



The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman

- 1.** Do the stories and events told in this book remind you of anything that has happened to you or to people you know? If not, can you imagine that events like these might happen to you or someone you know in the future?
- 2.** What do you expect when you go to the doctor? How does this fit into your script or worldview of the United States' medical profession?
- 3.** Why did Lia's parents keep going back to the hospital? How did you feel about their refusal to give Lia her medicine? What were their motivations? Do you sympathize with them? Can you also understand Lia's doctors' position?
- 4.** This book presents cultural differences of healing practices. In the Western culture of the United States, there tends to be a dualism of mind and body in healing practices, while in the Hmong culture the mind and body are often viewed as one. Do you believe that the mind (spiritual) and body (physical) should be separated or placed together when considering how to heal a person?
- 5.** At the end of this story, is Lia alive or dead? What leads you to your conclusion?
- 6.** What do you know of services the government provides to disabled persons like Lia? Can you think of ways our country could improve the quality of life for people with disabilities? What should be the source of funds for these programs?
- 7.** Would you assign blame for Lia's tragedy? If so, to whom?
- 8.** Do you think Fadiman, as a journalist, did a good job presenting all sides of the story? Did she seem even-handed or biased? Are there other types of investigation the author might have conducted?
- 9.** What was the "role loss" many adult Hmong faced when they came to the United States? What is the underlying root cause? How does this loss affect their adjustment to America?
- 10.** Fadiman writes, "During the last decade, shocked Americans have responded to the ritual killings performed by devotees of other religions by invoking legal sanctions." (p. 107) What do you think of the Hmong's religious beliefs and practices, as presented in the book? Should the Hmong be expected to assimilate to the culture of the United States?
- 11.** Do you believe the Hmong should learn English while in the United States? Should the government make this a requirement? Had Lia's parents learned English, do you think the outcome would have been different?
- 12.** What do you think about the American government making promises of U.S. immigration to people of another country in exchange for their services in a war? What were some of the misunderstandings between the United States and the Hmong people in the Vietnam War?
- 13.** How are the Hmong refugees similar or different from other immigrants to the United States?
- 14.** The Hmong were blamed, at least partially, for Merced's "economic catastrophe." (p. 232) How did they strain Merced's economy? What could the United States have done to alleviate some of this stress? Is there anything the Hmong could have done? Do you think the economic pressure the locals felt affected how they treated the Hmong?



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15. Art is considered an important part of the Hmong culture. For example, "In Laos, a Hmong man was said to value two qualities most highly in a wife: her ability to sing poetry and her skill at paj ntaub." (p. 102) In what ways does Foua use her skill at paj ntaub?

16. What does this book say about multiculturalism in the United States? Is there such a thing as "too much" cultural difference? What are the rights and responsibilities of the majority and minority cultures?

17. The United States is often referred to as a "melting pot." (p. 181) What is your ideal metaphor for the United States? Does this include isolationists?

Source: <http://www.unc.edu/srp/srp2001/questions.html>