

Cracking India

Bapsi Sidhwa

Teaching Guide

Milkweed Editions 1995

Dear Educator,

Milkweed Editions has developed a series of teaching guides to encourage students to enter books with pleasure and insight—to enjoy as well as understand them.

We began by asking classroom teachers what would help them to teach novels and anthologies. The teachers said they wanted open-ended questions for use in guiding students to read more deeply. They also asked for exercises in teaching writing. Their third request was for assistance in teaching with a sensitivity to the needs and goals of multicultural education. The guides were conceptualized to serve those requests.

Literature opens up the classroom to a larger world and to disciplines beyond its own. So we developed the guides while keeping other disciplines and directions in mind. We also asked Dena L. Randolph, a leader in the field of multicultural education, to comment on the role of literature in education. Her introduction follows.

The guides were developed and written by people who are both teachers and writers. Each guide offers extensive step-by-step writing exercises. The key to successfully using the exercises in your classroom is to take time for the whole process: time for warm-ups, time to brainstorm before writing, time for the writing itself, and time for reading the writings aloud.

We hope that the guides will help you in your teaching. Feel free to use only those parts of them that are relevant to your needs. Jot your own thoughts and lesson ideas in the margins. And, as one teacher interviewed said, “Don’t try to do too much. The main thing is to read and enjoy the books. Enter the stories of the people in them. Pass on your excitement to the students.”

Roseann Lloyd

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS TEACHING GUIDE

Julie Landsman is a teacher and writer who lives in Minneapolis. For fourteen years, she has taught in inner-city public schools in special settings for students who have difficulties in the classroom, as well as in regular junior and senior high schools. In fourteen secondary schools, she oversaw a program meant to help students unable to succeed either academically or behaviorally in their classes. Landsman has run support groups for failing high school students and for teachers looking for new ways to reach disillusioned or unmotivated students. She has traveled around the country speaking to groups of teachers and administrators, presenting positive ways to work with students who often fail in traditional classrooms. She also teaches creative writing and children's literature to teenage parents.

Julie has published her essays and poetry in numerous small press magazines and anthologies. Her book *Basic Needs: A Year With Street Kids in a City School* was published in September 1993 by Milkweed Editions, and most recently she has edited the anthology *From Darkness to Light: Teens Write about How They Triumphed Over Trouble* (Deaconess Press, 1994). She has won a number of writing awards in Minnesota, including a State Arts Board Grant, a Loft McKnight Grant, and two Jerome Travel Writing grants.

She is married and has one son, a college graduate.

Multicultural Education in Literature Classes

Education theorists offer philosophical answers to the question of why we should pursue the ideal of multicultural education. But philosophy, statistics, and changing demographics aside, the most compelling “why” for most teachers is increasingly evident in our classrooms. Our students are coming from a variety of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. Their families are just as diverse. The world is made smaller by technology, yet it is an increasingly complex place. Defining one’s self is not an easy undertaking. The faces of America’s future are the faces in our classrooms. Their ability to make the world better depends on how well we teach them to value each other’s culture, history, and language. To understand the world around them requires a real understanding of themselves, as well as of others.

Students should inquire into their own lives, as well as into the lives of others. Literature classrooms and curricula can provide students with such opportunities. At some time in their K–12 education, children should read something that affirms their existence. All around us are the stories of people, yet we have heard only a few of them, usually concerning the same group of people. It is time to look for more voices if we are to give our children a sense of what it means to be human.

The work of curriculum reform in literature classes can begin small. While many of us are charged with transforming whole departments and/or schools, I think the most effective place for us to begin is in our own classrooms. As you make changes, consider who is represented and who is left out. Begin with a manageable task, like changing one unit or one unit per class. For example, teaching the literature of the Harlem Renaissance along with other literature of the Jazz Age gives a more balanced view of that era. Or in a class about growing up, teachers could include a book by a writer of color who has addressed this topic.

Even “traditional” material can be looked at in different ways. This is important for those teachers who cannot change the actual content of their curriculum. For example, what does *The Scarlet Letter* reveal about early attitudes toward Native Americans? Think of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Lord of the Flies* as texts about class and gender roles and expectations. One overall guiding principle is always to have more than one type of voice addressing any theme or issue. “Matching texts” is a way to do this. Pairing John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* with Tomás Rivera’s *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* gives students a fuller picture of the lives of migrant workers by presenting both Anglo and Chicano experiences.

One set of voices usually missing from the curriculum is the voices of students. Including those voices is crucial to making the

curriculum more representative; the students can help to shape the curriculum. For example, ask students to think about their own ethnicity. Music and art are a central part of our students' lives, and they too can be used as ways to let students testify to their own experiences. One assignment could ask students to select or create music and artwork to accompany particular passages in novels or poems.

