

A Reading Group Guide to

Shooting Kabul

By N. H. Senzai

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The discussion questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Shooting Kabul*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit the needs of your classroom or community group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 1 begins with the sentence, “It’s a perfect night to run away . . .” From what is the family running at the opening of the story? Describe at least three ways in which running away (or choosing to stay) is an important idea in terms of the novel’s plot and themes.
2. Describe the main character, Fadi. What are his interests and dreams? What roles does he play within both his immediate family and his larger Afghan community in California? How are Fadi’s family and community relationships similar to, or different from, your own?
3. Why did Fadi’s father, Habib, choose to return to Afghanistan? What does this choice tell you about Habib? If you were a member of Habib’s family, how would you have felt about this decision?
4. What happens to Fadi’s sister, Mariam, as the family embarks on their escape from Afghanistan? How are feelings of guilt and responsibility about this incident expressed differently by various members of the family?
5. What do Fadi’s memories of life with Mariam teach readers about Afghanistan? What type of doll is Gulmina? Is this important? In what ways might this doll be viewed as a symbol of the west? Can you think of other ideas represented by Gulmina?
6. How does Fadi react to meeting his extended family in San Francisco? How does Mariam’s absence affect this reunion? In what ways do family members reach out to Fadi, Noor, and their parents? What is life like in Uncle Amin’s house? What job does Habib take in America?
7. At his new school, Fadi “. . . felt as though he were hidden behind a camera lens, watching another world whirl past in shattered fragments.” What does this observation tell you about Fadi’s adaptation to his new school? Is he able to form friendships? What kinds of groups does he encounter at school?
8. What happens to Fadi’s camera? What does Fadi’s behavior after the fight with Felix teach you about Fadi? Who helps Fadi enter the photography contest anyway? What is the first picture Fadi takes for the contest? Why does he reject this picture as his contest entry?
9. How does Fadi discover the real picture he wants to take? What brings him to this decision? Have you ever entered a creative or athletic contest? What were your hopes for the outcome? How are they similar to, or different from, Fadi’s reasons for wanting to win?
10. Does Fadi win the contest? How does the contest experience help the family find Mariam? Once Mariam gets to America, do you think Fadi and the others are able to let go of their guilt? Explain your answer.
11. How does the author interweave real world events with the fictional story of Fadi and his family? How do the events of September 11, 2001, affect Fadi’s school and home life? What types of misunderstandings about

the Muslim faith and Middle Easterners more generally are shown in the novel? What has the novel taught you about Afghan culture?

12. Why is this novel entitled “Shooting Kabul”? Were you surprised, when you reached the end of the story, at the meaning of “shooting” that the author wanted to convey? After finishing the novel and reading the subsequent Author’s Note, what do you feel is the most important idea or message of this story?

WRITING & RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. Through the Lens

1. Write a short essay describing what photograph you would choose enter a “Take Your Best Shot” contest. If possible, take some pictures. Choose your best shot and write a brief explanation of why you like your selection. With friends or classmates, create a photography display.
2. The author uses the camera, and photography-related words and images, to help readers better understand Fadi’s experiences. Include photography-related language to write a journal entry describing an experience in your own life.
3. Go to your local library or bookstore and look through books by famous photographers such as Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Alfred Stieglitz. Select a photograph that is particularly thought-provoking or inspiring to you. Write a short essay describing the photograph and your thoughts.
4. Go to the library or online to find a picture of Fadi’s old camera, the Minolta XE. Write a short paragraph explaining the history of this camera. Then research cameras and photography to choose a camera you would like to use if you were entering a photography contest. Write a brief description of this camera.

II. Beyond the Book

1. Read Fadi’s favorite book, *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg. Then write a two- to three-page essay explaining why you think this book is so meaningful to Fadi.
2. Do you have a favorite book that you read again and again? Create a poster featuring this book. Include a summary of the plot, a list of main characters, and illustrations of the cover or other important images. Present your poster to friends or classmates, making sure to explain why this book is special to you.
3. Both *Shooting Kabul* and *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* feature works of art. N. H. Senzai includes the work of fictional photographer Clive Murray. E. L. Konigsburg’s mystery involves the art of Michelangelo. Using what you have learned from reading these novels, write an essay explaining how art and literature can help young people learn more about themselves.
4. Running away is an important concept in both novels. Create a poem, song lyrics, drawing, story, or other creative work exploring the idea of running away.

ABOUT ANOTHER WORLD

1. Afghanistan is a country with a rich history. Create an illustrated time line of at least twenty notable moments in Afghan history beginning as far back as 500 b.c.
2. In her Author’s Note, N. H. Senzai tells readers that she “didn’t want to write this book.” Write a letter to the author explaining why you are thankful she did write *Shooting Kabul* after all.

3. Go to the library or online to find a map of modernday Afghanistan. Learn more about the various ethnic groups that live in this country, including Pukhtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek. Research the Taliban and the effect this organization has had on Afghanistan. Find a newspaper article less than two weeks old that provides information on the current situation in Afghanistan. Imagine you are an advisor to the American president. Present information from your research to help the president better understand the situation in Afghanistan.

4. Go to the library or online to find a recipe for *mantu* . With adult help, prepare this dish for friends or classmates. Invite friends or classmates to share favorite ethnic recipes enjoyed by their families. Create a class cookbook, including recipes and short paragraphs in which each student explains the origin or importance of the recipe they shared.