

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## Birds Without Wings by Louis De Bernieres

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### **Tolerance**

The people of Eskibace were of different religions and ethnicities, yet they mostly coexisted harmoniously. How were they able to do this? Did the differences between people allow them to see themselves any differently? What point was the author trying to make with his depiction of Eskibace?

### **Humor**

Amidst the grimness of the subject matter, there is much humor and colorful characters. What were some of the most enjoyable of these for you?

### **Role of Women**

Women were limited in power and restricted by rules. What are some examples of this, and what are some of the thoughts of various characters about this?

### **Writing Style**

The story is told from many characters' points of view and is not strictly chronological. Iskander says: "The thing about stories is that they are like bindweeds that have to wind round and round and creep all over the place before they get to the top of the pole." What does this storytelling technique achieve? Does it add suspense or depth to the story? How does the use of different voices affect the story?

### **Love**

Iskander the Potter says that love disappoints and ruins. He says it is better not to marry for love. Is he, in some part, right that in the book love causes a lot of suffering? What are some examples of this?

### **Wartime Behavior**

Acts of brutality go hand-in-hand with war. It also requires great strength to cope and survive, and invites acts of compassion and bravery. What are some examples of the coping strategies used by various characters? What are some examples of courage and compassion?

### **Politics**

Mustafa Kemal, like Enver Pasha, is a real historical figure. He is presented as an independent-thinking, upstanding, virtuous person (p.99), and a "dictator who has a democratic future for his country in mind." Does the author present him in a completely sympathetic light?

### **Nationalism & Genocide**

The ideals of nationalism drive much of the fighting in the Ottoman Empire. What are some examples of a nationalistic attitude on the part of some of the characters? What is the result of such beliefs?



**Skokie Public Library**

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**Fate & Faith**

Does believing in fate, and specifically in paradise, make war easier for the Muslim soldiers to bear? Do the characters in the novel appear to have much control over their lives? Are they able to make choices that change the direction of their lives? If not, why? If so, in what ways?

**Bird Imagery**

The book has many references to birds and birdsong. The mountain village is filled with song and the people enjoy having a caged songbird outside their doors. Ayse and Polyxeni believe a dove can carry a message to the dead. Women are called “partridge” as a term of endearment. But people are also compared to birds without wings. Why?

Does the book end with a note of hope or is it all grimness?