A multicultural curriculum cannot work in isolation: It has to be supported by other elements in the school. For some schools, that means starting a multicultural awareness group; for others, it means hiring more teachers of color. Whatever form it takes, the work of making schools psychologically enriching places for students is not just about changing titles and texts.

And yet, I still believe that the work done by classroom teachers is the first step in the process of transforming schools. Teachers have the ability to influence students' thinking about themselves and others. If one purpose of education is to provide students with models for life, then the models we present must be as varied as life itself. Literature provides the kind of raw material that helps students understand what it means to be whole and human, and to allow everyone the luxury of living that way.

Dena L. Randolph

Dena L. Randolph, an educator who focused on the implementation of multicultural education in K-12 classrooms, especially literature classes, completed her comments for these guides shortly before her untimely death.

BACKGROUND

Overview of CRACKING INDIA

Cracking India is a novel set in 1946–1948, in Lahore, India. The novel takes place during the subcontinent’s struggle for independence and its eventual partition into India and Pakistan. After Partition, Lahore became part of Pakistan. Robert Ross, in a review of *Cracking India*, has summarized the situation in Lahore like this: “Assigned to Pakistan by those who ‘crack’ India, Lahore turns into a microcosm of the violence associated with Partition as the Hindus flee, the Muslims arrive, and the Sikhs wreak havoc.”

The narrator of the novel, Lenny, is an eight-year-old girl who is handicapped by polio. She is a Parsee, a member of a religion that is neither Muslim nor Hindu. Lenny observes all sides of the partition issue and is quite an objective narrator: She describes her Parsee family life with humor and openness; her Hindu nursemaid, Ayah (who is attended by an amusing coterie of suitors) and her visits to a Muslim village in the Sikh farmlands. Woven into Lenny’s story are political events, the rise of such important political figures as Nehru, Gandhi, and Jinnah, and the massacres and horrors of Partition.

The novel’s idyllic and amusing opening shows us all that Lenny will lose when the tension of political conflict becomes a backdrop to the book’s daily events. Eventually Lenny loses her ayah, witnesses the death of many in her community, and watches her mother and grandmother become proud rescuers and spokeswomen for the ayah and other captured Pakistani women.

The novel’s themes are conspicuously topical. They include the experience of being handicapped; the effects of religious and racial conflicts; the subjugation of women (e.g., arranged marriages, prostitution); sexuality; class and caste prejudice; and political violence. The novel also concerns generational differences, and children’s rights and vulnerabilities. By writing about a child growing up during this time in India and Pakistan’s history, Sidhwa confronts many important social, historical, and political issues with humor and compassion.

This book would be suitable for high school history, English, or—ideally—humanities classes that combine various content areas, such as history and literature. A fast-moving, action-packed novel, *Cracking India* will engage readers with its carefully drawn characters.

About Bapsi Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa was born in 1938 in Karachi, Pakistan, to a Parsee family and grew up in Lahore. In 1947 India was partitioned, and Lahore became part of Pakistan. When two years old, Sidhwa contracted polio; she received no formal schooling until age fourteen. She married at nineteen, had three children, and lived as a wealthy Pakistani housewife. On a family vacation, Sidhwa heard the story of a young girl who had married against her will, run away, and was finally tracked down. Sidhwa felt compelled to tell the girl's story, but wrote in secret, worried that her friends might consider her pretentious. Also during this time, Sidhwa became a social worker. In 1975 she represented Pakistani women at the Asian Women's Congress.

After encountering years of rejection from publishers, Sidhwa saw *The Crow Eaters*, her novel based on Parsee family life, issued in England by Jonathan Cape, Ltd. Her second novel, *The Bride*, based on the story of the young girl who had run away, was published by Cape in 1983. Also in 1983, both novels were published in the United States and received favorable reviews. Sidhwa's books have been translated into Russian, German, French, and Urdu. She is one of the first Pakistanis to be published internationally. In 1986 Sidhwa was awarded a Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe College. In 1991 she received the *Sitara I Imtiaz*, the highest civilian honor bestowed by Pakistan.

Currently she divides her time between the United States and Pakistan. Sidhwa has taught creative writing at Columbia University, the University of Houston, and Rice University.

Sidhwa writes from a nontraditional and feminist historical perspective. As Gerda Lerner, in her article "The Challenge of Women's History," has commented: "The central question [women's history] raises is: what could history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by the values they define?" In *Cracking India* Sidhwa provides an illuminating answer to this question.

Setting the Historical Context

When this novel begins, India is still a British colony. The British, however, were already considering the impending likelihood of India's independence. They did not want to divide India but wanted India to become a federation of three large provinces, each self-governing except in matters of defense and foreign policy. Muslims would be in the majority in the northwest and Bengal, and Hindus would dominate the rest of the country—a vast portion. However, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslims, insisted that the Muslim League serve as the sole representative of the Muslims, not the Congress Party, as was planned. In August

of 1946 the British asked for the Congress Party to form a pre-independence government without the Muslim League.

