



The Ugly American Discussion Guide



Overview:

This book views American troubles in Southeast Asia through the lens of several different characters, each representing a different side of our nation's people, in the fictitious country of Sarkhan. From the lazy political insider Ambassador Sears, to the religious revolutionary Father Finian; from the competent and concerned Ambassador MacWhite, to the actual ugly American himself, Homer Atkins, the characters show the many faces of America shown to the rest of the world. Ultimately, despite the best efforts of the good men, the corrupt laziness of the bad men triumphs in the end and foreshadows many years of foreign conflict to come.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of the Russian dock workers stenciling "This rice is a gift from Russia" onto the bags of American grain at the end of chapter two?
2. Father Finian engaged in the conflict against Communism in Southeast Asia because he said, "Communists say the soul and the state are identical. The price of being a Communist is that you must also give them your soul and your will." Are our international policy objectives strengthened or distracted by men like Father Finian?
3. Near the end of chapter four, Ruth Jyoti discusses the "Intellectual Maginot Line." What was it and do you agree that it contributes to our nation's difficulty implementing policy abroad?
4. Was Li justified in treating Donald so harshly in chapter nine? Did it need to be done? What did MacWhite learn from the episode?
5. In chapter eleven, Monet argues that Clausewitz was the master of war and wrote everything that needed to be known about conventional warfare. Tex and MacWhite argued that warfare had changed and that reading Mao would benefit the French and American armed forces. Later, in chapter twelve, Tex utilizes guerilla tactics by employing the rocket truck in the village. Was he justified in doing this? Should we counter the guerilla tactics of our enemy with guerilla tactics, or should we stick to more conventional methods of fighting?
6. When asked what he would do to improve the prestige of the United States in Southeast Asia, U Maung Swe cited the anecdote of the Martins showing the locals how to grow and can healthy vegetables, and said he would send more people like the Martins abroad. What would you do to improve the prestige of the United States in the troubled parts of the world if you were President?





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7. What did Jeepo and Homer fashion out of a bicycle in chapter eighteen? How did Emma improve her broom in chapter nineteen? Why were these important discoveries? In what way were these people able to improve the prestige of the United States in Sarkhan?
8. Why did Senator Brown directly contradict Senator Corona at the end of chapter twenty, when much of what he saw in Sarkhan confirmed what Senator Corona was saying?
9. In his letter to the Secretary of State, Ambassador MacWhite requests the enforcement of six new standards for all American employees that plan to work overseas. What were these standards and how would they help the Americans win the many tiny conflicts he described as necessary to defeat Communism?
10. Why would the author conclude a fictional story with a factual epilogue?

Discussion Guide by 2nd Lt. Abell

