Thank you for reading this *I’m Your Neighbor, Portland* book.

“The true meeting takes place when the book opens, and a stranger reads about — and comprehends — a stranger.” –Amit Majmudar, author of *The Abundance*.

We hope that this book has introduced you to some of your neighbors’ stories and as Amit Majmudar said, allowed you to “comprehend a stranger.”

**Discuss**

Consider exploring these questions after reading *Something About America* by Maria Testa.

• The narrator says that she looks like where she is from (p. 9-10). How do you look like where you are from? Are there clues about your own heritage that are revealed in the way you dress, talk or even what you eat?

• Ms. Lee, the narrator's teacher, says her class "is a slice of America" (p.13). Compare the narrator’s descriptions of her classroom to your own, or to your neighborhood. What do we gain by knowing people of diverse backgrounds?

• "What I like about America best of all – me, myself, without asking anybody else – is that I think I might just be American" (p. 25-26). What do you think it means to be “American”? What are things that you love about America? Are there things that disappoint you about this country?

• Even though the narrator and her family have lived in the US for ten years, her parents still think of Kosova as home. Where do you feel your home is? Is it a different place than where you live now? What are some things that make a house, city, state or country feel like home to you?
• The narrator feels very differently about America than her parents and thinks her parents still feel like foreigners. Why do you think the narrator and her parents’ have different experiences adjusting to living in America? Have there ever been changes in your life that has been easier for you to adjust to than your parents?

• The narrator's father says he doesn't like reality TV because it isn't like the real America he knows. Do you think people outside the US have a different idea of American life from watching American TV shows? What are some things you have watched on TV that you don't think accurately reflects real life in America?

• After the Many & One Rally, the narrator sees her father in a new light and the experience brings them closer together. Have you shared an experience with a friend or family member that made your relationship stronger? Why was it important?

• "If you can't find the welcome mat when you arrive, put out one yourself" (p. 81). After reading Something About America and about incident in Lewiston, who do you think is responsible for putting out the “welcome mat”? What could you do to put out the “welcome mat” for people who have recently arrived in your neighborhood?
Explore

Kosova is the Albanian spelling of Kosovo, a region of the Balkan Peninsula. This area of Europe experienced terrible fighting among its ethnic groups during the 1990s. From their spelling of Kosova, it is likely that the narrator and her family in *Something About America* were ethnic Albanians who were expelled from Kosova/Kosovo by Serbs at that time.

In 1999, the US accepted about 20,000 Kosovar refugees, who were resettled throughout the country. The US government also offered the Kosovars a free one-way ticket back home if they wished to return. According to the U.S. Committee of Refugees and Immigrants, only about 20% of the refugees accepted the offer at the time, but many who stayed hoped to return to Kosova once the violence ended. Many Kosovars also considered the US to only be a temporary stop rather than permanent resettlement, which made assimilation to America more difficult because they were unable to make the psychological break with their homeland.

The letter to the Somali community and the rally that followed that are described in Part 2 of *Something About America* were actual events that took place in Lewiston, Maine. Large numbers of Somalis began migrating to the Lewiston and Auburn area in 2001 and continued to grow. Most were secondary migrants who were initially resettled in large urban cities like Atlanta, Georgia, and were moving to Maine to be reunited with family or for Maine’s safe communities, schools and affordable housing.

In 2002, Lewiston mayor Larry Raymond wrote an open letter asking Somali immigrants to slow down their migration to the city because the city was “maxed out.” The letter received intense criticism from Lewiston’s Somali leaders and from around the state and nation. It sparked the Many & One rally that took place in February 2003, with over 4,500 people attending to advocate pro-diversity.

Engage

WATCH the documentary *The Letter* directed by Ziad Hamzad, which follows the firestorm of events that followed the Lewiston mayor’s letter to the Somali community in 2001 and the Many & One Rally.

VIEW clips from the documentary *The Letter* and newspaper articles from the Portland Press Herald about Lewiston and the rally from author Maria Testa’s website http://www.authorsupport.comoj.com/

WELCOME Maine’s newest U.S. citizens at the *Naturalization Ceremony* September 17th, 2013 at Ocean Gateway.
Read

From I Remember Warm Rain:
  • “Lost and Found” by Nasra Hassan

From New Mainers:
  • Zeynep Turk, Turkey
  • Emrush Zeqiri, Kosovo
  • Ismail Ahmed, Somalia

Other titles set in Eastern European and Somali communities:

Ages 4-8:
  • Hamzat’s Journey by Anthony Robinson, set in Chechen American community

Ages 10-12:
  • The Day of the Pelican by Katherine Applegate, set in Kosovo and Kosovar American community
  • Drita, My Homegirl by Jenny Lombard, set in Kosovo and Kosovar American community

Ages 13+:
  • Out of Nowhere by Maria Padian (an I’m Your Neighbor Portland featured book), set in Somali American community
  • Tell Us We’re Home by Marina Budhos, set in multicultural community