The Muslims feared a government led by caste-conscious Hindus who, unlike themselves, believed in many gods. The Muslim League declared a Direct Action Day to demonstrate and strike. They demanded the formation of the Muslim state of Pakistan; horrendous carnage ensued. Muslim mobs in Calcutta killed more than 5,000 people, and frightened thousands more into fleeing the city. Later, Muslim gangs burned hundreds of Hindu homes in the eastern Bengal town of Hoakhali, and raped Hindu women. In response, Hindus in nearby Bihar province rampaged through villages and killed 4,500 Muslims. This destruction subsided only when Gandhi, leading advocate for a unified India and himself a Hindu, walked through the country, threatening to fast until death unless the killing stopped.

National tension continued to mount. Bengal saw considerable conflict: peasants in the region were Muslim, while the landlords and moneylenders were Hindu.

In 1947 British Lord Mountbatten became Viceroy and arrived in India to engineer its independence. When he failed to convince Jinnah to support a united India, Mountbatten concluded that partition was preferable to continued violence and probable civil war. By now even the leaders of the Congress Party, formerly opposed to partition, favored this as a solution to the problem of Muslim intransigence. On June 3, 1947, the British government formally announced its plan to partition India into two nations. Gandhi vehemently opposed partition, but the leaders of the Congress Party ignored him and approved the plan.

Partition had tragic consequences. The Punjab, homeland of turban-wearing Sikhs, was split in half, causing hundreds of thousands of Sikhs to move east to India to rejoin their brethren. Jute farmers in eastern Bengal were cut off from the mills and docks of Calcutta, and poor farmers now had to pay customs duties just to get crops to market.

The division of goods was supposed to be made in proportion to the population: 82.5 percent for India, 17.5 percent for Pakistan. Gandhi fasted until the cabinet pledged to send Pakistan its rightful share of the wealth. Even so, Pakistan received far less than its fair share of the money and materials—and none of the machinery involved for weapons production.

On August 14, 1947, Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan. Muslims were to live in Pakistan, Hindus in India. When the boundaries were announced three days later, armed Sikhs and Hindus in eastern Punjab killed thousands of Muslims with the aim of driving all Muslims west across the border into Pakistan. As the refugees streamed into Lahore, Muslim gangs took revenge by slaughtering thousands of Sikhs and Hindus.

Almost one million people were murdered in the religious violence of 1947 and 1948. Vultures hovered in the skies. To avoid massacre, millions of families left their homes, only to arrive at crowded, disease-infested refugee camps. Six million Hindus and Sikhs in all fled to India, and eight million Muslims fled to Pakistan. Gandhi tried to promote harmony, but his generosity to Muslims angered militant Hindus, and one fanatic killed Gandhi on January 30, 1948. His death shocked both Muslims and Hindus, and brought an end to the worst of the killing.

In 1948, one month after India and Pakistan agreed to a cease-fire, Jinnah died of lung cancer, and Liaquat Ali Khan became the new leader of Pakistan.

Warm-Ups

1. Use a large wall map to show students where India and Pakistan are. Note that Lahore, the main setting of the novel, is located along the “crack” that partitioned India—and that gave Sidhwa’s novel its title. If possible, superimpose another map made out of transparent plastic to show the boundaries of India before the Partition of 1947. Explain that this book takes place during Partition.

2. Have students read the two-page historical narrative and look at the maps to get a sense of Pakistan’s history. Split the class into four groups to research and explain to the class the roles of Lord Mountbatten, Muhammed Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawahral Nehru in the Indian independence movement and in the formation of Pakistan. The groups could debate their historical character’s point of view, arguing for or against Partition, proposing solutions, etc.

Have students research and present descriptions of Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Parsee religions. If time allows, have students explore each religion’s attitude toward the status and rights of women. Since the book explores women’s issues, provide students with information about arranged marriages, prostitution, and women’s lack of education to engage their interest in the book.

3. Ask students to “partition” the U.S. along racial or religious lines. They will have a map of the U.S. in front of them and a demographic description of racial and religious groups. Have them redraw the map, creating new countries within the U.S. Later ask them to get together with their group to draw up a joint map that would efficiently and “fairly” create these countries. (This exercise can be done for a state, instead of the whole country, depending upon the emphasis followed in the class and the decision of the teacher).

Ask students to consider how to answer the following questions: How would they decide where people would live once they

arrived at their appropriate country? Whose houses would they occupy? How would students make sure all was done fairly? Would they hire and train more police, more national guard troops? How would groups get from one place to another? By train, plane, car? What would students do if people refused to leave their homes to move to the newly designated country of their religion? What would they do about persons who were married to each other, but were of different religions or races? Could people who were atheists remain in their homes?

