

Reading Group Questions

- What do you think are the main themes of the novel?
- What impact does the war have on the lives of the main characters?
- Do you agree with Afra's need to remain in Syria at the beginning of the novel? What might this suggest about her state of mind?
- Which of the two characters seem stronger at the start of the novel? Does this impression change by the end?
- Are there similarities and differences in the way in which Nuri and Afra deal with the obstacles they face?

- What do you think the author's intentions were by introducing the character of Mohammed? What could the relationship between Nuri and Mohammed reveal about Nuri's state of mind?
- What do you think the bees and beekeeping represent and symbolise in the story?
- At the end of the novel Nuri says, 'Mustafa has always given me something to hope for.' To what extent does Mustafa influence the decisions that Nuri makes in his life and during his journey with Afra? In what ways might the friendship between the two men give the reader something to hope for?
- It is because of Mustafa that Nuri strives to reach the UK. Why do you think Nuri does not make contact with Mustafa as soon as he arrives?
- Nuri contributes to the murder of Nadim. Do you condemn or agree with his actions?
- Do you consider Nuri to be a strong or weak man?
- Which character do you think changes the most during the course of the novel?
- Why do you think Nuri finds it so difficult to make emotional and physical contact with Afra?

- What might Afra's blindness reveal about her state of mind?
- We never really meet Sami, but in what way do we learn about his character and the type of boy he was?
- How does Nuri and Afra's relationship change during the course of the novel?
- At the end of the story Afra says to Nuri, 'You think it's me who can't see.' What do you think she means by this? And how far do you agree with what she says?
- Which character in the novel do you think displays the greatest emotional resilience?
- What do you think happens after the end of the novel?
- Can reading a novel about the experience of refugees offer a different perspective or have a different emotional impact to that of the media and news bulletins?