

Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Stories as a Window into the Indian-Immigrant Experience
OLLI, Spring 2024
Syllabus

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This course introduces the short fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri through her Pulitzer Prize-winning first book, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). We will focus on one short story each week, focusing on literary elements as well as cultural contexts. You will have an enhanced experience if you read the stories ahead of the discussions, but reading is not required in order to learn about Lahiri's career, to get a taste of her fiction, and to appreciate the insights the stories provide on the Indian-immigrant experience in the United States in the twentieth century.

The text our class will focus on:

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999). If you can get a copy of this book (any edition), it will be helpful to you; used copies are available online. You can also search for copies of the stories posted online.

Our class meetings: 11:30 to 1:00 PM on four Wednesdays, March 27, April 3, April 10, and April 17 at OLLI in M2 in downtown Champaign.

An outline of our weekly schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to Jhumpa Lahiri's life and work. *Brief* history of Indian immigration to the United States. Begin discussing "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine." Context includes the 1947 Partition of India and the 1971 war that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.

Week 2: Continue discussing "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine." If time allows, discuss "Mrs. Sen's." Topics of discussion include the use of a child's point of view, the theme of assimilation, and the myth of the American dream.

Week 3: Discuss "The Interpreter of Maladies," the title story in the collection. Topics of discussion include the cultural differences between Indians and Indian Americans, especially in marriage, sexual expression, and dress.

Week 4: Discuss "The Third and Final Continent," the final story in the collection. Topics of discussion include attitudes towards the elderly in India and in the US as well the immigrant's attempt to create community and home. We will also discuss what themes and patterns you notice in the stories on our reading list.

Other fiction that might interest you:

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Arranged Marriage: Stories*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

Story-Wallah: Short Stories by South Asian Writers, edited by Shyam Selvadurai. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Nonfiction that might interest you:

Kakar, Sudhir, and Katharina Kakar. *The Indians: Portrait of a People*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2007.

Rudrappa, Sharmila. *Ethnic Routes to Becoming American: Indian Immigrants and the Cultures of Citizenship*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004.

Vara, Vauhini. "How Jhumpa Lahiri's Work Has Shaped Indian American Literature—and What's Coming Next," *New York Times Book Review*, 24 Sep., 2023, pp. 14-15.