4. In this book, people who for years have lived peacefully together suddenly begin to kill each other, lock each other up, and burn down each other's houses. Similarly, Yugoslavia was a peaceful country until conflict erupted among Serbs, Croatians, and Muslims. Do students believe that human beings are naturally or innately "tribal"? That they will revert to their own group even after peacefully coexisting with others? Why or why not? What do the students' answers say for the future of world peace? How does it affect how we live?

5. An important theme in *Cracking India* is Lenny's inability to lie. This inability gets many people she loves into serious trouble in the third section of the book.

Ask students to list the times they have lied (small lies and big lies).

Ask students to choose one of these times and write two short stories: one describing what happened when they told the lie; and one describing what might have happened had they not lied.

LESSONS

The Open-Ended Questions and Writing Exercises for each lesson are written for students. These sections can be read to students for class discussions or can be used as worksheets.

Section One (pages 1–66)

Warm-Ups

In this section of the novel, Lenny manipulates others by using and delighting in her handicap, and Ayah manipulates her male admirers (and they manipulate her).

List times when you have manipulated others: fooled them, flirted with them, flattered them, teased them. Where do you draw the line between harmless fun and destructive behavior? Using one of the incidents on your list, imagine you had crossed that line. Write a story or, with other students, a play depicting this.

This section also concerns itself with the loss of innocence, for a child and for a country. At the end of the section, in a village in the Punjab, Lenny listens to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs talk about the troubles building in their country.

Imagine the U.S. in the year 2024. Will it be more united or more polarized than it is now? Picture four religious or racial groups talking about their community in the year 2024. Attend a community meeting in your town, suburb, or neighborhood where an issue is being discussed. Do people seem naive or realistic?

Open-Ended Questions

1. On page 11, Lenny says of Godmother's home: "This is my haven. My refuge from the perplexing realities . . ." Do you have a refuge—a place, person, room, corner—where you retreat to figure things out? Has your refuge changed over the years? Where was it when you were small, and where is it now?
2. On page 17, in describing Godmother, Lenny says, "The intensity of her tenderness and the concentration of her attention are narcotic. I require no one else." Is there any person, feeling, or natural experience that is a narcotic to you? Do you believe in the term "natural high" (as opposed to a chemically induced high)?
3. On page 30, Lenny says about her cousin's upcoming tonsillectomy: "I visualize a red, scalloped scar running from ear to ear. It is a premonition." What do you think she means by this? What is a premonition? When in your life have you had premonitions? How are premonitions used in movies to build tension? In stories? On TV?

4. On page 44, read the paragraph describing a woman who laughed at her son's funeral. Think of times when you were supposed to be silent or sad but had a hard time not laughing (church services, memorial services, funerals, weddings, etc.). It has been said that laughter is just this side of tears. What does the saying mean? Why does your mouth sometimes curve into a smile when you don't want it to?

Writing Exercises

Analogies

1. Read the colonel's story on pages 46–47. It is an analogy that explains the mixing of the Parsees into the country of India.
2. Get together in small groups and brainstorm events from history, from your own life, or from today's news that could be explained with an analogy (the LA riots, the formation of Native-American reservations, the American Civil War, the increase in population of an ethnic group in your own city, town, or suburb).
3. After listing events, choose one to explain with an analogy.
4. Ask each member of your group to write his or her own analogy to explain the event.
5. Read the analogies to the class. Have your classmates decide which analogy they like best, or read the analogies to your group and have it choose which one to read to the entire class.

Betrayals

Pages 16–17 depict the betrayal of Lenny by her father.

1. List times you feel your parents have betrayed you.
2. List times you have betrayed your parents.
3. Write a story about one of these "scenes" or about an imaginary betrayal.

Section Two (pages 67–119)

Warm-Ups

Lenny says, on page 78, “I am schooled to read between the lines of my father’s face.” In the upcoming section, Lenny has to try to “read” the faces, the tones of voice, and the actions of the adults around her. She has to try to understand exactly what is going on around her, why there is tension, and how it will affect her daily life.

1. Think of behaviors that convey tension: a frown, your father clearing his throat, an overly clean room, a verbal or physical assault.
2. Imagine that you are in a crowd at a demonstration. Describe the tension that is building in the crowd and then depict what happens on a video or cassette tape or in a drawing or written account. As an alternative, describe tension building in a family.

On page 101, we see where the title of the book comes from: “India is going to be broken. Can one break a country? And what if they break it where our house is?” And later: “And I become aware of religious differences. It is sudden. One day everybody is themselves—and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols.”

1. Can you think of other examples of former neighbors becoming enemies? What about in the U.S.?
2. After studying the causes of the Civil War in the United States, take one side. Prepare to debate someone formally on the opposing side.
3. Now write an explanation of the war from a neutral point of view. Is this difficult? Why?

