

Literature – Questions for discussion

Contemporary British Fiction

What are the main features of contemporary British fiction? Can we identify some recurring themes?

How did cultural movements, and recent political and historical events affect British fiction?

How have immigration, multiculturalism and devolution affected the identities of Britishness?

What is Post-modernism? What are its major stylistic features?

What are the major stylistic features associated with realism?

What is 'postcolonial' literature?

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003)

What is the meaning of the novel's title?

Why did both Ali's novel and its film adaptation arise controversy and criticism?

How is the novel structured? What are its main stylistic features (narrative mode, language, point of view...)?

Where is the story set?

What are the novel's major themes?

What were the circumstances of Nazneen's birth?

In the beginning of Monica Ali's novel, the protagonist Nazneen moves from her rural Bangladeshi village to London. How does she cope with the transition?

Fate is a significant theme in the novel. What role does Fate play in Nazneen's life? Does she rebel against her fate?

Why is Nazneen alienated?

What are the major turning points in Nazneen's struggle for self-empowerment?

Why is the 'Bishopgate episode' so important?

Why are female characters given more prominence in the book?

Can you find similarities in the characters of Chanu and Karim?

How is the episode of 9/11 used in the novel? What are its effects on the community of Brick Lane and on the characters' lives?

How is the inter-generational conflict between immigrants and their European-born children played in the story? Why are there so many clashes between Chanu and Shahana?

After almost thirty years in England, why does Chanu decide to go sightseeing?

What are the most powerful symbols of the book?

In which sense clothes and clothing are used as personal and cultural signifiers?

What does the clutter in Nazneen and Chanu's council flat represent? Why is the wardrobe a recurring image?

The image of ice skaters is recalled several times throughout the novel, and closes the story: what does the ice-skating symbolize?

How do you think life would have been for the family had Nazneen decided to return to Bangladesh with Chanu?

Do you think Chanu will eventually return to London?

What kind of identities does Ali's book portray?

Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998)

What is the meaning of the novel's title?

How is the novel structured? What are its main stylistic features (narrative mode, language, point of view...)?

Where is the story set?

What are the novel's major themes?

What are the most powerful symbols of the book?

What episodes of Martha's childhood are described in the first part of the novel?

What are the metaphorical meanings of the jigsaw puzzle?

How is the character of sir Jack Pitman introduced? Would you like to work as an employee for him?

Why do the project team decide to build "England, England" on the Isle of Wight?

How does the vocabulary adopted by Barnes reinforce England's process of 'commodification'?

Which icons of Englishness does the list contain?

In which sense can the theme park be defined as an 'original reproduction'?

Does 'Anglia' represent an 'authentic' version of Englishness?

Which traits "England, England" and "Old England" have in common?

What does the phrase "the invention of tradition" mean?

To what extent are nations 'imagined'?

Which idea of "Englishness" does Barnes's book convey?

If they really did build "England, England", do you think that you would want to go there?

Has Barnes' suggestion of the possibility of a mega-heritage tourist attraction along these lines in any way changed your views about tourism?