

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## Reading *Lolita* in Tehran by Azar Nafisi

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- How did Nafisi's book discussion group come about?
- What was the theme of the class? What was she trying to accomplish by the reading of Western authors?
- How did Nafisi's father's imprisonment affect her?
- What is the author's objection to wearing the veil?
- How does the author portray the Revolution and the period before the Revolution when the Shah was in power?
- During one of the book discussions Mitra asks a question: "Why is it that stories like *Lolita* and *Madame Bovary* — stories that are so sad, so tragic — make us happy? Is it not sinful to feel pleasure when reading about something so terrible?" Would we feel this way if we were to read about it in the newspapers or if it happened to us? If we were to write about our lives here in the Islamic Republic of Iran should we make our readers happy? (p. 44) Why do you think these stories make Mitra feel happy?
- Why do you think that Mr. Nyazi feels that *Gatsby* is "a how-to manual vs. a work of fiction"?
- If you were involved with a book club in another culture or country, what books might you put on a reading list?
- How would you describe Nafisi's characterizations of the males in her book? (Mr. Forsati, Mr. Ghomi, Mr. Nahvi)
- What does the title mean to you? How does Nafisi see it? (p. 33, 35) How does her interpretation relate to the situation of women in Iran, the political situation in Iran?
- What are the two sides in the *Gatsby* Trial? (p. 125 Mr. Nyazi's argument, p. 141 Nafisi's argument)
- Why does Nafisi call her friend "my magician"? What does he mean to her?
- What is the significance of the Green Gate?
- How was the subjugation of women useful to the political structure?
- Nafisi makes the following statement about evil (p. 224): "I think most of my students would have agreed with this definition of evil, because it was close to their own experience...Lack of empathy was to my mind the central sin of the regime." How does literature develop empathy in the reader? Can we in the West have empathy?
- What persuades Nafisi to go back to teaching? What was her dilemma?
- Has this book inspired you to read or reread some of the books which were read and discussed?



**Skokie Public Library**

5215 Oakton Street  
Skokie, Illinois 60077  
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax  
[www.skokielibrary.info](http://www.skokielibrary.info)

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