Open-Ended Questions

1. This section is perhaps the most humorous in the book. Farting, swearing, hiding under the table, making out, and family chase scenes occur. It is also a section in which the tension of coming conflict builds, so that at the end of page 119, we are aware that violence will be an inescapable consequence.

How have you used comedy or humor to relieve tension in your life? Have you seen movies in which humor is used effectively to relieve tension?

To relax while performing surgery, some surgeons make jokes. Can you think of other situations where humor is used to relax people, either in your own life or in movies? List those situations.

In a personal essay, write about one of the situations.

2. “I know when you want something very much it gives people power over you,” says Lenny on page 80. Is this true? How can people resist that power? How does our society make people desire things? Give examples.

TV, radio, and print advertising appeal to all five senses. Is this why advertisements are effective?

3. Pages 83–86 describe Shabat Kyan wooing Ayah. He brings her things she likes to eat, he sits close to her, he makes promises, he flatters her. Reread this section.

How do Americans woo a beloved? Do we wear perfume? Bring gifts? Ignore or follow around our love object? Is there a ritual for asking someone to go out? What is it? What works and doesn't work? Why?

4. At the end of this section, the villagers again talk of the coming conflict, but many refuse to leave, even though they have been warned. Can you think of times in history or in your life when people refused to leave their homes? What was the result? Write a short story about such an event, but have those involved leave their homes.

Meet in groups and set up imaginary day-to-day situations about historical events similar to the partition of India.

Create characters who debate plans of action.

Write the dialogue and create a play.

Writing Exercises

Monologues

1. Reread the scene on page 96 in which Gandhi speaks of a very human activity. At first Lenny is shocked to hear this famous person talk about bowels and bowel habits, but later she testifies to his great power.

2. Think of a famous person or someone else you admire. (This person can be alive or dead.)

3. List incidents this person was involved in. Research this person, writing down details of interest.

4. Now imagine that you are this person. Write a dramatic monologue as though you were the person talking. This can take the form of a letter to someone, or simply a personal essay. Include both the person's public and private sides.

Monologues with Partners

1. Write down information about a famous person.
2. Exchange the information with a partner. Imagine the famous person's private thoughts and write an interior monologue or a short story based on the information given by your partner.
3. Read your paper back to your partner.

Characters Changing from Good to Evil

Ice-candy-man is a "con artist," changing occupations and personalities to achieve an advantage.

1. Write a sketch of a con artist. Have him or her change from evil to good, or good to evil.
2. Give a partner a description of a good person. Have your partner show the character change through the character's actions and words.

Section Three (pages 120–220)

Warm-Ups

In this section, friends separate, leaving their homes afraid of each other. We see people who formerly lived in peace killing each other. Lenny witnesses and hears about killing, rape, and torture. In the U.S. young children are sometimes caught in cross-fire and killed walking to school, or a favorite principal is shot as he visits the home of a student.

For the next few days, interview children. Go to an elementary school, a playground, or a community center with a tape recorder, a video or 35 mm camera, or just a pad and pencil. Talk to kids about violence. Find out the television shows they watch, their fears, their feelings about the future.

1. Think of questions, ideas, and angles on the story. Do girls respond to your questions differently than boys?
2. After reviewing the information you gathered from the interviews, write a personal essay on a topic related to children and violence. Or write a short story based on one of the kids you interviewed. Perhaps you will want to write some poems about what you heard and how it made you feel.

If you are a visual artist, draw a picture, paint a mural, or organize an art class for kids.

Open-Ended Questions

1. On page 125, Lenny says, “Now I know surely. One man’s religion is another man’s poison.” Do you believe this? Given the violence that breaks out and the fact that India is “cracked” along religious lines, can you understand why Lenny feels this way? And yet, in other cultures, religion saves lives. Give some examples of this from U.S. or world history. Listen to John Lennon’s song “Imagine.” Write a poem, song, play, or essay on religion.
2. On page 149, Lenny says of the violence, fires, and massacres, “Despite all the ruptured dreams, broken lives, buried gold, bricked-in rupees, secreted jewelry, lingering hopes . . . the fire could not have burned for months and months. But in my memory it is branded over an inordinate length of time: memory demands poetic license.”

Think of a time when you were in pain, upset or depressed, when your life was disrupted by a move, a divorce, or the death of someone you loved. Did time then seem to pass slowly? Especially when compared to happy times? Bored times? Does time seem to move at different rates depending on whether you are at school or home, in the wilderness or the city?

In small groups discuss how mood, place, and activity affect time.

Present the results of your discussion to the class in a creative way: a skit, a group poem, or a list of suggestions for moving time along.

3. Chapter 21 takes the reader back into Lenny's family world, characterized by humor, joy, and a "regular life." Why do you think the author shows us Lenny's family here?

