

# BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE  
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES JHUMPA LAHIRI'S NOVEL

# THE NAMESAKE

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# BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

## Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Jhumpa Lahiri's novel **The Namesake**

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of **The Namesake**. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for **The Namesake** has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker and writer. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

### **Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for The Namesake**

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# BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

## Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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# BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

## Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

## You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

The guide is formatted to give you extra space to make your own notes.

## How to Begin

**Relax and look forward to enjoying your bookclub.**

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more 'hands-on' support, feel free to contact us. (See Contact Information)

## What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

**INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.**

## **Do We Need to Agree?**

**THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.**

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences with us. You can respond on-line at our website or contact us through our Contact Information. We would love to hear from you.

## **Discussion Starters**

There are as many ways to begin a bookclub discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)

- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote. (not necessarily from the novel)
- Discuss the historical information of the novel. (not applicable to all novels)
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

## **Above All, Enjoy Yourself**

# INTRODUCTION

## Novel Quickline

**The Namesake** is a novel about the start of a new life, a new culture, a new country. The parents of our story, Ashoke and Ashima, have moved from India to America. Ashoke is to be a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at MIT (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology), located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. With him is his new bride, Ashima. The novel opens with the birth of their first child, a son.

Immediately there is a clash of cultures – the baby must be named, an important step in every baby’s acculturation. In the Bengali tradition, this is a relaxed and honored practice. The child is usually given two names: a pet or nickname to be used within the family, and a good name to be used outside the family circle. According to Bengali tradition, the Hindu ceremony for naming a baby takes place at home and lasts anywhere from eleven to forty-one days after birth – but that is in India.

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The Gangulis are now in America, where everything moves more quickly. They are told that they cannot take the baby home until a name is registered on his birth certificate. What are they to do? The honor of naming this child belongs to Ashima's grandmother, who lives in India. The letter that will declare the baby's good name has not arrived and the parents have not even begun to think of a pet name. Suddenly there is pressure.

The name of the Russian writer Gogol comes to mind. Ashoke had been caught in a life-threatening train accident when he was younger and had been miraculously saved when someone noticed the movement of his hand in which he grasped a page from a book of short stories by Nikolai Gogol.

He tries the name out on the baby.

*"Hello, Gogol," [his father whispers] ... "Gogol," he repeats, satisfied. The baby turns his head with an expression of extreme consternation and yawns.*" (p.28)

Despite the baby's worried reaction, both parents approve of the name, because it represents the birth of the son and the re-birth of the father. *"Besides, it's only a pet name, not to be taken seriously, simply something to put on the certificate for now to release them from the hospital."* (p.29)

**What cultural ideas do we inherit from our parents? In an immigrant situation, if these cultural ideas and perspectives clash with the new environment, how is that clash managed? Do people grow into their names, or do their names shape them?**

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**Thanks for previewing this  
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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