

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

The Attack by Yasmina Khadra

- In what way does Amin change during the novel?
- Can you ignore your heritage?
- How were you affected by the structure of the novel, including the author's use of present tense, the first-person narration, and the way the timeline unfolds? What makes fiction itself a useful form in examining horrific realities?
- Is it really possible that Amin had no clue that his wife was becoming a suicide bomber? Is it credible that an intelligent and involved husband such as Amin would not be aware that his wife was becoming a "terrorist" right under his nose? Visits by Adel, bank account changes...
- Does anyone ever really know another person, especially spouses?
- Why does Kim remain so supportive of Amin? In what way is her friendship different from Navid's? Why are they more patient with him than most of their colleagues are?
- At the end of chapter seven, Amin tells Kim he has no idea why he did not tell Navid about the letter. In your opinion, why did he keep the receipt of Sihem's letter a secret?
- Adel and the militants Amin encounters emphasize their anger about being humiliated, saying emotional and cultural destruction are just as devastating as physical destruction. What do these observations imply about solutions for peace? Would years of this constant feeling of humiliation naturally lead to terrorism?
- The title of the book is "The Attack" Besides the suicide bombing of Sihem, what other attacks are depicted in this novel? What motivates the various attackers?
- What are the differences (and similarities) between the prologue attack and the last chapter attack?
- What is Amin's goal in investigating the truth about Sihem himself, and confronting those who assisted her, rather than letting the Israeli authorities handle it? In the end, has he achieved his quest?
- Does it seem reasonable that an educated man, a surgeon, would go off half-cocked to confront the Imam?...Was he looking to die?
- Was Amin too worried about his own self esteem. Is he a chauvinist...more afraid he'd been cheated on than that his wife had been devoted to a cause?
- There are two passages that emphasize two of the novel's elderly characters: Kim's grandfather, Old Yehuda, who in chapter six recalls Hitler's rise; and in chapter sixteen, Omr, Amin's great-uncle, who recalls the destruction of family orchards to make way for an Israeli colony. What do Yehuda and Omr reveal about the history of violence, not only in the Middle East but throughout humanity?
- What do you think about the bulldozing of the patriarch's home toward the end of the novel when Wissam became a suicide bomber? Is this effective?
- How could Sihem have been swayed by the Imam?



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- In chapter nine, Amin’s taxi driver lauds a militant imam and plays one of his recordings. What elements of persuasion did you detect in the imam’s diatribe?
 “Is there a splendor so great as the Lord’s face...are there other splendors great enough to turn us away from the face of Allah? In truth, my brothers, a man’s riches are not what he possesses, but what he leaves behind him. And what do we possess, my brothers? What are we going to leave behind us?”
- Was Sihem ashamed of her riches in relation to the poverty of her countrymen?
- What similar tactics are used by religious and political leaders in other circumstances around the world?
- Amin says that blinders prevented him from seeing the devastation that is Palestine. Where else has this happened in the past?
 - Nazi Germany
 - Darfur (now)
- Robert Frost said : (“Mending Fences”)
 “Something there is that doesn't love a wall, ...
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down.”
- How does that apply to this book...
 P. 240 Jews have created a ghetto
- What about a wall on our southern border?
- Would Amin have ever returned to his old life?
- Earlier in this passage (p.159) the Commander notes the difference between Sihem and Amin, **“The truth of a woman who realized where her duty lay, or the truth of a man who believes you need only turn your back on a tragedy to wash your hands of it”**
- Could the Jaaferi’s be considered traitors to their heritage?
- On pages 161-162 the Commander of the sect seems to negate the idea of any peaceable accommodation for Palestine.” **“I’m very sorry for you, Dr. Amin Jaafari...”**
- Did you learn anything from the novel—not only about daily life in the Middle East but also about the prospects for peace?