A Thousand Splendid Suns – Study Guide Questions

Themes in the novel

- Man’s inhumanity to man
- Systematic victimization of women by patriarchal institutions
- Spousal abuse
- Resistance to victimization
- Power of education
- Education for women
- Corrupting influence of absolute power

General Approach

As you read the novel, stop after reading each chapter and write a two (2) sentence summary of the chapter. If the chapter is titled, then write it down. If it has no title, then create one.

This simple exercise will help you sense the flow of the novel.

Character List

For the following characters make note of on what page he/she first appears. It is often on that page that you find the description of the character.

Miriam –
Muhsin & Ramin –
Afsoon –
Fariba –
Hasina –
Tariq –
Zalmai –
Sayeed –
Jalil –
Bibi Jo –
Nilofaur –
Hakim –
Giti –
Khadim –
Zaman –
Hamza –
Nana –
Mullah Faizullah –
Rasheed –
Laila –
Ahmad & Noor –
Aziza –
Salim –

Glossary of Terms

For the following terms you may want to look them up before you read. It will help you better understand the book as you read.

Ahmad Shah Massoud
bath house
Communist
Eid or Eid-ul-Fitr
Hazaras
jihad
kolba
militia
Mullah
Ramadan
Soviet
Al-Qaeda
Buddahs of Bamiyan
daal
fast
Hekmatyar
Islam
Koran or Qur’an
Mohammad Najibullah
Mullah Omar
republic
Tajiks
Allah
burqa
Dostum
hashish
infidel
jinn
land mine
Mjihadeen
Pashtuns
Socialist
Taliban
Chapter 1

bazaars – open-air markets
culpable – guilty, responsible
demurely – in a reserved manner
delements – affectionate words or actions
facade – the front
harami – an illegitimate child; one born of two unmarried parents
illegitimate – the child of two unmarried parents
jinn – a demon or other possessing spirit
kolba – a hut or rudimentary house
loathsome – hated
minarets – steeples; towers on top of mosques
relic – a souvenir; memento
Sufis – Muslim mystics
surmise – to figure out; understand
trellised – covered with a screen or lattice work so vines can grow on it
ward off – keeps away

1. How old is Mariam at the beginning of Chapter 1?
2. Describe Nana’s reaction to Mariam’s breaking the bowl.
3. Why does the speaker assert that the harami is innocent?
4. How does Nana react after Jalil told Mariam about the pistachio tree?
5. Describe Jalil’s family and business life.
6. What happened to Nana after she became pregnant with Mariam?
7. What does Nana wish her father had done?
8. Nana tells Mariam, “Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam.” What does this mean?

Chapter 2

dohol – a cylindrical drum that can be played on both sides
henna – a reddish-brown dye made from a plant
penance – an action performed to relieve guilt
recremation – disapproval
shahnai – a type of flute
suppress – to keep quiet
tandoor – a clay oven for cooking food
wistful – sad and sentimental

1. Why had Nana refused to live in Herat?
2. When Nana was fifteen, she almost got married. Why was the wedding called off?
3. According to Nana, why did Jalil build her and Mariam’s house instead of hiring workers?
4. Contrast Nana’s and Jalil’s versions of Mariam’s birth.

Chapter 3

akhund – a religious leader
arbab – a landlord or other town official
coveted – desired
dishlemeh – a sweet candy made mostly of sugar
gaunt – very thin
kindle – to light afire
quinces – fruits that are similar to apples
scuffled – struggled
turban – a traditional headdress made of fabric wound around a cap

1. What chores do Nana and Mariam enjoy together?
2. Who is Mullah Faizullah?
3. What in this section indicates that Mariam and Mullah Faizullah have a close relationship?
4. What does Mariam tell Mullah Faizullah she wants?
5. When Mullah Faizullah asks Nana to permit Mariam to attend school, she says to Mariam, “What’s the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining a spittoon.” What does Nana’s simile mean?

