

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## The Lemon Tree by Sandy Tolan

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- In the author's note at the beginning of the book, Tolan talks about being scrupulously factual. Do you think he does a good job of maintaining his objectivity?
- How did Bashir's family react when he related the events of his visit to al-Ramla? Can you relate to their reactions?
- The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 is known as the "War of Independence" to Israelis, and the "Nakba," or "Catastrophe," to Palestinians. Discuss the experience of the war for Bashir's family vs. someone like Dalia's cousin, newly arrived in Palestine.
- Bashir and his family kept their focus on the "right of return," as promised by U.N. Resolution 194, as their exile extended. Why was this such a singular focus for Palestinians during this time? If it were you who had been displaced, would you also demand to return home, or would you, at some point, decide it would be easier to live in peace, if also in exile? Whatever your answer, what does it say about Bashir and the Palestinians that they remained focused on the right of return?
- Bashir and Dalia finally meet again, in the midst of rising violence and political tensions, in Ramallah in 2004. The author poses the following question: "They find that their political differences are as great as ever, but that their personal relations are as warm as ever. How does one explain that?" What did you think was the tone of that meeting?
- After 37 years of knowing one another and continuing this ongoing dialogue, what did Bashir and Dalia accomplish? How did the characters (or their opinions) change over time – or have they?
- What do you think was the author's intent in writing this book? Did he accomplish his aims?
- We all come to this book with our past experiences and opinions. Did reading *The Lemon Tree* change any of your opinions? What, if anything, have you learned from the story of Bashir and Dalia?
- The book ends with the planting of a new lemon tree. What is the symbolism of this? Did the book leave you feeling more or less hopeful about peace in the Middle East?
- If this were a novel and Bashir and Dalia were fictional characters, how might the book differ? Would it end differently?



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