous to those who survived.” What does she mean by this? Why are all those examples like “little thank-yous?”

14. At one point, Balvir says, “…what people tell you and what’s true are two different things.” What does she mean by this? And why would Sam be so alarmed at not having learned anything about the Japanese internment camps during World War II?

15. In chapter ten, Mike says, “Well, maybe we’ve both done some changing. You used to be way more fun. Now you’re way too serious . . .” Why does Sam suddenly not find The Simpsons funny? Is Sam too serious? Do you agree with Mike that she “can’t even take a joke?”

16. In chapter fifteen, Sam’s mom finally has a confrontation with her parents. Do you see any similarities between this confrontation between Mom and Naniji and Nanaji and the confrontations between Sam and her mother?

Taken from www.neeshameminger.com/Teachers_Educators
WRITING EXERCISES

(Can be reworded as pre-reading or preparation exercises)

1. When Sam was deciding on which college to attend after high school, she found this quote: *Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.*

   As an exercise, take a few moments to jot down a description of who you are. How do you see yourself? What kind of person are you?

   Then, have a friend, or someone who knows well, write a description of who they think you are. Compare the two descriptions. Are there any surprises? Anything you always thought that was confirmed?

2. Balvir says, “I do research. I dig. I ask questions. You learn from living with a family like mine that most of the time what people tell you and what’s *true* are two different things. I want to find out for myself.”

   Write about one thing you always thought was “true,” but turned out not to be (or maybe wasn’t as true as you thought it was) upon closer examination. It could be something as simple as believing in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy, or something more complex, like changing your views about God and spirituality.