

# The World is Flat by Thomas Friedman

## Discussion Questions

Directions: While reading the book please answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper. Support and explain your responses. It is recommended that all students take notes on the book while reading. Topics will be discussed during the first week of school.

1. The first chapter in *The World Is Flat* recalls the voyage of Columbus, colonization, and industrialization. Are the motivations behind twenty-first century globalization much different from the ones recorded through history?
2. What are the stages of globalization as identified by Thomas Friedman? What events triggered each stage and how did the world change as a result. (Chapter One)
3. The second chapter outlines “Ten Forces That Flattened the World,” ranging from the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, to the open-source software movement. In what way did politics influence entrepreneurship in the 1990s? What psychological impact did November 9 have on the world, particularly when paired with new means for global communication?
4. What is your opinion of the open-source movement? Should there be any limit to the amount of freedom, including “freedom” from the demand to make a profit, in the technology marketplace? (Chapter Two)
5. What qualities enabled India to take center stage when the looming Y2K scenario generated unprecedented demand for programmers? What can other nations learn from India’s success in this realm? What are India’s greatest vulnerabilities? (Chapter Two)
6. Discuss the ruthless efficiency demanded by supply-chaining. In the long run, does it benefit consumers? How does it impact the economy? Do you believe it enhances or reduces production quality? (Chapter Two)
7. Were you familiar with the concept of “insourcing” prior to reading *The World Is Flat*? Does it matter to you whether your computer is repaired by an employee of Toshiba or of UPS? Should it matter? What is the advantage of insourcing? (Chapter Two)
8. Friedman calls the tenth flattener “steroids.” Are these crucial to success, or are they luxuries? Will the globe’s nonsteroidal citizens be able to compete without them? (Chapter Two)

9. In what ways has the Triple Convergence affected your day-to-day life? (Chapter Three)
10. Discuss the “Indiana versus India” anecdote, recounted in the second section of Chapter Four. Which approach benefits Americans more: offshoring state projects and cutting taxpayer expenditures, or paying higher wages to maintain job security at home?
11. Chapter Six, “The Untouchables,” features the story of Friedman’s childhood friend Bill Greer. What does his story indicate about flattening in the creative fields? Will illustrators lose out to Illustrator? What would it take for you to become an untouchable?
12. Chapter Seven, “The Quiet Crisis,” outlines three dirty secrets regarding American dominance: fewer young Americans pursuing careers in math and science, and the demise of both ambition and brainpower among American youth. What accounts for this? What would it take to restore academic rigor and the enthusiasm enjoyed during the “man on the moon” days?
13. Which of the proposals in Chapter Eight, “This Is Not a Test,” would you be able to implement? Explain.
14. In Chapter Nine’s third section, “I Can Only Get It for You Retail,” Friedman offers a vivid portrait of the “neighborhoods” comprising various parts of the globe today. How will those neighborhoods look one hundred years from now? Will America still be a gated community, and Asia “the other side of the tracks”?
15. Friedman contemplates the cultural traits (such as motivated, educated workers and leaders who don’t squander the nation’s treasure) that drive a nation’s success. He uses this to illustrate why Mexico, despite NAFTA, has become the tortoise while China has become the hare. Does America fit Friedman’s cultural profile as a nation poised for prosperity? (Chapter Nine)
16. Use the example of the Virgin of Guadalupe to describe the problems Mexico and other countries are facing. What policies do developing countries need to make to thrive in a flat world. What problems do they face? What has Ireland done to make itself so successful? (Chapter 10)
17. What do you make of the approach taken by Bill Gates’s foundation to combat disease? In your opinion, what are the roots of the public-health crisis in the Third World? (Chapter Eleven)
18. How did the book’s images of India compare to your previous perceptions of it, from the country-club atmosphere described on the first page to the tragedy of the untouchables?(Chapters One and Eleven)

19. Do you have faith in Michael Dell's theory of conflict prevention? What can we do to ensure that the strategic optimists win? And when they do, what dreams do you have for the world they will create? (Chapter Twelve)