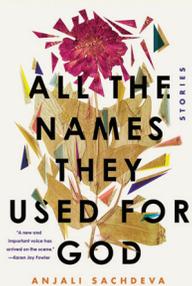


# In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Jeff Langford



## *All the Names They Used for God*

by Anjali Sachdeva

This short story collection spans centuries and continents but is united by each diverse character's struggle with fate. Sachdeva has a talent for creating moving and poignant scenes, following her highly imaginative plots to their logical ends, and depicting how one small miracle can affect everyone in its wake.

### **The World by Night**

- Sadie's story begins with her working alongside a gravedigger at night. How are the themes of death and darkness different in this story than in most?
- Zachary leaves Sadie behind, something that happens to several other characters in the collection. What are we meant to feel about her response to this? Do you admire her courage or feel pity for her desire to escape underground?
- The story juxtaposes two worlds, one of which is under the earth. Are we meant to see this as a description of Heaven and Hell? If so, what is the message of the story?

### **Glass-Lung**

- The story contrasts scientific and intellectual growth with the failures of human connection (physical, emotional and intellectual). Does the author trust more in science or in relationships?

- The lightning-glass fulgurite leads Van Jorgen — like a divining rod — to the site of the Egyptian tomb. Is this evidence of luck, providence, science, or magic?
- “But as Freyn and Effie and Van Jorgen cracked open the entrance to the crypt, all they could imagine was the glory that had so long eluded them.” Is the ending of this story hopeful or not?

### **Logging Lake**

- Robert's new motto is “Say Yes to Everything.” How does this motto shape his experience in the story? Is he still living by this motto at the end of the story?
- Nature plays an important role in the story. How does this story relate to other Naturalist works which pit humans against nature, such as Jack London's *Call of the Wild* or *To Build a Fire*?
- Robert's experience on Logging Lake gives him an aura of mystery and danger, which reignites his relationship with Linda. What changes in Robert does Linda expect? Has Robert changed?

### **Killer of Kings**

- John thought of himself as “Killer of Kings” because of the power of his words, but now he seems to regret his choices. Reflect on the power of words in our society. Are words still the “Killer of Kings?”
- We see the origins of John's resistance to cruel authority in his daydream about his classmate Reede. Has John lived up to Reede's example of triumph and courage?
- John's angel helps him to write an “apocryphal tale” but suffers the consequences as “the white light of her presence is snuffed.” The story suggests this is “what happens to dissidents.” Do you agree? Is the author suggesting there is a Divine role in this?

### **All the Names for God**

- Magic plays an important role in this story, while the title of the work refers to religious beliefs. What is the author suggesting with this interplay?
- Why did this story inspire the title of the book? Did you read the other stories with “the names of God” in mind?
- How would you describe Promise's relationships? Who has affected her life most — Abike, her parents, or her captors?

### Robert Greenman and the Mermaid

- Robert Greenman's attraction to the mermaid is mirrored by the mermaid's attraction to the shark. What is the author suggesting about the allure of danger?
- What were some of the ways the mermaid brings both bounty and ruin to the ship's crew, especially Robert?
- The ship, *Ushuaia*, is named for the southernmost city in Argentina, whose motto is "End of the world, beginning of everything." How is this motto reflected in the story?

### Anything You Might Want

- As the story begins, what is the basis of Michael and Gina's relationship?
- After Michael abandons her in Florida, Gina builds a sort of father-daughter relationship with Paul. How would you describe Gina's time with Paul? Why is their relationship left unresolved?
- At the end of the story, Gina realizes she has "her own kind of magic." How is Gina's magic related to that of the women in "All the Names for God"?

### Manus

- This story utilizes a common science fiction trope: blob-like aliens. How does this story compare to other alien stories you've read?
- Yvette Raymond sparks a revolution against the Masters that is based on literal self-sacrifice. Does this seem like an effective strategy? How does it compare to Christ's sacrifice?

### Pleiades

- Del's parents have a faith-like belief in science: "They wanted to make miracle babies so unbelievable that people would stop and stare, their own organic equivalent of a billboard for Jesus." How is this desire fulfilled or not fulfilled in the story?

- What interested you most about Troy? What role did he play in conveying Del's story?
- As Del nears death, she thinks "Nature wants us gone. Who knew the world was so unforgiving, so eager to cull?" How is this view of Nature reflected in other stories in this collection?

## NEXT MONTH



### *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson

Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement.