

Mornings in Jenin by Susan Abulhawa

Discussion Questions

1. Mornings in Jenin opens with a prelude set in Jenin in 2002, as Amal faces an Israeli soldier's gun. How does this prelude set the scene for the novel to come? Why does the novel open here, in contemporary Jenin, rather than at the beginning of the Abulheja family's story? Why do you think the author wanted the reader to know in the prelude that the main character was an American citizen?
2. Discuss the dual traditions of land and learning in the Abulheja family. Which members of the family seem to value land over education, and vice versa? In which family members do these two traditions come together? What common values do all members of this family share? How do these values compare to the values of farmers or of those who in another way live close to the earth in other countries?
3. The boyhood friendship between Hasan and Ari Perlstein is consolidated in the innocence of their twelve years, the poetic solitude of books, and their disinterest in politics. What do Hasan and Ari learn from each other? Considering that Palestine had historically been a country where people of all three monotheistic religions lived in relative harmony, do you think such friendships between children like Ari and Hasan were unusual then? Could two children like Hasan and Ari have become friends in a later time period? Why or why not?
4. In Jenin, the early morning was a time and place where the hope of returning home could be renewed. What rituals take place in the early morning hours? What is the significance of the title Mornings in Jenin?
5. Find scenes in the novel when family strife and political strife intersect. What are some problems that the Abulheja family faces day-to-day? Which family conflicts are caused by the political situation, and which seem common to families in all parts of the world?
6. Discuss the series of events that lead to Ismael's new life as David. What connections can be drawn between Moshe's kidnapping and Israel's actions toward the Palestinian people? What wounds are healed when David discovers his real identity?
7. Hasan tells his daughter, Amal, that her name means hopes and dreams. What hopes and dreams does Amal's name suggest for the Abulheja family, and to what degree is she able to fulfill them? How do her hopes and dreams change when she calls herself Amy in America?
8. After surviving a week underground during the 1967 conflict, Amal denies knowing Dalia. Why does she renounce her mother? What are the consequences of Amal's lie?
9. Haj Salem tells Amal that one treasure is your mind and another is your heart. How does this influence Amal's decision to go to school in Jerusalem? Why does she consider his words the greatest wisdom imparted to her?
10. Amal and Yousef both lose the people they love most in the attacks on Lebanon in 1982. How do brother and sister react differently to their tragedies, and why? How does this tragedy drive them further apart instead of closer in their grief? How might Amal's reaction have been different had she not been pregnant?

11. Amal associates Dalia's stoic behavior with the advice to keep feelings inside. When does Amal follow Dalia's example, and when does she break from it? How does Amal's behavior with her daughter, Sara, resemble Dalia's mothering?
12. Consider the Israeli characters within the novel. How do their experiences compare to the experiences of the Abulheja family? What do these voices add to the story?
13. What layers of meaning can you find in the title of part III, *The Scar of David*, which was the original title of the book?
14. When David asks if Amal still sees him as an abstraction, she thinks that both are heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities and ragged confusion. What does she mean, and how does this relate to the broader struggle?
15. In her final conversations with Sara, why did Amal grieve three thousand times on September 11th? How was Amal's experience similar to and different from the widows of 9/11? How did Sara misinterpret her mother's grief?
16. Nearly all of the characters are transformed by personal and international events. How are the transformations of Moshe, Dalia, Amal, and Yousef similar and different? Who undergoes the most dramatic change?
17. Why does the novel end with words from Yousef, who lives in exile? What mood does Yousef's perspective create at the end of the book? Why might the author have chosen this ending, and what is the significance of the chapter title *The Cost of Palestine*?
18. If at all, how has this story changed how you view the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Did you learn things that surprised you?
19. When the story returns to the prelude, how can Amal face a soldier with a mother's love and a dead woman's calm? What does this suggest about soldiers, war, and the burdens of power?
20. Do any themes or conflicts in *Mornings in Jenin* resonate with present-day events? How might this story inform a book club discussion today?