Chapter 4

fretting – worrying
gauging – judging
mashallah – Islamic for “whatever God wills”

1. Describe the anxiety Mariam feels as Jalil’s visit approaches.
2. What characteristics of Jalil indicate that he is of a different socio-economic class than Mariam?
3. When Jalil tosses Mariam in the air, Nana says that one day he will drop her. What does this imply about Nana’s feelings for Jalil?
4. Why do you think Nana behaves civilly when Jalil visits?

Chapter 5

aggrieved – offended
ample – more than enough
articulate – explain clearly with words
conifer – an evergreen tree or shrub
consoling – soothing
disillusionment – the state of having lost faith or trust
dousing – extinguishing; killing
foreboding – indicating or suggesting misfortune
forlorn – miserable or hopeless
grudges – complaints
hookahs – water pipes used for smoking tobacco
muted – hushed
opaque – cloudy
reproach – disapproval
1. At the beginning of Chapter 5, how old is Mariam?
2. What tactics does Nana use to keep Mariam from going to visit Jalil? List as many as you can.
3. After Nana's emotional outburst, Mariam wishes she could tell her mother certain things. What does she want to tell her, but does not?
4. What does Mariam assume when Jalil does not arrive on time, and what does she do instead of waiting for him?
5. Describe what happens when Jalil's driver tries to get Mariam to get into the car?
6. The driver returns Mariam to her house, but at the last second, he yells, "Go back! No. Don't look now." To what is he referring?

Chapter 6

1. After the death of her mother, how do Mariam's feelings for Jalil change?
2. Mariam watches the "comings and goings of Jalil's daily life" from her bedroom window.
3. Mariam feels guilty about her mother's death. Why and how does Mullah Faizullah try to comfort her?

Chapter 7

1. What shocking news do Jalil's wives tell Mariam at the beginning of Chapter 7?
2. Describe Rasheed.

Chapter 8

1. Find and list three similes in this chapter.
2. Describe the process of the marriage.
3. Re-read the part describing Mariam and Rasheed's hurried wedding. Find and list one example of foreshadowing. What event do you think is being foreshadowed?
4. How does Mariam respond when Jalil tells her he will visit her in Kabul? How does Jalil then react to her response?

Chapter 9

1. Why does Mariam have difficulty understanding Rasheed?
2. Why does Mariam start to cry in the middle of the living room?

Chapter 10

1. In Chapter 10, how much time has gone by, and how has Mariam responded to her new home?
2. What does Mariam do the day after Rasheed tells her he expects her to "start behaving like a wife"?
3. What does Mariam hear some of the other wives saying about their husbands?
4. Why does Mariam first begin to get nervous while standing in line?
5. When the women approach and encircle Mariam, they do so out of curiosity and a welcoming spirit. Why do you think Mariam panics?
6. Mariam feels "a flare of pride" when Rasheed compliments her cooking. Why does this surprise her?
7. What does Rasheed say about Fariba and the other women who do not wear burqas and who look him in the eye?
Chapter 11

appeasement – satisfaction
averted – turned away
cantering – walking briskly
corrupt – fake; tainted; ruined
emphatic – forcefully
jovial – merrily; joyfully
meek – humble
mystified – confused; amazed
palate – the sense of taste
scrutinizing – closely examining

1. Standing on Chicken Street, Mariam sees many "modern" women. Describe these women and how they make Mariam feel about herself.

Chapter 12

brandished – exhibited; showed off
brooding – gloomy
curt – rude
frenetic – frenzied; showing excitement
languid – slow; sluggish
propriety – the quality of being proper or appropriate
Ramadan – the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims fast from dawn until dusk
sanctity – holiness; sacredness
scant – lacking in quantity
sullen – resentful or gloomy

1. How do Mariam and Rasheed observe Ramadan differently?
2. What does Mariam remember about Ramadan back home at Gul Daman?
3. Why does Mariam deny knowing Fariba when Rasheed asks her?
4. Why does Mariam wish Nana could see the fireworks?
5. Why does Mariam feel Rasheed is a hypocrite for having the magazines?
6. Later, why does Mariam regret snooping in Rasheed's belongings?
7. Why does Mariam now feel "a kinship" with Rasheed?