4. On pages 196–200, we see an example of an "arranged marriage." Do you believe that arranged marriages can work? Should such marriages be outlawed? If a culture's practices are harmful (e.g., forcing very young women to marry men they hate, refusing to call a doctor when someone is critically ill), do you believe that governments should forbid such practices, even if they are consistent with religious beliefs? If an arranged marriage requires (and receives) the consent of the prospective husband, wife, and their families, then doesn't this cultural practice serve everyone's best interests?

Writing Exercises

Near the end of Ranna's story, in which he, a young child, survives a massacre in his village, the author says, "The moment Ranna was close enough to see the compassion in her stranger's eyes, he fainted" (page 219).

1. List moments of compassion in your life, or examples of compassion that you have read or heard about. These can come from history, the newspaper, the neighborhood, or within your family.
2. Write a story, a poem, an essay, or a play based on a specific example of human beings showing compassion for each other.

Section Four (pages 221–289)

Warm-Ups

In this section, you will sense the importance of Godmother, the wise and influential woman in Lenny’s life who seems to bring about miracles. Think about such people in your town, your family, your neighborhood.

1. Read some poems and prose pieces that describe unusual characters.
2. Write a poem or story about someone who is powerful in a supernatural way, or simply because he or she is old and wise.

Open-Ended Questions

1. Ayah’s story will emerge as the book ends. She is one of many women affected by the partition of India. “The women on the roof . . . beat their breasts and cry: ‘Hai! Hai! Hai! Hai!’ reflecting the history of their cumulative sorrows” (page 285). How do men and women experience war differently?

Write from a woman’s point of view about any war you have studied in American or world history.

Now, write about the same war from a man’s point of view.

Choose a partner of the opposite sex to read your portraits to.

Listen to your partner’s portraits.

Discuss the portraits.

2. On page 234, Hamida tells a story to Lenny. It illustrates Hamida’s belief that nothing can be done to alter their lives because they are “fated”: God has a plan, and people cannot change it. Do you believe this? If not, do you believe in free will—that your choices and actions determine your future? Do your beliefs lie somewhere between fate and free will?

Find someone who disagrees with you, and present your views to the class or to a small group.

3. An unusually frank and humorous scene on pages 246–248 describes a family letting gas. In the midst of the moving and difficult search for Ayah, the author includes this bit of slapstick comedy.

Have there been times in your life that something funny has happened in the middle of tragedy or tension?

Describe one of these times on paper or to a small group.

Make a skit out of it and present it to the class.

4. On page 266, Lenny says about her own crying: “It is how grown-ups cry when their hearts are breaking.” Do grown-ups experience things differently from young people? At what age does this difference in experience change? Can you describe what makes grown-up grief different from childlike grief?

Writing Exercises

One of the themes in the novel is that children should not be allowed to see, hear, or know about certain things. Each culture has its own taboos, but children usually find ways of subverting them.

1. List things, words, ideas, or places that have been, or are still, forbidden to you.
2. Read these lists one at a time to the class. As each of your classmates reads, jot down taboos they mention that you had not thought of.
3. Review your list.
4. Expand on one “forbidden” item.
5. Write a memoir, an essay of personal opinion, a poem, or a short story. Or explore this topic in pictures, photographs, or music instead of, or in addition to, writing.
6. Present this work to the class, or as a class put together a booklet about forbidden themes.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Open-Book Test Questions

Section One

1. The opening words in the book are “My world is compressed.” List ways in which Lenny’s world is compressed in this section. Now find ways in which the outside world is beginning to impinge on her world. What in the outside world affects you?
2. How does Lenny use her handicap? How does she feel about it? Find examples of her taking delight in her handicapped status. How does this attitude differ from your feelings about people with handicaps?
3. Pages 28–29 give a description of Ayah and her suitors. It is a very sensual description. Find and list examples of touch, smell, sight, taste, and sound in the description on these and other pages in this section. Write a description of your own neighborhood, room, car, or town, using all five senses.
4. After reading this introductory part of the novel, how do you feel about Lenny? Why? Support your opinion of her with evidence—incidents, descriptions, and dialogue—from the story.

Section Two

1. Throughout this section, Lenny steals and hides bottles. Finally her godmother discovers the theft on page 93. Are some people better at lying than others? Is Ice-candy-man a good liar? Is Ayah?
2. Reread the opening paragraph on page 113 beginning “While I lead the life of a spoilt little brat . . .” Here Lenny describes two simultaneous lives. Think of someone you know and contrast his or her life with yours in a paragraph beginning with “While I lead the life of . . .”
3. In the last pages of this section, the villagers refuse to leave their homes, even though they are warned of impending danger. Why don’t we believe people when they warn us? Give examples in your life when you did not heed someone’s advice or warning.

Section Three

1. Over the course of this section, Ice-candy-man changes, culminating with the scene in which Ayah is taken. Find examples of his metamorphosis into a frightening figure and of the build-up of tension around his actions. Note especially the scene on page 159, after Ice-candy-man has come from seeing the train. The gardener says to Ice-candy-man on page 167, “There are some things a man cannot look upon without going mad.” Is this an excuse for Ice-candy-man’s actions? Later, can you excuse what he does? Would you act similarly had you seen what he saw? Explain.

