

The Cellist of Sarajevo - Discussion Questions

1. What effect does constant confrontation with war have on each narrator? Does suffering and loss ever become normalized for them? What does it mean to reintroduce color and music into this anarchy?
2. How has life changed since the men on the hills arrived? What physical and mental resources help the four characters survive? How would you fare under these conditions - and what would be your greatest challenges?
3. Each chapter is told through one of four perspectives. How does that structure shape your reading? How would the experience differ in first person or in a more journalistic style?
4. How do Arrow, Dragan, and Kenan view their fellow citizens and their choices? What keeps them from giving up on one another? Does Kenan's idea of the three types of people ring true to you?
5. Does the author intend readers to be sympathetic to Arrow? Does war force everyone to compromise something in themselves - their attitude or moral compass?
6. What are the goals of the men on the hill? What do they represent to the main characters - and how are they different from Arrow?
7. Dragan avoids friends, Arrow takes a new name, and Kenan builds a ritual of getting water. How do rituals help them cope? Do the cellist's performances change how they face danger?
8. What force does music have in a war torn city, and what power does it hold over each character? Do you relate to the impact of the performances?
9. How does mapping Sarajevo - its streets, crossings, and landmarks - affect the narrative and your intimacy with the story?
10. Kenan is disturbed by halted trams and the burned National Library. What services and symbols do you consider pillars of civilization?
11. Why does the opposing sniper avoid taking a shot at the cellist when he has opportunities?
12. Why does Dragan prevent the dead man's body from being filmed? What lesson does the author suggest for the living about not letting horror become commonplace?
13. Were you surprised by Arrow's final act of protest? Is she able to reclaim herself and her identity?