Chapter 13

abasement – hatred; shame
harmonium – a keyboard instrument
perfunctory – lacking in interest
province – a station or place in life
pumice – a stone used for smoothing or polishing
relishing – enjoying
tabla – a pair of hand drums

1. Why does Mariam see bright colors on the ride home from the doctor?
2. Why do you think Rasheed wants so badly for the baby to be a boy?
3. Why is Rasheed worried about the stairs, the knives, and the stove?
4. Describe how Mariam feels when she thinks about the baby.
5. What happens to Mariam at the bathhouse?
6. Rasheed covers Mariam in a "stiff, perfunctory" way and complains about the doctor's explanation—"God's will." How is Rasheed feeling at this point?
7. How has Mariam's mood changed by the end of the chapter?

Chapter 14

besieged – surrounded by
consolation – comfort
harangues – lectures; speeches
sacrilege – something offensive to God
sulk – to be quiet and moody
sustenance – means of support or strength
tantalizing – in a teasing manner
taunting – teasing
vindication – revenge

1. Mariam grieves for her unborn baby. Describe the different beliefs and emotions she feels during this time.
2. How has Rasheed changed since the loss of the baby?
3. How does Rasheed react when Mariam suggests having a burial service for the baby, and what does she do?

Chapter 15

disheveled – messy
mundane – boring, unemotional
resonated – vibrated; echoed
volatile – explosive
winced – shrank back; flinched

1. How long has it been since the last chapter?
2. How does Rasheed treat Mariam when she asks questions about Mir Akbar Khyber?
3. Of what does Mariam live in fear?
4. How many babies has Mariam miscarried?
5. Why is cooking "an exercise in heightened anxiety" for Mariam?
6. What happens to Daoud Khan, and what is the result, according to Abdul Qader?
7. Describe what happens at the end of the chapter with the pebbles.
Chapter 16

- brutes – beasts; savages
- coup – the violent overthrow of a governing body
- ghazals – a type of poetry
- indomitable – unconquerable
- ineptitude – inability; incompetence
- mincing – cutting; harsh
- sheepish – embarrassed

1. How much time has gone by since the last chapter?
2. The text states that Laila is “hungry for the sight of her friend Tariq,” and that to her, “time stretched an contracted depending on Tariq’s absence or presence.” What can you infer about Laila’s feelings for Tariq?
3. Describe Laila’s appearance.
4. What character from earlier in the novel is Laila’s mother?
5. Describe Babi, Laila’s father.
6. Laila sees a blue Mercedes Benz in her neighborhood. The man in the back seat is wearing “a dark brown suit, with a white handkerchief triangle in the breast pocket.” Who is this man, from earlier in the novel?
7. How is Laila’s teacher different from an American teacher? How is she similar?
8. Contrast Shanzai’s opinion of Russia with her opinion of America.
9. Describe Giti and Hasina, Laila’s two friends from school.

Chapter 17

- badmash – bad person
- boisterously – in a loud and excited manner
- flaccid – limp
- khastegari – a formal marriage proposal
- potency – force; power

1. Why does Laila wash herself thoroughly after the boys squirt
2. What is a good day like for Mammy?
3. Based on the information in this chapter, why do you think Mammy stays in bed until three in the afternoon?

Chapter 18

- propaganda – the spreading of ideas for a specific cause
- ruefully – sadly

1. Laila worries why Tariq has been away so long. What are some things she suspects has happened?
2. What sign does Laila receive that shows he is all right?
3. Why has Tariq been away longer than he anticipated?
4. Describe Laila’s relationship with Tariq’s family. Give details from the text that support your ideas.
5. What causes Laila to learn that “boys differed from girls”?

