



# NIGHT THEATER

A novel by Vikram Paralkar

## Reading Group Guide & Discussion Questions

1. The characters in *Night Theater* are known only by their occupations (“the surgeon,” “the teacher,” “the pharmacist,” and so on), and we never learn their real names. Why do you think that Vikram Paralkar made this decision? What does that say about living in a society that places more value on one’s profession than on one’s personality?
2. Would the surgeon have been willing to take on this case if the teacher’s wife hadn’t been pregnant? What do you believe the deciding factor was for the surgeon to help this family?
3. After operating on the young boy, the surgeon’s demeanor changes dramatically. He seems kinder, more compassionate, and even makes jokes. What do you think changed his behavior?
4. Before the surgeon operates on the wife, he reflects on the young pregnant woman who committed suicide when he was working at the coroner’s office: “He was required to extract the inhabitant of her womb, a cold and unmoving fetus that had never known the world outside her and now never would” (80). Did you see any similarities between the two cases?
5. The pharmacist states, “Our family astrologer used to tell us that when we’re born, our souls lose their memories. So we live every life as if it were our first” (101). *Night Theater* explores how class, access, education, and location influence one’s relationship to medicine. How do you think the author balances medical science and belief in the supernatural in this book?
6. After we learn the story behind the family’s untimely murders, the story seems to shift, showing the teacher in a less-than-favorable light. Do you believe that his family blames him for what occurred to them? Does the surgeon? Do you?
7. Why do you think the teacher lied to the surgeon? Do you think that the surgeon would have helped the family if he knew the actual terms and conditions? What would you have done in his position?
8. Ultimately, the family is dragged back to the afterlife, including the little boy, despite the surgeon remarking “the boy would have lived . . . Why not give him a chance?” (198). Was this a part of the official’s plan all along? Do you think there was any doubt that the plan would fail?
9. The novel ends with the baby about to take her first breath. Why do you think Paralkar decided to end the story on a hopeful note, despite everything the surgeon and the pharmacist have suffered through?
10. Do you think the surgeon is a hero? Why or why not?