

RESOURCE SHEET 1

CAROUSEL BRAINSTORMING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Quotation:** *The grandmother ... glanced up at us, the gold hoop in her nostril glinting in the firelight. My dad tipped his Indians cap to her. She stared at him, stared a little longer and a little more deeply.... I looked at her and my father. What was happening here in the doorway, between light and dark, between civilizations, between centuries?*

Questions: At the beginning of the visit to Vijay's, what was the relationship between the grandmother with the gold hoop in her nostril and Toner's father with his Cleveland Indians baseball cap? How did it change? What was it like at the end? What does the author mean by the phrase "between light and dark"?

- 2. Quotation:** *He woke up with the slightest of smiles and the slightest skip in his step. Maybe the smile was from [a dream]. But more likely that smile reflected the start of a shift within my dad during the night.... Over the next few days, bit by bit, I saw my father meet Sri Lanka.*

Questions: What was the shift the author saw taking place within his father? In what ways did his father "meet" Sri Lanka?

3. **Quotation:** *To them this must have been a miracle, two Americans come to worship in their temple here on their forgotten plantation.*

The Hindu priest approached. He stood before my father in just a loincloth.... For a moment these two opposites stood eye to eye—a nearly naked holy man facing a white man in wool pants holding a Gatorade bottle—and I wondered what sense either could possibly make of the other.

Questions: What message is the author trying to convey in this passage? What does he want his readers to be thinking about? Aside from their outward appearance, how were the Hindu priest and the father different from each other? How were they similar to each other?

4. *My dad ... pressed his hands together in front of the garland and, bowing to the priest, said, "Wanacome." ... The rest of the crowd froze. This one holy Tamil word, wanacome ... had now become as sacred as incense.... For a moment that contained eternity, the vast distance from black to white, from Hindu to Catholic, from tea-picker to judge, from Sri Lanka to America—all was ultimately no further than the utterance of a word.*

Questions: What is the significance of this passage? Why did the crowd freeze? What did the father's use of the greeting "Wanacome" mean to them? What is "the vast distance" the author refers to?

5. *There, standing in the doorway ... was the grandmother. She raised her eyes from the ground and said through Vijay's translation, "Sir, you have honored my family by coming here. You are old, and I know it is not easy for the old to learn the new. You are a good and holy man.... [My dad] bowed to her with his palms together, saying in a very familiar way, "Wanacome." ... And then, in a gesture of either comedy or sanctity, my dad placed his Indians cap on her head. Vijay and I laughed, but from her reaction you'd think she'd just been crowned with a tiara of diamonds.*

Questions: What is the significance of this passage to Toner's story? What change does it symbolize? Why was the grandmother so moved by the gift of the father's Indians cap? What did giving the cap away symbolize for the father? How far had he come on his journey?