Identifying with The True American

✦ America has often been described as a nation of immigrants, a patchwork of racial and ethnic cultures whose sheer diversity is its greatest strength. What do you think threatens this ideal in today’s society?
✦ The True American paints a portrait of an America divided between those who can seize opportunity and achieve the American dream, and those for whom that dream is more like a cruel illusion. What do you think provides access to that dream? And what makes that dream unattainable for so many?
✦ Many found themselves drawn to Stroman’s story not because it is a horrific exception, but because it in many ways reflects what America itself would become in the years after 9-11 as racism and xenophobia have increased. Do you agree with this comparison?

Engaging The True American

✦ How does Bhuian’s Muslim faith shape his relationship with his would-be killer—and his response to the death penalty—over the course of the book?
✦ The True American is a story about the power of what Giridharadas calls “enduring mutuality,” of relationships between parent and child, between criminal and victim, between a solitary self and a what the author calls a “world of others.” What relationships in The True American were most interesting to you and why?
✦ In his Author’s Note, Giridharadas positions himself as an objective reporter. “My movements as an author remain invisible in the text,” he writes. After reflecting on the way the author relates this story, do you agree that he remains objective and invisible? How do the facts speak for themselves and how does Giridharadas also subtly speak for them?
✦ What values do you think America has lost and needs to recover? And what new values do think America needs to embrace?
✦ Whatever struggles you have faced in your quest to attend college, you now have the opportunity to join what Giridharadas has called a “flourishing America.” But this America, he contends, faces a “moral challenge that begs each of us to take on the wilting America as our own.” How might you undertake this moral challenge in the years ahead?

About the Author

Anand Giridharadas is a New York Times columnist, writing the biweekly “Letters from America.” The author of The True American, in 2011 he published India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation’s Remaking. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, he was raised there, in France, and in Maryland, and educated at the University of Michigan, Oxford, and Harvard. He appears regularly on TV and the radio in the United States and he has given talks on the main stage of TED and at Harvard, Stanford, the Aspen Institute, the Sydney Opera House, the United Nations, the Asia Society, and Google. He has received honors from the Society of Publishers in Asia, the South Asian Journalists Association, the Roytter Fellowship in Journalism at Yale, and the New York Public Library’s Helen Bernstein Award. Anand lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife, Priya Parker, and son, Orion. [adapted from author website]