Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *If You See Me, Don’t Say Hi*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of some of these stories, as well as their endings. If you have not finished reading *If You See Me, Don’t Say Hi*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Discuss the title of Neel Patel’s book. How does that sentiment resonate throughout the collection, beyond the title story? What expectations did it set when you first started reading these stories?

2. Did you have a favorite story? What did you love the most about it? Which story had the most unexpected twist ending for you?

3. The first line of the collection is “The Wi-Fi was out.” What role does technology—from Facebook to Instagram to dating websites—play in these stories? How does it shape the way the characters relate to one another, particularly when it comes to dating and sex?

4. Indian Americans are often labeled a “model minority” and are frequently stereotyped as being hardworking, studious, quiet, and well behaved. In “If You See Me, Don’t Say Hi,” Premal says: “In school, I learned very quickly what it meant to be brown: it meant that white kids only talked to you if they needed something, black kids only talked to you if no other black kids were around, and the rest of us wouldn’t talk at all.” How do the characters in these stories subvert the model minority myth and stereotypes about brown people?

5. Premal tells his white girlfriend she can’t come home with him for Thanksgiving: “When I had explained to her the glaring differences between her world and mine, she had cried and cried until she couldn’t breathe anymore, saying it didn’t matter, that we were all just people in the end.” What do you think? Discuss the various interracial couples in the collection and the particular challenges they face.

6. Anita, the narrator of “God of Destruction,” reflects: “No one ever told me that happiness was like a currency: that when it goes, it goes, and that few people are willing to give you some of theirs.” What does she mean? Do you agree? How much of a person’s happiness is dependent on others? What brings the characters in this collection joy and fulfillment?
7. Several of the female characters in the collection, including Anita, Sabrina, and Rupa, act in ways that are socially unacceptable, particularly for women. Did you find them sympathetic? Likeable? Does that matter in your enjoyment of the stories?

8. Many of these stories center around the experiences of gay characters within the Indian American community. Discuss the interplay between race and sexual identity within these stories, notably in “Just a Friend.” What different challenges do John and Ashwin face, with regard to their sexual identity?

9. “These Things Happen” begins with the line, “It wasn’t that I was a snob or anything; it was that Chloe wasn’t the kind of girl you invited over to your house.” Discuss how class is addressed in these stories, especially in “These Things Happen,” “The Other Language,” “World Famous,” and “Radha, Krishna.” What assumptions do the various characters make about one another based on class stereotypes, and how are those assumptions undermined?

10. In “World Famous,” Ankur’s mother holds up their neighbor Seth as a cautionary tale, a young man with mental health issues who doesn’t have a serious job and still lives with his parents. But when Ankur sees him perform with his band, he takes a different view: “In that moment, I envied him. His freedom. His will. It didn’t matter where Seth was in life. It didn’t matter who he’d become. On that particular night, and on that particular stage, he was whoever he wanted to be.” How is Ankur—and several of the other characters in the collection—constrained by various pressures from being whoever he wants to be?

11. The final two stories in the collection, “World Famous” and “Radha, Krishna,” are linked: they follow the same two characters. How long did it take you to figure out that Anjali was narrating “Radha, Krishna”? How did reading “Radha, Krishna” change how you felt about what happened between Anjali and Ankur in “World Famous”?

12. In the last paragraph of the collection, Anjali remembers the photographs of Lord Krishna on the walls of her childhood home. The characters in these stories aren’t overtly religious, but references to the Hindu gods reverberate, particularly in “Radha, Krishna” and “Hare Rama, Hare Krishna.” In “Hare Rama, Hare Krishna,” Samir says: “I had learned enough to know that life was like a strong current, sweeping you in whichever direction it chose.” Discuss the influence of religion, particularly in terms of how the characters view fate and agency.

13. Themes of displacement, belonging, and identity echo throughout these pages. The characters often seem to reject the Indian American communities in which they were raised, only to be drawn back into them. What does this collection have to say about the experience of first-generation immigrants in America?

14. If you could ask Neel Patel to turn one of his short stories into a full novel, which would it be and why?