

***Middle of Everywhere* (by Mary Pipher) Discussion Questions**

Adapted from Harcourt Trade Publisher's Website at <http://www.harcourtbooks.com/>

1. A quote from Willa Cather's *My Antonia* opens the book, "There seemed to be nothing to see; no fences, no creeks or trees, no hills or fields. If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made." What point is Pipher trying to make by using this passage?
2. In the Foreword to *The Middle of Everywhere*, Mary Pipher discusses how September 11th changed the way she thought and felt about this book. Do we as a country view people of different races or nationalities post 9/11? What has changed politically in this country since this book was published?
3. Pipher notes, toward the end of Chapter 1, that refugees "reveal the strengths and flaws of America." How would you support this remark? What specific examples from the book would you cite first and foremost? Do these observations make you feel differently about your country? Would you say these same judgments apply to our local community?
4. In Chapter 3, (pg 71) the text reads, "The ethnic community can become a feather bed, a little soft and difficult to climb out of." What did Pipher mean by this statement? How can we help newcomers to face the real America?
5. Pipher refers to research compiled by Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut in the book *Legacies* on how immigrants adapt to their new country. Long term studies indicate that most immigrant's move into middle class in one or two generations. Those that do not succeed in are often stuck in poverty. What does this imply about the USA's forced immigrants during the antebellum period? What do believe is this country's responsibility towards refugees, immigrants and even undocumented newcomers?
6. The book describes the role of "cultural broker" to newcomers. What particular activities were you surprised to find on her list? If you met a refugee or even a recent immigrant, would you be interested in becoming a cultural broker. Do you think that this is something that you could do on an informal basis? Why or why not?
7. Pipher is extremely harsh in her criticism of the INS. Assuming that this is an accurate description, why do you suppose that the United States allows such an unfriendly and underfunded agency to continue in its current state? For those who are interested in a movie that portrays the problems that newcomers face in dealing with the INS check out *The Visitor*, (DVD owned by the library)
8. As mentioned in this book, immigrants from Latin American countries are not granted refugee status due to political reasons. What criteria do you think that our country should use when deciding on the status of refugees?
9. Have you ever had the opportunity to help someone newly arrived to the United States? If so, please share your experiences.
10. This book was full of surprises about refugees. What stands out to you as the most unexpected?