Chapter 19

1. What news does the visitor bring Laila and her family?
2. Laila tries to console her mother, but the other women do not let her. How does this make Laila feel?
3. Why does Laila have a hard time putting herself in her mother’s shoes?

Chapter 20

- curator – a caretaker
- martyrs – people who give their lives for their beliefs
- obliterate – to destroy
- pallid – pale

1. The deaths of Laila’s brothers debilitate Fariba. How does Laila’s role in the household change?
2. Laila believes that “her future was no match for her brothers’ past.” What does this mean?
3. Laila fears Mammy might kill herself. Mammy assures her she will not, but, if that is the case, why is Laila left with “dueling emotions”?

Chapter 21

- disavowal – a non-acceptance
- frescoes – paintings on plaster
- niche – a small space
- solace – peace

1. What historical landmark does Babi take Laila and Tariq to see?
2. What causes “a wave of affection” to come over Laila?
3. In what way does Babi say his grief is different from Mammy’s?
4. What does Babi tell Laila that she probably wishes to hear from her mother?
5. Babi speaks of leaving Kabul. Why would this idea never actually happen?
6. What does Laila not tell Babi about why she would not want to move away?

Chapter 22

- admonishing – scolding; shaming
- conspicuous – obvious
- faltering – a hesitation
- shaheed – a person who died for a cause

1. What do Tariq and Laila say about marriage while watching the movie?
2. How does Tariq cut the tension during the kiss scene?
Chapter 23

carafes – jugs; bottles
circuitous – roundabout
conspiratorial – secretive
contentiousness – an argumentative nature
cretinous – stupid or insensitive
fodder – food; material that can be used
fruition – realization; existence
impetus – a cause
incensed – angry
inconsolable – very upset
interim – appointed temporarily
nepotism – favoritism toward family members
seethed – boiled; became angry
swooned – became giddy or happily silly
ubiquitous – widespread
vigils – periods of watching

1. What happens to Hasina?
2. What happens between Najibullah and the Mujahideen, and how does this development affect Fariba?
3. What warning does Fariba give to Laila about Tariq?
4. Laila tries to ease Fariba’s mind by telling her that Tariq is like a brother. How does Fariba react to this statement?
5. Why does Laila feel it is not fair for Mammy to counsel her about Tariq?
6. How has Giti changed, and why?
7. What irritates Laila about Tariq and his new friends?
8. What does Tariq say that makes Laila swoon?

Chapter 24

aversion – dislike
chivalric – gentlemanly
pulverized – crushed into fragments
scorn – disrespect; ridicule
suffused – filled; surrounded
unfathomable – unimaginable

1. Laila ironically describes the bomb blasts as “blissfully elsewhere.” What does she mean by this?
2. What is the “flip side of being spared”?
3. What event causes Tariq to buy a gun?
4. Why have people been spray painting their cars yellow?
5. What happens to Giti?

Chapter 25

beseeching – begging
guileless – innocent; honest
rancor – bitterness

1. Why is Tariq leaving Afghanistan?
2. Why does Laila say she cannot marry Tariq?

Chapter 26

brusquely – quickly and in a harsh manner
concession – giving in
garish – flashy; tacky
lethargic – tired; lacking energy
smugness – self-satisfaction

1. Describe what Laila experiences in trying to remember Tariq.
2. What does Mammy finally agree to, and why?
3. Why does Laila have hope that she will see Tariq again soon?
4. What “painful task” does Babi have in preparing to move?
5. What happens to Laila’s family at the end of the chapter?
6. What can you infer has happened to Laila since the explosion?

Chapter 27

churlishness – bad manners
demeanor – attitude
humility – modesty, humbleness
impunity – exemption from punishment
smugness – exemption from punishment

1. What actions of Rasheed and Mariam show that they care about Laila?
2. What has happened to Tariq’s house?
3. Why does Laila believe she should have been in the house during the explosion?
4. Why can Mariam not find any comforting words for Laila?

