

A Discussion Guide for *The Immigrant Princess*

The Immigrant Princess, by Variny Yim, is a poignant love story about four women from the Cambodian royal family who escaped prior to the invasion of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, and are now trying to build a new life as immigrants in the U.S. **Here are some questions to help facilitate your discussion of the novel in your book club or reading group:**

1. There are many themes interwoven into the book including love, family, cultural and generational conflicts, identity issues, and reinvention. What theme most resonated with you and why?
2. At the core, this is an immigration story about a displaced family who loses everything because of war and strife in their own country, and they must rebuild their lives in the United States. Have you ever been displaced or forced to move out of your living situation? What challenges did you face? How did it make you feel? How did you cope and rebuild your life?
3. Sophea and Ravy seem to be in a constant state of conflict with their mother and grandmother. They love each other, but view the world very differently. What kind of mother-daughter issues are raised in the book? Which side do you tend to agree with and why? How do generational or cultural differences affect their relationship? Is approval from our mothers and elders important? Why or why not?
4. The book touches on the political history of Cambodia, and the effects the Vietnam War and French colonization had on the country. Do you think outside countries like the U.S. played a role in contributing to the turmoil in Cambodia? Is a country solely responsible for its own fate? Are there any lessons to be learned from what happened in Cambodia that can be applied in today's world?
5. The Killing Fields and the genocide that killed two million Cambodians are an integral part of Cambodia's history. How does this play out in the book, as well as in the interaction between the characters? What are the ways in which each character deals with the trauma of that kind of loss and pain?
6. At any point, we all must face some traumatic episode or loss in our lives. Do people tend to speak openly about their hurt, or is it easier to remain silent and private? When you have faced a tough time, how did you cope? What was the best piece of advice that you received during that time?
7. The idea of *Apsara*, the mystical deity and enchantress, is prevalent throughout the book. What does *Apsara* mean to you? Is it important to have a community of family and friends who guide and support us? Who are the *Apsaras* – female supporters – in your life?
8. Sophea's dream is to become an executive producer at the local television station where she works. What importance or role does her job play in her life? How do you view her relationship with her career? Have you ever lost a job that you really wanted? If so, how did you handle the situation? Is there a time when you stood up for yourself in the workplace?
9. As with many young women, Sophea and Ravy are consumed by their love lives. What important points mark their journey in trying to open themselves up to love? What lessons do they learn along the way? Have you ever been with a partner that your family disapproved of? What happened and

August 2016

how did you handle the situation? How important is the opinion of your family and friends when picking a mate?

10. What did this story teach you about the immigrant experience in America? Was there anything that surprised you? What is your family's history in coming to the U.S.? Do you have any family stories about past relatives that still have an impact on you today? Are there any special traditions or practices that have been passed down in your family over the generations?

11. This is a story about four very strong women in one family. What are the individual struggles for each woman? What is the dynamic between all of them? What challenges and fears do they face that is projected in the way they interact with one another? Does the lack of a strong, male role model in the family affect them? If so, how? In which ways do the four women exemplify traditional females roles, and where do they divert?

12. Cultural differences, diversity, and race play key roles in *The Immigrant Princess*. In what particular scenes did these themes show up in the book? What did you find most interesting about Cambodian culture? What is the revolution of Cookie's relationship with Dr. Michael in regards to her initial prejudice against him?

13. Family is at the centerpiece of this novel. How is the family paradigm shifting in the U.S.? Why is family important and what must we do to preserve it? Where in the novel does it illustrate the movement for an acceptance of a more unconventional family model? What is unique and true about whom you consider to be your family?

Additional Questions:

14. Humor is used to diffuse many tense scenes in the book. What was your favorite use of humor and why?

15. What are your thoughts about the male characters in the book: Tim, Adam, Dr. Michael, and Prince Chakra? What is their impact/influence on the women in the story?

16. Food is almost a character in the book. How was the use of food used to bring the Cambodian culture to life? What role does food play in your life? In what ways does food bring people together?

###