

## **Discussion questions for *The House on Dream Street*, by Dana Sachs**

Questions by Dr. Stephanie Richardson, UNCW Department of English

1. In the “Prologue” to her book, Ms. Sachs writes, “over the course of all these years, some part of my soul reserved itself for Vietnam” (3). What does this quotation teach us about the benefits of reaching out to “alien” cultures? What benefits can we anticipate from reaching out?
2. As you proceed through the memoir, pause to appreciate the poetry in Ms. Sachs’ prose. For a sample, please see the passage on the arrival of summer in Hanoi (third and fourth full paragraphs on page 162). What techniques are used to create the desired effects? What nature poetry is the prose reminiscent of?
3. On page 31, we readers get our first sense of the complicated politics of the Vietnam of Ms. Sachs’ visit. How does she involve us in these politics? Why? How do we feel about being involved? How should we feel?
4. Evaluate the symbol system in the memoir. Which symbols are most important -- the Dream, the rice fields, the seasons, the pagoda, or something else? Think it over; discuss with your group.
5. Evaluate narrative techniques used by Ms. Sachs in her memoir. You may study techniques with which you are familiar, or you may wish to use some of the considerations that follow: uses of metaphor and simile (samples on page 121), techniques of characterization (sample on page 111), techniques used to teach readers the Vietnamese language (sample on page 25), techniques discussed by literary critics (ask your discussion leader, teacher, professor, or someone from our OBOC Web Page).

6. Discuss Ms. Sachs' view of herself as a visitor in Vietnam (for an early example, see pages 43 and 44). Watch the changes in this view as the memoir proceeds; then, see the epiphany (revelation) on page 345. How have your connections to Vietnam developed as you read the memoir? Reflect.
7. On page 157, Ms. Sachs gives us a brief political history of Vietnam. In what ways is our political history similar to theirs? Why did our country develop differently? What might Ms. Sachs say?
8. Look at the final paragraph on page 357. In what ways are our memories our home? How did Ms. Sachs arrive at this realization? Which memories are "home" for us? What effects do travel and friends have upon this home?
9. Pages 1 through 3 of the memoir detail some images about Vietnam that many of us recall. What are some of the roots of our fears about Vietnam? How can we overcome these fears? What have you learned from the memoir that has permanently changed your view of Vietnam?
10. After reading a substantial portion of the memoir, view a film about Vietnam that you have seen before and that left an impact on you (for me, it's *Born on the Fourth of July*). How has reading the memoir changed your view of or connection with your chosen film?
11. Cooking and cuisine are two of the many delights of this memoir (for examples, see pages 75 and 355). What purposes do these passages serve? How do they build links between our culture and Vietnamese culture? How and why does Ms. Sachs make us feel like a "guest"?
12. One of the purposes of the OBOC Project is to encourage us to reach out to the Vietnamese community in our area. With our new knowledge from the memoir, how can we accomplish this goal? How can we turn our dreams into realities?