Chapter 28

aloof – seemingly uncaring
bulbous – round
lorry – a wagon

1. List and identify two examples of figurative language in this chapter.
2. What did Abdul Sharif talk to Tariq about in the hospital?
3. What, according to Abdul, did Tariq mostly talk about?
4. Abdul Sharif reveals that he considered not telling Laila about Tariq after hearing how her parents died. Do you think Abdul is insensitive in bringing Laila this bad news, given everything else she has been through?
5. Why does Laila think this news is a punishment?
### Chapter 29

**ambagh** – a woman in a harem, who is one of a man’s multiple wives  
**blatant** – purposeful  
**contempt** – disrespect  
**contrived** – fake  
**feign** – to pretend  
**incessantly** – nonstop  
**legitimize** – to make legal

1. What is suddenly different about the way Rasheed eats?  
2. What is Rasheed’s attitude toward Americans?  
3. What becomes painfully clear to Mariam after dinner while she is in the kitchen?  
4. List three ways that Rasheed tries to justify marrying Laila.  
5. What image does Rasheed paint of Laila if she were to leave his household?  
6. Why does Rasheed consider his offer to be “charitable”?  
7. What is Laila’s answer to Rasheed’s proposal?

### Chapter 30

**disingenuous** – not honorable; deceptive  
**recoiling** – drawing back and away  
**translucent** – showing light through  
**wincing** – flinching

1. How does Rasheed afford to give Laila a ring?  
2. What might make Rasheed “suspicious”?

### Chapter 31

**discrepancy** – something that does not make sense  
**illicit** – not permitted  
**leniency** – tolerance of behavior  
**lewd** – vulgar; obscene  
**meager** – skimpy  
**pretensions** – goals

1. In what ways does Rasheed verbally degrade Mariam?  
2. Why does Rasheed have reservations about Laila’s upbringing, and what changes will he enforce?  
3. Mariam confronts Laila about both their roles in the household. What rules does Mariam lay down?  
4. How does Mariam feel after establishing the rules?

### Chapter 32

**palls** – something that covers  
**sharab** – alcohol

1. What new information do you learn about the death of Rasheed’s first child?  
2. Why does the Koran forbid drinking?  
3. How does Laila deal with her grief over the next several months?  
4. How does Laila feel about wearing the burqa?  
5. What do Mariam and Laila get into a fight over?  
6. Why might the two women have enjoyed the argument?

### Chapter 33

**brazier** – a brass pan for holding hot coals  
**contorted** – twisted  
**exasperated** – frustrated  
**lolloping** – bobbing  
**perverse** – improper  
**phosphorescent** – glowing  
**specter** – a haunting idea  
**tentative** – uncertain

1. What is unusual about Laila’s arrival home from the hospital? Explain.  
2. What complaints does Rasheed have about the baby?  
3. Why does Mariam “smirk” when she hears Rasheed complaining?  
4. Why are the baby’s clothes an issue?  
5. Rasheed now ignores Laila. What is Mariam’s reaction to this behavior?  
6. What does Rasheed try to blame Mariam for?  
7. Describe what happens during the fight between Rasheed and Mariam.  
8. Describe Mariam’s middle-of-the-night encounter with the baby. What can you infer from it?

### Chapter 34

**adversary** – an opponent; an enemy in competition  
**indignant** – angry

1. What does Rasheed ask Laila about Tariq?  
2. What gift from Mariam does Laila find outside her bedroom door?  
3. How does Laila finally win over Mariam?  
4. When the “look passed between Laila and Mariam,” what do the two women come to understand about each other?

