

A Curriculum Guide to

Saving Kabul Corner

By N. H. Senzai

About the Book

When her cousin Laila arrives in California from war-torn Afghanistan, twelve-year-old Ariana resents her perfect manners and competence. Ariana’s large extended family seems to prefer the gentle newcomer to outspoken Ariana. But Ariana soon has a bigger worry—the grocery store owned by her family is losing business to a new family-owned store nearby. The two families clash and suddenly violence erupts. Figuring out who has caused the violence brings Ariana and Laila together and introduces a new boy into Ariana’s life. Fascinating details about Afghan-American food and culture blend with thought-provoking themes about conflict in this fast-paced mystery.

Prereading Questions

Discuss the issue of conflicts, why they occur, and how they can be resolved. Consider conflicts on a small, personal level such as a disagreement with a friend. Consider them also at a broader level such as war.

Before reading the book, look carefully at the Table of Contents and discuss what it foreshadows about the story. Can you predict anything about the genre, plot, characters, or setting? Look also at the glossary at the end of the book and discuss why it might be included.

Discussion Questions

The following questions in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature: (RL.4–7.1, 2, 4) (RL.4–6.3) (RL.5–6.5, 6)

1. Ariana envies Laila for a number of reasons, and later learns that Laila envies her. Compare and contrast the two characters. What do they have in common? How are they different? Describe how others in the family such as Hava Bibi, Zayd, and the twins treat each girl, and why.
2. One worry for Ariana is that Mariam and Laila will become best friends. Why does she think that? What do Mariam and Laila share in their lives and in their pasts that Ariana doesn’t? How does this problem get resolved in the book?
3. Laila has recently moved to the US from Afghanistan. Throughout the story, she mentions details about her life in Afghanistan, which inform the reader about that country. Describe some of those details including her home life and her education there, and how they contrast with her life in the US.

4. Not long after she meets him, Ariana says some harsh words to Wali. Why is she angry at him? What are the results of her outburst? Describe how and why their relationship changes. By the end of the book, how do they feel about each other?

5. Ariana dislikes most kinds of clothing unless the fabric is very soft. She finds tags scratchy and seams irritating. On the other hand, she enjoys the feel of certain fabrics and papers. Find examples of these reactions in the story. What causes them? Why do you think the author included this as part of Ariana's character?

6. Hava Bibi and Uncle Tofan play important roles in bringing together the two families. Describe how they knew each other, and how they helped bring about peace. How did the book foreshadow what you learn about the two of them in the final paragraph?

7. Ariana and her friends end up solving the mystery of what's happening in their shopping plaza. Lay out the steps they take and the clues they gather. Who were the various suspects? Describe the scene where they find final proof of their theory about who did it. Who were the culprits and why did they work to destroy the businesses?

8. Mariam likes a TV reality show called *Take That*. Describe the show and discuss its similarities to parts of the story. How does the first mention of the show foreshadow certain elements that occur later in the plot? Why did the author use foreshadowing? How does it involve the reader in the mystery?

9. Ariana's extended family is worried about the store but also worried about Laila's father. Describe what he does and what happens to him. As Laila hears about his situation, how does she feel and how does she show those feelings?

10. Ariana is learning about endangered species in school. Describe how she applies that concept to her family's store and the threats against its existence. Explain the parallels between endangered species and the store. What other aspects of her life does Ariana consider endangered? She uses the phrase "survival of the fittest." How does this phrase apply to the situation with the store?

11. Another theme in this novel is conflict. Consider the conflicts between the two families in the past in Afghanistan and in the present about the stores. Ariana also mentions the famous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. Compare and contrast the conflicts. Are any of them resolved? If so, how? How does the war in Afghanistan affect Ariana's extended family?

12. The novel's point of view is a type of first person narrative called limited omniscient. It conveys Ariana's thoughts but no one else's. Find places in the text that show what Ariana is thinking. Find some of her thoughts that are in italics and others that aren't. What is the difference between the two types? Why does the author sometimes use italics?

13. Many novels, even if they have chapter titles, don't have tables of contents. After you've read the book, look back at the Table of Contents and consider the chapter titles. What do

individual chapter titles convey about that chapter? Looking at the order, do the titles give a sense of how the book flows? Why do you think this particular book includes a Table of Contents?

14. *Saving Kabul Corner* ends with an epilogue. What does the epilogue tell you that wasn't in the final chapter before it? Why did the author use a newspaper excerpt instead of just describing what happened or having characters discuss it? What incidents in the book led you to believe there might be a newspaper story about what happened?

15. The author weaves in words and phrases from Arabic, Farsi, and Pukhto. What does this add to the story? How different would the novel be without these words? Find some of the words in the text. Is their meaning clear in the context or is the glossary necessary for understanding them?

16. Besides the words from other languages, this novel has other vocabulary that may be unfamiliar. Have students write down new words as they read, first trying to understand their meaning from the context. If that doesn't work, they should look the word up in a dictionary. Here are some possibilities:

- roughhousing
- inconsequential
- temperamental
- uptick
- bamboozled
- premise
- deflated
- buffeted
- retaliate
- forcible
- Möbius strip
- quizzically
- cavernous
- perpetrated

17. Why do you think the author chose to tell Ariana's story instead of just continuing Mariam and Fadi's from *Shooting Kabul*?

Activities

Kebovs and Lablabu

Between the grocery store and family meals, this story mentions many different foods such as kebovs and lablabu (sugared beets). As a class, make a list of foods that are mentioned, using the narrative and glossary. Each student can choose a type of food to learn more about. They can present their findings to the class orally or as a poster with information, photographs found online, and recipes. If possible, the class could cook some of the food together or students could

bring food in that they cooked or bought. Use the topic as a way to discuss foods from different cultures, emphasizing similarities as well as differences.

Crossroads of the Ancient World

Students may think of Afghanistan mainly as a war-torn country. But, as *Saving Kabul Corner* makes clear, it is also a region, sometimes called the Crossroads of the Ancient World, with a rich history and cultural heritage. To get an overview of that heritage, have your students visit the National Geographic for Kids website listed below, which has a slide show, video, map, and a printable card with information. Have students choose different topics about ancient or modern Afghanistan for a research project to do alone or in pairs, using both print and digital resources to find information. The author provides a bibliography and websites at the back of the book. The final product could be both a paper and a short presentation to the class in which students share their findings.

National Geographic for Kids: <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/places/find/afghanistan>

Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of Great Books for Girls and Great Books about Things Kids Love.

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