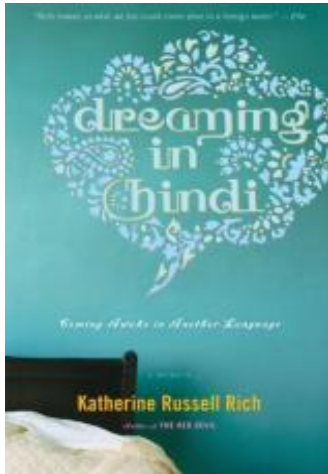

Dreaming in Hindi: Coming Awake in Another Language

by Katherine Russell Rich



About the Book

At a time when her life seemed to be crashing, Katherine Russell Rich took on a writing assignment in India, where she was seduced by the idea of trying to speak Hindi. In a rash moment, she decided she would go live and study in the ancient city of Udaipur --- a move that led to unexpected reclamation. In this beautifully written memoir, she documents her experiences, from the hilarious to the frightening to the full-out exhilarating, and interweaves them with reporting on what effects a second language has on the brain. Hindi becomes the lens through which she gains a perspective not only on India but on the radical way the country and the language itself are changing her.

Discussion Guide

1. At the opening of the book, Rich's life is falling apart: she's just lost a job, isn't sure she wants to continue working in the same industry she's always been in, is rebounding from cancer but on "perpetual alert" against another seige. Why do you think she chooses to learn a language at that particular juncture? Is it an act of defiance? Evasion? Passion? Or none of these things?
2. Throughout the book, Rich plays language against science. Why do you think she chose this structure? What do the two halves of the split represent? Mind/body? East/West? How do they symbolize what was going on in her life? How are the two halves reconciled at the end of the book?
3. What benefits does a structure like this have? Are there ways it doesn't work?

4. Nine-eleven happens on the fifth day of classes, but Rich doesn't reveal this fact right away. Why do you think she waits to disclose it? In what other ways does she deviate from a straightforward chronology, and why do you think she decided not to write one?
5. The novelist Jayne Anne Phillips described *Dreaming in Hindi* as "a funny, deeply humane journey of words." A number of reviewers have remarked on the humor. Do you think humor is universal? What was Rich's experience with this?
6. Early on, she goes to live with an extended Jain family toward whom she felt a great amount of fondness. What ultimately caused her to leave?
7. Who is the hero of the book? Is there more than one?
8. **Dreaming in Hindi** contains a number of portraits of Indian women living in one of the most conservative states in India, in a city where a substantial number of women are still in *pardah*. How does Rich, an independent Western woman, adjust to social conditions? In what ways does she not?
9. In the book, we learn that there's no word for privacy in any of the Indian languages. What other Western concepts does Rich find are missing? Which particularly Indian ones does she come to embrace?
10. The book presents the argument that a second language has an effect on the self. Do you agree that language influences the way you see the world? What have been your experiences with this? What do you think about the claim that different languages engender different emotions?
11. Discuss the very last line in the book, where the deaf school teacher Anukul answers a question that Rich has long entertained. Why do you think she decided to end on this?

Author Bio

Katherine Russell Rich is the award-winning author of **The Red Devil: To Hell with Cancer --- and Back**. She has written for the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Washington Post*, *Slate*, and *Vogue*, and teaches writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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