



READER'S GUIDE

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

A Few Good Questions...

Immigration

How are the Hmong refugees similar to or different from other immigrants to the United States?

Multiculturalism

What does this book say about multiculturalism in the United States? Is there such a thing as "too much" cultural difference? What are the rights and responsibilities of the majority and minority cultures? Should the Hmong be expected to assimilate to the culture of the United States? Should all immigrants?

War

What do you think about employees of the U.S. government (whether military or otherwise) making promises of U.S. immigration to people of another country in exchange for their services in a war? Does the entire population share responsibility for promises made and acts done by a small number of people during wartime? What were some of the misunderstandings between the United States and the Hmong people in the Vietnam War?

Identity

What was the "role loss" many adult Hmong faced when they came to the United States? What is the underlying root cause? How does this loss affect their adjustment to America?

Language

Do you believe the Hmong should learn English while in the United States? Should the government make this a requirement? Had Lia's parents learned English, do you think the outcome would have been different?

Metaphor

The United States is often referred to as a "melting pot." (p. 181). What is your ideal metaphor for the United States? Does this include isolationists?

Local cultures

There are many linguistic, cultural, and religious groups in Anchorage and Alaska. What benefits do they bring to the community? What challenges? What opportunities become available?

Disabilities

What are the attitudes in this country toward people with disabilities? How were the attitudes of Lia's family different, and how were they the same?

Economics

The Hmong were blamed, at least partially, for Merced's "economic catastrophe." (p. 232) How did they strain Merced's economy? What could the United States have done to alleviate some of this stress? Is there anything the Hmong community could have done? Do you think the economic pressure the locals felt affected how they treated the Hmong? What's happening in Anchorage and Alaska?

Healing

What might the average American doctor learn from a Hmong *txiv neeb* (shaman)? What might the *txiv neeb* learn from the doctor? What are the similarities and differences between traditional Hmong healers and other traditional healing arts in the US?

Philosophy

This book presents cultural differences of healing practices. In the Western culture of the United States, there tends to be a dualism of mind and body in healing practices, while in the Hmong culture the mind and body are often viewed as one. Do you believe that the mind (spiritual) and body (physical) should be separated or placed together when considering how to heal a person?

Law

This book raises issues of power and authority in various contexts. What should be the role of law in defining the best interests of children when parents and doctors disagree?

Journalism

Do you think Anne, as a journalist, did a good job presenting all sides of the story? Did she seem even-handed or biased? Are there other types of investigation the author might have conducted?

Point of View

From a writer's point of view, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being an outsider in the two cultures Fadiman explores?

Connection

Do the stories and events told in this book remind you of anything that has happened to you or to people you know? If not, can you imagine that events like these might happen to you or someone you know in the future?

Relevance

What relevance does this book have to your life and work? Can the situations or issues it describes be applied to your everyday life?
