



SOUTH ASIA BOOK AWARD  
*for Children's and Young Adult Literature*

## Research and discussion topics for **Island's End** by *Padma Venkatraman*



### **The setting**

The story takes place on an unspecified island in the Andaman archipelago of the eastern Indian Ocean. Have your class research the setting of the novel by ...

... creating a map of the archipelago on which the major islands, towns and geographic features are labeled.

... preparing a series of poster depicting the main geographic features (jungles, swamps, beaches) and native plants and animals of the islands.

... writing a brief report on the indigenous cultures of the islands. How many tribes of indigenous Andamese people lived on the islands in the past? How many are estimated to exist there today?

The class could start there research projects here ...

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andaman\\_Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andaman_Islands)

### **The characters**

The novel is populated by many interesting characters. In addition to the young girl protagonist/narrator Uido (pronounced ooh-ee-doh), there is her mentor Lah-ame, her curious younger brother Tawai, her stubborn older brother Ashu, her best friend, Natalang, her friend and eventual love-interest Danna, her parents, the outsider Ragavan, and the woman doctor she meets off-island named Maya. Have your students discuss the various characters and their relationships with one another while considering the following:

Who was their favorite/least favorite character and why?

Do any of the characters remind them of themselves? Or of people they know at home or in school?

A good art project might be to have individual students create pictures of the different characters. This could include not only the human ones but also the spirits (such as Biliku-waya) and the various animal guides (Lah-me's sea eagle and Uido's octopus).

### **Examining traditional gender roles**

The members of Uido's tribe live in a fashion that most everyone on earth did up until a few thousand years ago, that is, as hunter-gatherers. The boys and men of the island would hunt for meat (lizards in the book) while the women and girls would gather roots and berries. Do parallels to these traditional gender roles exist in our modern society?

Uido's brother Ashu is angered when Lah-ame selects her to train as the next shaman (although the narrative states there had previously been women shamans). As the most successful hunter he feels that he should have been chosen. How does young Uido gain her tribe's trust and prove herself a worthy successor to Lah-ame? How and in what way did the female doctor Maya become Uido's role model?

### **Shamanism / "oko-jumu"**

In traditional societies a *shaman* is a person having the ability to perceive spirits (both good and evil) and the spirit world. Called *oko-jumu* in the novel, these members of tribes may serve not only as religious advisors but also as healers (medicine men/women) and keepers of sacred knowledge (like, as shown in the book, the ability to make fire).

Have the class discuss the details of Uido's training as an oko-jumu? Why must she endure the hardships of her journey into the swamp? What does she learn?

Uido's spirit animal is an ocean-dwelling creature. How does this become important later in the story?

### **Uido's dreams**

Uido's dreams in which she journeys to the spirit world play a very prominent role in the narrative. How do they allow her to foresee the future and save her tribe? How do they help her to become an oko-jumu? Did Uido's dream of the snakes have multiple meanings?

## **The consequences of contact with the outside world**

Some of the most affecting passages of the book deal with the changes that occurred when traditional Andamese societies came into contact with very different people from across the ocean. Have your students discuss ...

... Lah-ame story (p. 30) of the islands prior to and after contact with the outside world. Can you understand why chose to move much of his tribe to a remote island?

... Uido's encounter with other native Andamese people now living in the town across the water. What does she see and what does Dr. Maya tell her about their lives?

Native cultures "untouched by civilization" are dwindling rapidly throughout the world. One such group was recently reported in the Amazon jungle of Brazil. Here are some links with more information.

<http://greenupgrader.com/1694/amazing-photos-untouched-native-amazon-tribe/>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2007528/Brazil-confirms-lost-Amazon-tribe-goes-missing-drug-gang-attack.html>

What should our response be when discovering such people?

### **Strangers**

The reaction of Uido and her tribe (the En-ge) to the appearance of strangers on their island drive much of the story. Some, such as Ashu, are accepting of Ragavan and his gifts. Uido is wary even though she comes to admire many of his offerings. Dr. Maya eventually reveals Ragavan's true intention to exploit the rare trees of the island.

How do members of your class feel about Ragavan's horrible fate? Uido herself seems conflicted.

### **Balance**

Achieving a balance between the traditional and the modern is a central theme of the novel (the word "balance" is at several points throughout the book). How does Uido hope to achieve a balance between the traditional society which she serves and modern one that is steadily encroaching?

## **2004 Tsunami**

The novel ends with the events of 26 December, 2004.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004\\_Indian\\_Ocean\\_earthquake\\_and\\_tsunami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004_Indian_Ocean_earthquake_and_tsunami)

In the author's note at the end of the book, Padma Venkatraman, discusses how some indigenous tribes of the Andaman Island escaped the effects of the tsunami because of their traditional knowledge.

## **Other resources**

Here is a link to a lesson plan created by the books author.

<http://www.padmasbooks.com/resources/IEandClimbingppt.pdf>

Here is a link to a short interview in which the book's author, who is by training an oceanographer, discusses melding art with science.

<http://lcbrennan.blogspot.com/2011/11/padma-venkatramans-islands-end.html>