

**“When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” Study Guide**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Setting the Scene: The Facts (23-5)**

Who is the narrator? \_\_\_\_\_

How old is she? \_\_\_\_\_

List 5 Key Facts that the narrator reveals about Mr. Pirzada’s family, occupation, and origin.

Where is Dacca? What is happening there?

What does Mr. Pirzada do with his time?

Why does Mr. Pirzada come to dinner?

**Looking Deeper: Possible Interpretations**

Jhumpa Lahiri carefully designed Mr. Pirzada’s character. What details / facts about his profile could be symbolic or clues into the deeper meaning of this story?

Why might Lahiri have selected this particular character to be the narrator?

How might the scenario (dinner) and overall setting (in a cozy house) function as an element of the story?



**Dacca – India  
[Pre-1947]**

The Partition of India was the process of dividing the subcontinent along sectarian lines in 1947 as India gained its independence from the [British Raj](#). The northern, mostly Muslim sections of India became [Pakistan](#), while the southern and majority Hindu section became [India](#).

<http://asianhistory.about.com/od/india/f/partitionofindiafaq.htm>



**Dacca – Pakistan  
[1947-1971]**

With the **Partition** of India in 1947, it became the Pakistani province of East Bengal (later renamed East Pakistan), one of five provinces of Pakistan. In 1971 it became the independent country of Bangladesh, with its capital at [Dhaka](#).

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Bangladesh>



**Dhaka – Bangladesh  
[1971-Present Day]**

Britain’s holdings on the Indian subcontinent were granted independence in 1947 and 1948, becoming four new independent states: India, Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and Pakistan (including East Pakistan, modern-day Bangladesh).

<http://indiaopines.com/pakistan-future/>

Please examine the above maps and facts. The story is set in 1971, just as Dacca is in transition. Next, review pages 25-6 of this story, paying close attention to the ways that Lilia’s father explains the events and impact of the world events to our young narrator. In particular, the following passage on page 25 reflects the ways that the Partition in 1947 affected Lilia’s father:

When Lilia says she will get “a glass for the Indian man,” her father replies, “Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian. Not since Partition. Our country was divided. 1947...One moment we were free and then we were sliced up,” he explained, drawing an X with his finger on the countertop, “like a pie. Hindus here. Muslims there. Dacca no longer belongs to us.” He told me that during Partition Hindus and Muslims had set fire to each other’s homes. For many, the idea of eating in the other’s company was still unthinkable.”

**In other words, Lilia’s father describes a break-up of sorts. Why do you think he is able to welcome Mr. Pirzada into his home in spite of the fact that he is Pakistani and Lilia’s family is Indian?**

## Setting the Scene— Part II: The Facts (27-32)

On page 27, Lahiri uses a section break to introduce one of Mr. Pirzada's evening visits. Lahiri weaves in some key details of this visit (pages 27-30)

- What does he bring Lilia?
- Where does the family eat dinner?
- What "curious thing" does Mr. Pirzada do during dinner?

## Looking Deeper – Lahiri's Craft

Lahiri seamlessly integrates multiple literary devices into her story. Here are some:

Juxtaposition: What images does Lahiri juxtapose during this dinner scene? (31) What is the effect?

Metaphor: "...A ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged" (31) What is the ghost?

Symbolism: What might these objects represent?

- Mr. Pirzada's Watch (30-1)
- Chocolate / Candy / Sugar (30-2)

## At Lilia's School (32-3)

When Lilia begins to show interest in learning about Pakistan at school, how does her teacher respond? (33)?

Why might Lahiri have chosen to emphasize the teacher's response?

## On the News (34)

Consider the teacher's response on page 33. This section is deliberately **juxtaposed** with the very next description on page 34. How does the teacher's response now seem a bit **ironic**?

## **Pumpkins and Halloween (34-41)**

Why do people carve pumpkins?

What words come to mind when you think of the holiday 'Halloween'?

What happens in the news while Lilia and Mr. Pirzada are carving pumpkins?  
What happens to Mr. Pirzada's pumpkin after this news breaks?

Describe the life of the pumpkin in this story.

When Lilia returns from trick or treating, what is happening at her home?

Why would Lahiri choose pumpkin carving and Halloween as elements of this story?  
What might they **symbolize**?

At the end of this section, Lilia's comments reflect Lahiri's use of **parallel structure**:  
"as if they were a single person, sharing a single meal, a single body, a single silence, and a single fear."

Why do you suppose she integrates **parallel structure** at this moment?

## **The Final Section (41-2)**

Where does Mr. Pirzada go?

What does Lilia's family learn about Mr. Pirzada?

Though Mr. Pirzada is now home with his family, why does Lilia "not feel like celebrating?"

Lilia mentions that she 'knows what it is like to miss someone' and then recalls how she ate her Halloween candy, one piece per night, since Mr. Pirzada's departure in January. In the end, once she learns that Mr. Pirzada is home safe, reunited with his family, she stops eating one piece of candy per night. Instead, she says "That night there was no need to. Eventually I threw them away."

Why does she throw the candy away?

What might these candies **symbolize** now?

## **Making Connections**

What similar message does Lahiri consider in both "A Temporary Matter" and "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"?