

Being American

1. Firstly, think about what it means to be the nationality you are; what is it that defines you as your nationality (apart from having the passport)? Is it your attitude to things; the way you dress; your religion or something else?
2. Do you think foreigners would choose the same thing you have to summarise your nationality? Is there an object or place or something else that you think a foreigner would mistakenly choose and why?
3. Now, decide what you think symbolises America to you: is it a place (such as New York); a person (maybe the President); an event (for example 9/11); an object (perhaps the flag); a type of food (such as a hamburger); an accent (perhaps Southern) or something else?
4. Why have you chosen what you have for question 3? Explain in what ways it sums up America for you.
5. Before you read the novel, think about why Anne Tyler might have called it *Digging to America*.
6. As you read the novel, return to question 5 and see if your ideas change. Make a note of new ideas and, if you change your mind, about your initial thoughts.
7. As you read the novel, make notes on what each character thinks it is to be American or the ways in which you think they express their 'Americanism', either explicitly or through Tyler's narration. Maryam in particular remembers how she felt and what she did when she first immigrated to USA.
8. Also make a note of how each character views other nationalities and their understanding of that culture. For example, what do Bitsy and Brad do and say to maintain Jin-Ho's Korean background? What comments do the Donaldsons' extended family make about Maryam moving to USA and her arranged marriage?

Overall: what do you think Tyler's purpose is in threading together all these cultures and understandings and misunderstandings that go on between the characters based on their nationalities and their heritage and what is the effect on the narrative?