

Mike Rose, “I Just Wanna Be Average” – Group Questions

Group 1 – pgs. 11-18

1. Violence seems to be at the heart of many of Rose’s earlier childhood memories. He says, “Any such demographic mix is potentially volatile, and as the fifties wore on, the neighborhood would be marked by outburst of violence.” Briefly describe some of those outbursts.
2. At this time in Rose’s life, what kind of role models did he have?
3. Rose says, “What finally affected me was subtler, but more pervasive”(pg. 17) What is he talking about in that passage?

Group 2 – pgs. 18-23

1. Rose says that some see the “classroom as an oasis of possibility” (pg 18). Is this true of Rose’s early education at St. Regina’s? Explain.
2. How did Rose cope with his difficulties in school?
3. Although Rose has difficulties, he is clearly imaginative. What imaginative activities does he engage in, and how are these activities helpful to him?

Group 3 – pgs. 24-29

1. What happens to Rose upon enrolling at Our Lady of Mercy? Why did it take so long for the error to be discovered?
2. What does Rose say are the “true job skills”? (pg 26). Are the vocational ed. students learning these skills? What are they learning?
3. Why does Ken “just wanna be average” (pg. 28)? According to Rose, what is the price one pays to live with such a mindset?

Group 4 – pgs. 30-37

1. Why does Rose initially have trouble in the college prep track?
2. How is Jack MacFarland different from Rose’s other teachers? What kind of role model is he?
3. Ultimately, Rose rises beyond the limitations of his upbringing. He is an English professor at UCLA. How do you react to his success? What might have happened if he hadn’t met MacFarland?