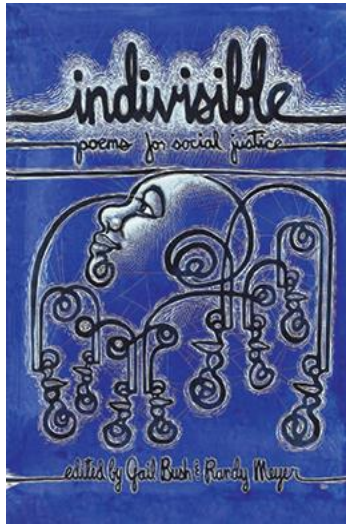


Indivisible: Poems for Social Justice

Book Group Discussion Guide

By Maureen Smith



- 1) The introduction states, “The poem has the ability to personalize the ideal, to make it tangible in a way that a speech or news report cannot.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? How might another art form express the ideal and make it more or less personalized? To which poems did you have the most personal response? Why?
- 2) Many of the poems in the first two chapters express anger and frustration. The poems in the final sections seek resolution and resolve. What was the experience or reading these collected voices? Which aspect best reflects your America? Do you relate to social justice on an intellectual or emotional level?
- 3) Select a favorite poem and read it aloud. Do you continue to understand the meaning of the poem and your personal response more with each rereading? How does hearing a poem affect its meaning? Discuss why it is a favorite of yours — is it for its meaning or its aesthetic beauty?
- 4) Consider the chapter titles—“liberty was misquoted,” “we are all getting burned,” giving secretes away,” “the signals we give,” and “the next thing to happen.” How do these suggest a progression? How do the poems in each chapter relate to the titles?
- 5) The editors frame the anthology as a “journey.” What did you experience along the way? Were certain parts of the journey more or less difficult? Why? Do you end up in a new or different place than when and where you began?
- 6) The poets use many different devices to convey their message—irony, humor, imagery, repetition. What techniques are the most effective for you? For example, compare and contrast—the economy of words and style between “Immigrants” (p. 13) and “The News You Don’t Get at Home.”(p. 17) How similar is the message? Is one more effective? Or does each style suit the topic?

- 7) Some of the poems present a vignette. Re-read “Indian Movie, New Jersey,” “Windshield,” “Being a Good *Americani*.” What feelings do these moments evoke for the writer? For you as the reader? Do the closing lines suggest resolution? Why or why not?
- 8) Read Carmen Tafolla’s profile in the Biographical Notes. Then, read “Marked.” How does having details about her life change the reading of the poem? To what extent are these poems personal experiences or universal ones? Does a writer need to belong to a community to write about them?
- 9) In the poems “A Ritual to Read Each Other” and “Sunrise,” the poets explore the possibility of connection. How do they envision it? How do you? What are the risks and the benefits?
- 10) The last poem in the collection ends with the following stanza—“How you stand here is important. How you listen for the next thing to happen. How you breathe.” What do these words mean? What does this suggest about the connection between individuals and social justice?
- 11) Consider the title of the work—“Indivisible.” In what contexts have you heard this word? What meaning does it hold in general and in the anthology? Consider the Lincoln and Whitman opening and closing quotes. In today’s political climate, are we still indivisible? Why or why not?
- 12) Are there voices that you expected as a part of the anthology that are not included? Where are there voices that you have not heard from before?

Maureen Smith has taught high school and college English. She has an M.A. in Education and in Women’s Studies, with an emphasis in literature, from the Ohio State University. Her graduate research focused on the influence of the oral tradition in African-American women’s writing. She has led book groups across Chicago for the past ten years.