

Common Reading Book *One Amazing Thing*

Form a group of 3 or 4, introduce yourselves, discuss, and take informal notes on the following:

Group Member Names _____

1. Are there any controversies in the book?
2. What sort of breakthroughs happen in the book?
3. In *One Amazing Thing* people listened to each other share stories. Should scientists try to communicate important results to the public, like by telling stories related to their work? Or should they concentrate on their research and specialized publications (ivory tower), keeping out of public engagement?
4. Here are excerpts from the book about science and mathematics. Analyze the author's treatment of science and mathematics by considering
 - a) How does the author make use of science and mathematics?
 - b) Can you infer how the author feels about science and mathematics, if there is enough evidence of that?

Uma

- p. 3 (making up dialogue about conversations she could not understand) If I fail Algebra, just remember it was your fault—because you were too scared to ride the bus here by yourself.
- p. 5 her father had quite his position as a senior administrator for a computer company to accept a consultant's job in India
- p. 9 laboratory... Sometimes at night when he went to the lab to check on an experiment, she would accompany him just so she could watch the stillness that took over his body as he tested and measured and took notes. Sometimes he forgot she was there.
- p. 206 Uma remembered an old science lesson from middle school. Gas killed people by displacing oxygen, which was lighter.
- p. 216 There had been a major explosion in one of the chemical factories to the east of the city... This explanation of my aurora was disappointing, but no matter what its source, the dance of lights over the night field had given me something facts couldn't take away.

Mangalam

- p. 33 he had been a student of chemistry... each person in this room... was like a simmering test tube that might explode if the minutest amount of the wrong element were added to it.

p. 86 had loved his wife in the beginning... He remembered the fact of that love, thought not *how* it had felt. That memory was gone completely, like a computer file wiped out by a virus.

Mr. Pritchett

p. 42 He liked formality. That is why he loved being an accountant. Early in their marriage, Mrs. Pritchett had protested that he wanted even the plants in their garden in neat rows, like entries in a ledger.

p. 43 Now that he thought of it, didn't he love the thrill of manipulating numbers, of balancing on the razor-edge of the law?

p. 44 He missed the efficient, antiseptic smell of his office, the obedient numbers adding up the way they were supposed to.

p. 94 It isn't until Mary Lou brings them the stolen math workbook that he will figure out that happiness is a whole different feeling.

p. 96 they go through a workbook titled *Fun with Math...* the boy is riveted. Inside his head, the numbers fall into place with little clicks. His body buzzes as though it is filled with electricity... he can work out the problems in his head.

p. 103 They will recognize his talent and enter him in math contests—regional, then state, then national—and winning these contests will begin to change the way he feels about himself.

104–105 The only time he can forget the feel of the kitten's fur... is when he's doing math. So he does more and more of it, asking his teacher for extra worksheets that he brings home... the words transform themselves into numbers that line up like acrobats, numbers that can be trusted to perform the way they're supposed to... they will never abandon him. They sing their answers to him, and the inside of his head fills with light as he writes them down.

p. 108 Lily said, "I'm glad you had your math, Mr. Pritchett. It made you special when everyone thought you weren't good enough."

Jiang

p. 72 older brother Vincent, a dentist...

p. 83 Mr. Chan was forced to accept the fact that his dentist's degree was worthless here.

Tariq

p. 135 ...Calculus class. The professor took off points for lateness, and I couldn't afford to lose any points.

Lily

p. 145 (her brother) wanted to become a scientist specializing in cancer research, and by ninth grade had already written a paper that went on to win a national science award. My parents would have preferred that Mark become a doctor or businessman.

p. 146 He spent weeks on science projects that awed me: elegant solar systems that rotated at different speeds around a sun, or intricate contraptions with beakers and burners that extracted water from ink.

p. 150 Mark never partied. His idea of a good time was meeting his geeky friends at the local Borders for a latte and discussing lesser-known scientific theories.

Cameron

p. 190–1 biology teacher, who had become a mentor... Cameron wanted to be a doctor... his friends would ridicule it...

p. 199 Seva... had done well in most of her exams except math, which was very difficult for her to understand;