2. Lenny has finally betrayed her ayah. What scenes in the earlier sections of the book led up to this betrayal? How were we prepared for Lenny's inability to lie? After the betrayal, what does she do? What do you do if you make a mistake or hurt someone? Do you remember examples of this behavior from your childhood? How real does Lenny seem to you now?

3. This section ends as the others have with the story of the Punjab, the countryside. Until this story, Ranna's family's life has served as a contrast to Lenny's city life. In this final story, the lives blend together into the chaos of a country gone mad, with both city and country in flames, friends killing friends, and entire villages and neighborhoods destroyed. In the stories told by Ranna and Lenny, we see clearly how the political can become personal.

Think of times when your life has been directly affected by a political decision or action. How did you or those you know respond? Can we do anything to prevent politics from hurting us? Could Lenny or Ranna have done anything differently? Write an essay about these issues.

Section Four

1. You have read that Ranna finally goes to Imam Din's village. Lenny says on page 243, "In any case we are growing apart. It is inevitable. The social worlds we inhabit are too different; our interests divergent." Do you agree with her? Do you find that you grow apart from the friends of your childhood? Is it because they are of a different social class than you are? Live in a different place? In what ways have you diverged from the ways of your childhood and from the friends of your elementary or junior high school years?

2. After Ayah tells Godmother that she cannot forget what happened, Godmother replies on page 273, "Life goes on and the business of living buries the debris of our pasts. Hurt, happiness . . . all fade impartially . . . to make way for fresh joy and new sorrow. That's the way of life." Can we really bury the past? Write a description of a painful incident from your past, at least five years ago. What have you done to recover from its effects? What do you think will happen to Ayah? Will she forgive Lenny for telling where she was? Would you?

3. On page 272, reread the paragraph that describes Ayah's eyes as she looks, finally, at Lenny. Describe someone in terms of his or her eyes. Use metaphor in your description, such as "wider than the frightening saucers and dinner plates."

4. How do you feel about Ice-candy-man after reading the last pages of the book? Is it possible to feel sorry for someone you hate? Describe a person in your own life for whom you have mixed feelings. Try to paint a neutral portrait of this person, one that includes good and bad characteristics. Is this difficult?

Overview

1. In many ways, this book is about control and lack of control, in a country, a child, a woman, and a family. Give examples of each from the novel.

Draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. Make a chart to examine this central theme. Label the halves “In control” and “Out of control.”

On the lefthand side write: Lenny, Lenny’s family, Godmother, Ranna, Ayah, Indian Government. Fill in the chart with examples of control and lack of control for each.

Now add “me.” Jot down times you feel you have been in control of your life, and times when you have not.

2. This is also a book about illusion and reality. In the beginning of the novel, we encounter a parade of unified soldiers marching down the street. Yet underneath this illusion, India was already beginning to dissolve. Ice-candy-man gives the illusion of being many men: a poet, an ice cream seller, a good friend to Lenny, a spiritual man. But underneath he is an angry man, cruel and cunning, manipulating his illusions in order to tempt Ayah. Lenny is under the illusion that her mother is burning parts of Lahore down when her mother is actually helping women to escape death and kidnapping. Adults often create illusions to protect their children.

List other examples of illusions in the book.

Think about the illusions in your life: the political illusions the government creates, advertising illusions, personal illusions. List these illusions on a sheet of paper.

Choose one illusion from your list and write a poem, story, or essay about it and its underlying reality. Remember that illusions can be good. You might want to write a piece about an illusion you don’t want shattered.

3. This book is a novel. Why do you think the author decided to make it a novel and not a collection of stories? What holds the entire story together?

In novels, characters often change over time. How does Lenny change in *Cracking India*?

Bapsi Sidhwa experienced firsthand the formation of Pakistan and the “cracking of India.” Why do you think she decided to make this a work of fiction, and not a memoir? What can authors do in a novel that they cannot in nonfiction?

Writing Activities

In the novel, Bapsi Sidhwa recreates her neighborhood through dialogue, sensory descriptions, events, and characters. In a play called *Under Milkwood*, Dylan Thomas recreates a town, too. He structures his play to take place over one day, from morning until evening, following the characters through their day.

1. Read aloud *Under Milkwood* as a class.
2. Discuss with your small group the differences and similarities between Sidhwa's and Thomas's towns.
3. As a group, create a town or neighborhood.
4. Create a conflict between some of the characters in your town.
5. Act this conflict out.
6. Videotape your improvisational acting.
7. Transcribe the tape. Add to it. Change it. Edit it. Work on this individually and as a group.
8. Videotape your play after choosing classmates to read parts, or act out the play, if time allows. Present the production to the class, to the entire school, or at a community theater.