### Chapter 35

**accomplice** – a partner in crime  
**artillery** – weapons such as guns and rockets  
**barricaded** – blocked  
**lament** – sadness  
**mortars** – cannons  
**pensive** – sadly thoughtful

1. What behaviors at the beginning of Chapter 35 show that Laila and Mariam are becoming friends?  
2. Mariam is slightly awkward with Aziza and tells her, “I am nobody...What have I got to give you?” Why does Mariam behave this way?
3. Mariam says she has a life of “false, failed connections.” Who are or were these connections, and why?
4. How and why has the war worsened?
5. Mariam says that “love was a damaging mistake, and its accomplice, hope, a treacherous illusion.” Do you agree? Explain.
6. How does Laila’s secret make Mariam feel a stronger connection to Aziza?

Chapter 36

caliber – the diameter of a bullet
distraught – very upset
euphoria – extreme happiness
gouged – poked
incredulous – unable to believe
porous – able to be penetrated
sporadic – irregular

1. Why must Laila and Mariam find a male escort?
2. What does Laila tell the young man about her family situation?
3. How does the young man betray Mariam and Laila?
4. During the interrogation, how does the policeman try to catch Laila and Mariam in a lie?
5. Why is it ironic that the policeman says, “It is my responsibility, you see, to maintain order”?
6. Summarize Rasheed’s brutal reaction to Laila and Mariam’s attempt to run away.
7. What effects of heat and dehydration do Laila and Aziza experience?

Chapter 37

infidels – people who go against their religious beliefs
recluse – a person who lives his or her life alone
urbane – polite

1. Who are the Taliban, and what is Rasheed’s opinion of them?
2. How do the citizens of Kabul react to the Taliban’s arrival?
3. The Taliban ride through the streets of Kabul announcing its rules over a loudspeaker. Which of the rules is most surprising to you, and why?

Chapter 38

averse – to get revenge for
bemusement – curious tolerance
dilapidated – run-down
erratic – strange

1. Describe some ways in which the Taliban soldiers destroy Kabul.
2. Rasheed likes the Taliban’s strict laws regarding women. In what way does he wield power over Laila?
3. Explain why Laila is in the bathroom with a bicycle spoke.

Chapter 39

horde – a large crowd
pragmatic – realistic

1. What is wrong with Laila when Rasheed and Mariam take her to Malahai Hospital?
2. Why can Laila not get medical attention there?
3. In what ways is Rabia Balkhi Hospital different from a hospital you might visit?
4. While at the hospital, Mariam comes to understand Nana. How so? Explain.

Chapter 40

cadence – the rhythm
dote on – to admire excessively
intonations – melodies created by speech

1. How old is Laila’s son now?
2. How is Rasheed’s treatment of Zalmai different from his treatment of Aziza?
3. How does Aziza treat her little brother?
4. Why is it risky for Rasheed to buy Zalmai a television?
5. Why does Rasheed suggest to Laila that they let Aziza beg on the streets?
6. Laila punches Rasheed. What is his response?
7. What do they bury in the back yard?

Chapter 41

audible – able to be heard
docile – calm
malice – anger
menace – trouble

1. Why, according to Laila, do the Afghans love Titanic?
2. What happens to Rasheed’s store?
3. All the problems and the family’s need to sell their belongings upsets Rasheed. In what ways does he express his anger and frustration?
4. What does the family do to continue to put food on the table?
5. Why does Mariam call Jalil, and what is the result of the call?

Chapter 42

clandestine – secret
condescension – a superior attitude
cordial – friendly
dire – serious
disconsolate – joyless
1. Ahmad Shah Massoud travels to France and asks the U.S. for help fighting the Taliban.
2. What truth has Laila not been able to tell Aziza?
3. What does Laila tell Aziza to say if she is asked about her father?
4. Why do some of the children have shaved heads?
5. Describe what Laila sees and smells inside the orphanage.
7. How does Rasheed try to prevent Laila from visiting Aziza?
8. Why do the children have to pull the curtains during lessons?
9. How has Aziza changed since arriving at the orphanage?
10. What new job has Rasheed acquired?
11. How does Aziza’s explanation of plate tectonics relate to the story?
12. At the end of the chapter, Laila finds Tariq at her doorstep.

