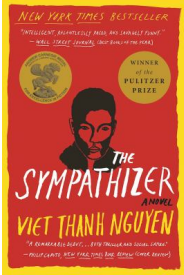


Books by the Stack



The Sympathizer by Viet Thanh Nguyen

Follows a Viet Cong agent as he spies on a South Vietnamese army general and his compatriots as they start a new life on 1975 Los Angeles..

Why you'll like it: *Introspective, leisurely paced, sardonic, compelling.*

About the Author: Viet Thanh Nguyen was born in Ban Me Thuot, Viet Nam. In 1975, he came to the United States as a refugee with his family. He received degrees in English and ethnic studies from the University of California Berkeley. After receiving a Ph.D. in English from Berkeley, he began teaching at the University of Southern California and has been there ever since. He is an associate professor of English and American studies and ethnicity. The novel *The Sympathizer* won the First Novel Prize from the Center for Fiction, the 2016 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature in Fiction, and the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the relevance of the title, *The Sympathizer*. Who do you think the author wants to reader to sympathize with? What are the different ways throughout the book that the author demonstrates sympathetic characters and situations?
2. Why do you think the author included a supernatural element in *The Sympathizer*? How does the presence of ghosts change the protagonist? What do they represent to the narrator? Are the readers meant to take the presence of the ghosts literally?
3. Guilt is a theme throughout the novel. What is the role of guilt in the lives of the characters? Does it compel them to try and right past wrongs, or make them more culpable? Or both?
4. Why is the narrator of *The Sympathizer* important? Is he a reliable narrator?
5. The narrator states early in the novel: "If ever circumstances force us into a situation where death was the price of our brotherhood, I had no doubt that Man and I would pay." Do you think he is foreshadowing events to come? Why or why not? Why do you think he feels this way about himself and Man but doesn't include Bon?
6. What does the narrator discover about himself when he travels to the Philippines to consult on *The Hamlet*? What is his greatest challenge there? How are his expectations and memories transformed by this visit? In what way does the Captain identify with the movie extras? How does he set himself apart from them?

- 7.** Throughout the novel *Man, Bon* and the narrator are referred to as a group, but let's take a deeper look at the blood brothers individually – who is Man, Bon and the narrator? What makes them blood brothers and what sets them apart? Of the three why is the narrator the only one without a name?
- 8.** At one point Sonny describes love as “being able to talk to someone else without effort, without hiding, and at the same time to feel absolutely comfortable not saying a word.” How do you describe love?
- 9.** How is Sonny set in contradiction to the narrator? Why do you think the narrator confesses to Sonny? What is the significance of the narrator's visit to Lana before meeting Sonny? He also returns to her after the “deed is done,” why do you suppose he does this? What is he hoping to find?
- 10.** What does the female agent mean when she is asked her name and she replies: “My surname is Viet and my given name is Nam”? In that moment, is she meant to represent Vietnam? Who else in the novel could be a substitute for the country? How does Vietnam function as a character in the story?
- 11.** Do you feel the harrowing experience of the female agent was meant to humanize the narrator? What was your initial reaction after he recalls the memory? How did this affect your attitude towards the narrator?
- 12.** After everything that the narrator has been through, his last words are a passionate celebration of life, “We will live!” Why do you think the author chose to end the novel on such an optimistic note? Were you surprised by the ending? What are your thoughts about what is happening in the last chapter?

(Questions provided by the publisher)



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