

we made puppets of King George wearing white tights and a black bow in his hair. During tests we were given blank maps of the thirteen colonies, and asked
110 to fill in names, dates, capitals. I could do it with my eyes closed. **D**

D THEME AND CHARACTER

Which details in lines 102–110 suggest that Lilia is dissatisfied with her history class?

impeccably (ĩm-pĕk'ə-blĕ)
adv. perfectly, flawlessly

E GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 117–123. Lahiri's use of the adverbs *perpetually*, *slightly*, *thickly*, and *playfully* helps to create a vivid image of Mr. Pirzada.

The next evening Mr. Pirzada arrived, as usual, at six o'clock. Though they were no longer strangers, upon first greeting each other, he and my father maintained the habit of shaking hands.

"Come in, sir. Lilia, Mr. Pirzada's coat, please."

He stepped into the foyer, **impeccably** suited and scarved, with a silk tie knotted at his collar. Each evening he appeared in ensembles of plums, olives, and chocolate browns. He was a compact man, and though his feet were perpetually splayed, and his belly slightly wide, he nevertheless maintained an efficient posture, as if balancing in either hand two suitcases of equal
120 weight. His ears were insulated by tufts of graying hair that seemed to block out the unpleasant traffic of life. He had thickly lashed eyes shaded with a trace of camphor,⁹ a generous mustache that turned up playfully at the ends, and a mole shaped like a flattened raisin in the very center of his left cheek. **E**
On his head he wore a black fez¹⁰ made from the wool of Persian lambs, secured by bobby pins, without which I was never to see him. Though my father always offered to fetch him in our car, Mr. Pirzada preferred to walk from his dormitory to our neighborhood, a distance of about twenty minutes on foot, studying trees and shrubs on his way, and when he entered our house his knuckles were pink with the effects of the crisp autumn air.

130 "Another refugee, I am afraid, on Indian territory."

"They are estimating nine million at the last count," my father said.

Mr. Pirzada handed me his coat, for it was my job to hang it on the rack at the bottom of the stairs. It was made of finely checkered gray-and-blue wool, with a striped lining and horn buttons, and carried in its weave the faint smell of limes. There were no recognizable tags inside, only a hand-stitched label with the phrase "Z. Sayeed, Suitors" embroidered on it in cursive with glossy black thread. On certain days a birch or maple leaf was tucked into a pocket. He unlaced his shoes and lined them against the baseboard; a golden paste clung to the toes and heels, the result of walking through our damp,
140 lawn. Relieved of his trappings, he grazed my throat with his short, restless fingers, the way a person feels for solidity behind a wall before driving in a nail. Then he followed my father to the living room, where the television was tuned to the local news. As soon as they were seated my mother appeared from the kitchen with a plate of mincemeat kebabs with coriander chutney.¹¹ Mr. Pirzada popped one into his mouth.

9. **camphor** (kăm'fər): a fragrant compound from an Asian evergreen tree, used in skin-care products.

10. **fez** (fĕz): a man's felt hat in the shape of a flat-topped cone, worn mainly in the eastern Mediterranean region.

11. **mincemeat kebabs** (kə-bŏbz') . . . **chutney** (chŭt'nĕ): an Indian or Pakistani dish consisting of pieces of spiced meat that have been placed on skewers and roasted, with an accompanying relish made of fruits, spices, and herbs.