

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Journey From the Land of No by Roya Hakakian

- Roya sees that the older women, such as her mother and grandmother, accept their fates as mothers and wives, living to serve their children and husbands. Even Farah tells Roya that a woman's destiny is to suffer and sacrifice. What are some examples of this? What are Roya's feelings about this?
- Why does Roya mean by the title *Journey from the Land of No*? How does it relate to Roya's feeling about writing in English, not Persian?
- Roya's coming of age coincided with the revolution. At first, she and her peers felt empowered by what was happening in the world around them. What are some of Roya's actions that showed her courage and strength?
- In Roya's family, writing and reading were tremendously important. When does Roya first discover the power of writing for herself, and what does that power allow her to do?
- What are her feelings when she discovers that Bibi has been imprisoned for writing an anti-war essay? Do you think this helps her to understand her father's act in burning her books and writings?
- What was the role of poetry in the Hakakian family?
- What was the role of poetry in Iran overall?
- Is the role of poetry as prominent in any other cultures?
- Would you identify Roya as primarily an Iranian or as a Jew? How does she see herself? Does that change?
- Roya's brother Javid, when reading to her, says, "You can't miss a single thing that happens in a book or in life." What does Javid mean by this? How does Roya take this advice?
- Why was Roya conflicted on speaking to journalist David Unger and what influenced her decision?
- Roya's father sent her brothers out of the country at great cost to himself, yet he resisted joining in the revolution, causing Roya to think of him as a "wimp." Why do you think he was conflicted on joining the revolution?
- Is Father suspicious of change? Why was he so conflicted on leaving?
- What were their expectations from Khomeini/the revolution? How did Khomeini betray them? If they had realized Khomeini's intentions, would the revolution have taken place?
- Roya and her family had enjoyed unrestricted lives, were well educated and appreciated many aspects of Western culture. Does it surprise you that such people would have taken part in an anti-Western, Islamist revolution? How do you think they feel about it today?
- Do you see any parallels between the Iran/Iraq war and the U.S. war in Iraq?
- Two other recent memoirs by Iranian women, *Persepolis* and *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, have received worldwide acclaim. Why are Western readers so drawn to these personal stories?



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