

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussion groups or library programs.

Meet Ohio-based author—and radiologist—Amit Majmudar.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading and sharing ***The Abundance***.

Discover additional books, films, and websites to explore topics and themes in depth.

The Abundance: A Novel By Amit Majmudar



About the Book

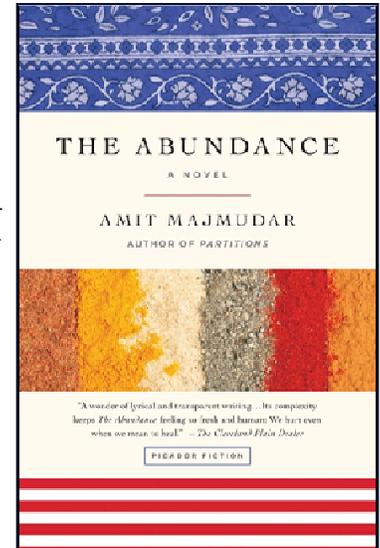
When Mala and Ronak learn that their mother has only a few months to live, they are reluctantly pulled back into the Midwestern world of their Indian immigrant parents. In the brief time between diagnosis and deterioration, busy, efficient Mala commits to mastering her mother's slow art of Indian cooking. Perfecting the raita and the rotli, the two begin not only to work together but also to talk, confronting their deepest divisions and failures. But when Ronak hits upon the idea of selling their cooking-as-healing experience as a high-concept memoir, immigrant and native-born must find a way to cross this last divide.

Picador, 2013, ISBN 9781250045096.

us.macmillan.com/theabundance/amitmajmudar

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library:

<http://ohdbks.lib.overdrive.com>



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Talk About It

*Topics to share when discussing **The Abundance**.*

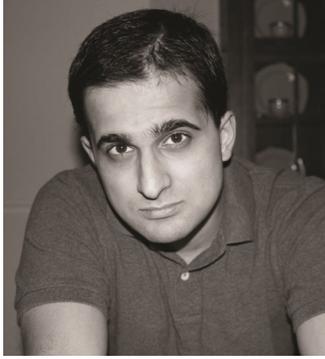
The narrative of the novel floats between memories and the present. What is the overall impact of this non-linear structure on the novel? Is it more a stylistic storytelling choice, or a nod towards the self-reflection a terminal illness can cause?

Can you relate to any of the conflicts caused by cultural and/or generational differences shown in the family's story? Are the main sources of family tension cultural, or generational? Could any of them be resolved more effectively than they are in the novel?

Apart from the narrator, which character were you most able to relate to? Which character were you least able to relate to? Do you think any of the characters were presented unfairly due to the narrator's biases?

Who in the family experienced the most personal growth through the novel? Did anyone in the family avoid learning any life lessons, or did they all grow together?

More discussion questions inside!



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Shilpa Majmudar Patel.

About the Author

Amit Majmudar is the author of *Partitions*, chosen by *Kirkus Reviews* as one of the best debut novels of 2011 and by *Booklist* as one of the year's ten best works of historical fiction. His poetry has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *Best American Poetry 2011*. A radiologist, he lives in Columbus, Ohio.

Author Resources

Amit Majmudar's official website

<http://www.amitmajmudar.com/>

Author page on Macmillan website

<http://us.macmillan.com/author/amitmajmudar>

Amit Majmudar reflects on what it means to be an "Immigrant Writer"

http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/04/am-i-an-immigrant-writer/?_r=0

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Madeline Gobbo in Picador's Publicity Department at 646-307-5525 or madeline.gobbo@picadorusa.com.

Talk About It (continued)

"It astonishes me that the dahl I have been making for the past thirty years can fill a whole screen with letters. It seems so important there, so permanent. But it's really just a cup of dusty-yellow mung beans soaked overnight."

Compare the mother's cooking talent with the father's mathematical talent. Are there any similarities between their approaches to their passions? Compare and contrast the ways in which these pursuits are used to cope with the reality of mother's mortality.

The author is a fairly young male, and yet *The Abundance* is intimately told from the perspective of a dying grandmother. Do you think the narrator was presented convincingly? What might have inspired the author's choice of narrator? Or was no particular inspiration needed?

Consider the role cooking plays in the novel. How different would the story have been without that common bond between mother and daughter, across generations? Could the story have worked with another activity substituted for cooking, or is there something special about the culinary art (the spices, the traditions, etc.)?

Why does Ronak want to turn his mother and sister's cooking-as-healing experience into a published memoir? Is he looking towards anything more than money?

Imagine the family was voting on whether to live in India or the United States. Who would vote for which? Why? Would anyone abstain, or change their vote after talking it through? Would there be an eventual consensus?

How does the narrator's terminal diagnosis flavor the novel? Is there room for hope, despite medical inevitabilities? If so, hope for what?

Talk About It (continued)

Is the narrator's vegetarianism mainly cultural, or does it also come from personal conviction? Would she still have been a vegetarian if she had been raised outside Gujarati culture? Or is one's culture so much a part of one's self that such "what if" questions are impossible to answer?