**Chapter 43**

exert – to apply a hold

1. Why does Mariam feel she has no authority over Zalmai?
2. Based on Zalmai’s behavior with Mariam and the ball, how would you characterize him?
3. Mariam realizes now why the doorman at the hotel seemed familiar the other day. Why?

**Chapter 44**

apparition – a ghost
dysentery – an illness marked by severe diarrhea
eclaciated – skeletal; severely underweight
flogged – beaten
hashish – a form of marijuana, an illegal substance
queries – questions
queues – lines
recrimination – an accusation
surreptitious – sneaky
uproariously – loudly
wry – clever

1. Laila is overjoyed to see Tariq again, but she feels ashamed. Why?
2. How has Tariq changed?
3. What does Tariq tell Laila about his parents?
4. Why did Tariq have difficulty getting work?
5. Why did Tariq end up in jail, and how long did he serve?
6. What are the concerns expressed just before Tariq and Laila part?

**Chapter 45**

appraised – judged
complacent – satisfied; not argumentative
conspiracy – a plan to fool or deceive
contrite – guilty
credence – an acceptance of something as true
despondent – depressed
discreditable – untruthful
futility – ineffectiveness
imminent – definitely going to happen; unavoidable
imploring – begging
incoherent – not understandable
mutiny – a revolt; rebellion
warrant – justify

1. Mariam comes to Laila’s defense, clawing and tearing at Rasheed’s face, as he whips Laila for visiting with Tariq. What does Mariam come to understand about herself during this fight?
2. What does Mariam do with the shovel?
3. What transpires silently between Rasheed and Mariam before she hits him the final time?

**Chapter 46**

leer – a knowing look
rictus – an open-mouthed smile
rife with – abundant in; plentiful in
stolid – unemotional

1. Where do Laila and Mariam take Rasheed’s body?
2. What does Laila tell Zalmai about his father, and what does Zalmai ask in the middle of the night?
3. Mariam is certain the police will eventually find out she killed Rasheed. What does she plan to do?
4. What is the last image Laila has of Mariam?

**Chapter 47**

clangor – a ringing sound
notoriety – fame for something bad
permeated – drenched; soaked through

1. Describe the Walayat women’s prison.
2. In what ways is the prison inhumane?
3. Mariam remembers Nana telling her, “Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always.” How do these words relate to Naghma?
4. In what ways does the judge show Mariam compassion? Do you think this is unusual?
5. As Mariam signs her sentence, she remembers the last time she signed a document. How are both documents “death sentences”?
6. What is ironic about the guard who rides in the truck with Mariam?
7. Why do you think people would want to witness an execution?
8. What does Mariam wish for in her last moments of life?
9. As Mariam draws nearer to her executioner, her regret is replaced by another feeling. Explain.

Chapter 48

abhors – hates
indolent – harmless
overtures – gestures
venomously – in a mean manner
verdant – green

1. What is the first thing Laila and Tariq do when they arrive in Murree?
2. What is the difference about the language the narrator uses in this chapter? Why?
3. What does Laila like about Murree, and how is it different from Kabul?
4. Laila dreams of hearing a woman humming a Herati song. Who is the woman, and why does the dream leave Laila “shaken”?

Chapter 49

allayed – soothed
rankles – irritates

1. What news does Tariq bring at the beginning of this chapter?
2. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Taliban refuses to turn over Osama Bin Laden. Why?
3. Tariq suggests that the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan might not be so bad. Why does he believe this, and what is Laila’s reaction?
4. What evidence is there in this chapter that the children are starting to accept Tariq?

Chapter 50

desolate – deserted; void of life
sullied – soiled; tarnished

1. Despite her love of Murree, Laila longs to return to Kabul. Why?