Interdisciplinary Activities

1. Invite someone of the Muslim, Hindu, or Christian faith to talk about religion to your students. Organize the discussion so it centers on differences and similarities. The speaker or speakers should relate how they have learned to live with people of other faiths.
2. Show films about India at different times in its history, such as the *Jewel in the Crown* series from public television and the movies *Gandhi* and *A Passage to India*. Show documentaries and share feature stories from news programs, such as *60 Minutes*, that focus on contemporary problems in India, such as the treatment of women.
3. Call an association for people with disabilities and ask someone to talk to the class about the facts of living with a physical disability. Or invite a physically disabled teacher or student to give a presentation on disabilities. Simulate a physical disability by having able-bodied students spend a day or two in a wheelchair.
4. Invite a magician to talk about "illusion" and its uses.

5. Invite someone who is knowledgeable about clothes, the history of fashion, or the role of clothing in different cultures to talk about how and why people of various religions dress the way they do, as well as how trends in fashion are created, encouraged, and marketed. Perhaps invite students from visual art classes to join your class.

6. Ask students to interview someone who is older and well respected in their family, neighborhood, or community. Tell them to record the interview. Students should find out why this person is respected. What is it in his or her life that inspires others? (Remind them of Lenny's relationship to Godmother in the novel.) Have students play their interviews for the class.

Establish a "local heroes and heroines" day in your class and invite respected citizens to talk to students and answer questions.

7. Find a cookbook of Pakistani recipes. Reserve the home economics room one day after school and cook a meal together similar to the meals Lenny describes in the book.

8. Invite a professor of Indian and Pakistani history to give a talk or show a film on the partition of India.

9. Many women throughout history have organized protests against war. For example, Joan Baez, the American folk singer, protested the Vietnam War. For years Irish women have organized to end the war between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Have students research women's peace efforts. Invite someone who has done peace work in your community to talk to the class.

10. In 1993 the United Nations, reacting to the conflict in Bosnia, finally declared rape a war crime. Have students find this declaration and read it to the class. Discuss the wording. Discuss why the U.N. had not made this declaration sooner.

ADDENDA FOR PHOTOCOPYING

Further Resources

The following books deal with issues and situations similar to those depicted in *Cracking India*.

Breckenridge, Jill. *Civil Blood*. The story, in verse, of a Confederate family, their slaves, and the slaves' families during the Civil War.
Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. A novel set in India at the time of its struggle for independence.

McCullough, David Willis, ed. *American Childhoods: An Anthology*. Read especially "Joanna Draper," a narrative from the Federal Writer's project, as told by a former slave; "Black Elk," selections from *Black Elk Speaks*, about the massacres of Native Americans and their forced settlement on reservations; "Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston," selections describing the enforced settlement of Japanese Americans in camps in California; "Sheyann Webb and Rachel West Nelson," young girls' memories of Civil Rights days in Selma.

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *The Crow Eaters*, *The Bride*, and *An American Brat*. Three novels about Pakistan and India at different times in history.

Scott, Paul. *The Jewel in the Crown*, *The Day of the Scorpion*, *The Towers of Silence*, and *A Division of the Spoils*. These four novels, set in India, comprise the Raj Quartet.

Welch, James. *Fools Crow*. The story of a Native American village during colonial days.

Students might be interested in reading *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen and *West with the Night* by Beryl Markham as examples of books written by immigrant women who lived as pioneers.

Books that deal with the theme of family and its relation to politics or outside forces include *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, and *Woman Warrior: Memories of a Girlhood* by Maxine Hong Kingston.

Glossary

Section One (pages 1-66)

ayah: nursemaid, nanny
baijee: female head of the house
calipers: metal braces
chaudhry: village leader
dhoti: loin cloth
granthi: Sikh leader
interlude: brief amount of time
jinn: evil spirit, devil
paucity of pigment: paleness, lack of dark pigment
pram: baby carriage
raconteur: storyteller
the Raj: British ruler of India
salaams: bows
sari: dress, wrapped around the body
Swaraj: independence
Zarathushtis: Parsee ancestors

Section Two (pages 67-119)

caste: group, defined by religion
fraternizing: forming alliances
Gandhijee: Gandhi, Indian leader
levitate: rise off the ground
Matric exam: exam to get into college
monsoons: rainstorms
ostentatiously: with a great show, fuss
Pathan: knife sharpener
phulka: pancake

Section Three (pages 120-220)

chuddar: veil
countenances: recognizes
kohl: charcoal
minarets: round tops of mosques
petrol: gasoline
sepoy: policeman
somnambulist: sleepwalker
virtuosity: exceptionally fine expertise

Section Four (pages 221-289)

exorcise: get rid of
metamorphosed: changed
Tongawallahs: men who pull people in tongas, or carts.