Many of the terms and practices mentioned in **The Abundance** may send unfamiliar readers off in search of a dictionary— or even an anthropologist! Does the cultural diversity showcased in the novel contribute to the success of the story, or is it a roadblock for many American readers?

Consider the various marriages shown in the novel. Which marriage is the happiest? Which is the least happy? If the narrator were to write a list of advice for a happy marriage, what might some of the "tips" be? Would the narrator's list be any different from the author's list?

What is the purpose and role of food in **The Abundance**? Is it more than nourishment? How much more? How does this approach to food compare to the role food plays in your family? Are these approaches different from generation to generation?

Go Further

*Ideas for extending the experience of reading **The Abundance**.*

Research Indian cooking, especially the traditional Gujarati style featured in **The Abundance**. Resources are available at local libraries, and online at websites such as <http://www.gujaratirecipes.in/>. For a list of Ohio public libraries, see OPLIN's Find A Library: <http://oplin.org/fal/>. Is there a dish that appeals to you? What makes it appealing? How much effort would it take to obtain the traditional ingredients?

Consider preparing some Indian recipes that interest you. Can you find any ways a recipe might have changed with the transition from the informal tradition of "a pinch of this" and a "a lump of that" to the standardized measures and descriptions of modern recipes?

Author Amit Majmudar is a practicing radiologist, and in many ways careers in medicine are the "family business" for the family featured in **The Abundance**. There are many challenges along the road to a career in medicine, as the narrator demonstrates while she reflects on her own failure of some of the exams included in the process. Research the requirements for becoming a physician. You might start with the American Medical Association's review of the topic: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/education-careers/becoming-physician.page>

Would you ever consider going through the training and overall investment required to become a physician? If so, how would you go about working through the process? If not, is there any career that would motivate you through such an extensive list of requirements?

The Abundance is marinated in family dynamics. Consider the habits and structures of your own family. Do any of the characters in the novel correspond to members of your own family? Which character plays a role most similar to yours? Consider encouraging a relative to read **The Abundance**, and see if they agree with you— if you dare!

While there's nothing wrong with hoping we have many years left, engaging with the intimate narrative of **The Abundance** may encourage readers to consider their own mortality and end-of-life plans. There are many aspects to consider. Do you have a designated medical power of attorney, and have you discussed your treatment preferences? What do your loved ones currently know about your wishes regarding your funeral or memorial service? Do you have a will? The section of the Ohio Revised Code pertaining to wills is available at <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/2107>.

DISCLAIMER: The materials in this toolkit are intended to facilitate personal and/or group reflection. They are not for the purpose of providing legal advice. Contact an attorney if you wish to obtain advice with respect to any particular legal issue.

Check It Out

Companion books and films for *The Abundance*.

Read *The Lowland* by Jhumpa Lahiri (ISBN 9780307278265). Jhumpa Lahiri's epic tale traces a Calcutta family through fifty years of tragedy, revolution, generational change, and the unending bonds of love.

Watch *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971). One of the most well-known musicals in Broadway history, *Fiddler* presents the story of milkman Tevye and his wife Golde as they work to navigate the rapidly changing world of late prerevolutionary Russia. Suitable husbands must be found for Tevye's five daughters, but questions and tensions abound about what a suitable husband is—and who decides that they've found one.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067093/>

Read *The Family Dinner: Great Ways to Connect with Your Kids, One Meal at a Time* by Laurie David and Kirstin Uhrenholdt, illustrated by Sarah Coleman (ISBN 9780446565462). A more-than-just-recipes toolkit for bringing the family together for dinner, and a testament to the benefits of dining as a unified group, even through the inevitable challenges of family life.

Read *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green (ISBN 9780142424179). Hazel is dying. She's 16, and she gets live life in such lovely ways as going to Cancer Kid Support Group. But this bit of Cancer Kid life turns into something wonderful when she meets fellow cancer survivor Augustus Waters. Their meeting turns into a mission to discover how her favorite story—famously incomplete—ends. Along the way, life, love, and death are examined with the kind of clarity that impending mortality brings.

Read *Learning to Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life* by Philip Simmons (ISBN 9780553381580). Philip Simmons was only thirty-five when he was told that he had fewer than five years to live. Though he did ultimately succumb to ALS, he left behind a moving collection of essays highlighting the deepest parts of his spiritual quest in search of the meaning of life and death. A surprisingly joyful journey: though many things are beyond our control, Simmons reminds us to “fall with grace, to grace.”

Explore More

Additional ideas and resources to use with *The Abundance*.

Government of India: Ministry of Culture

<http://www.indiaculture.nic.in/>

A variety of resources presented by the national government of India showcasing the many aspects of Indian culture.

American Cancer Society: Learn About Cancer

<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/index>

The American Cancer society's website includes a treasury of informational cancer resources in the “Learn About Cancer” section.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Food

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/default.htm>

An extensive resource on food and cooking-related topics brought to you by the U.S. Government. Learn about how our government approaches food resources, both at home and abroad.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:
<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

This toolkit revised
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