

READER'S GUIDE

1. The novel opens with Hanadi having a dream about Saeedah's funeral. Why do you think the author begins the story with this imagined loss?
2. What do you think of the rotating points-of-view in the novel? How would this story be different if it were told entirely from Saeedah's perspective? Or Muneer's?
3. Describe the various portrayals of marriage in the novel. What are some similarities or differences you see across generations?
4. The plot hinges on Saeedah's decision to take Hanadi without Muneer's knowledge. What does Saeedah willingly give up by staying in the United States and disappearing, and what does she lose despite herself?
5. When she first arrives in Jidda, Hanadi thinks that "she could tell, being here for less than half an hour, that she was a different person than she might have been if she'd grown up here, with her family intact.... What other lost elements of herself would she find here?" Do you believe that your birthplace shaped your identity? Have you ever found "lost elements" of yourself in an unexpected place?
6. While exploring Jidda, Hanadi recognizes that "this place—this bride of the Red Sea, as her father calls the city—is the origin of her mother's phonemes." What do you think Quotah is saying about intimacy and alienation in parent-child relationships?
7. Which character makes the most egregious decision in this novel? Does your answer to this question change depending on where you are in the story?
8. Over the course of the novel, more than forty years pass. What character changes the most in that time, in your opinion?
9. What role does secrecy, both voluntary and involuntary, play in this novel?
10. What do you think of Hanadi's dreams and prophecies throughout the novel? Have you ever had a dream that seemed to predict later events?
11. How do the various sections—the chronological history and Hanadi's flashbacks—affect your reading of the book? Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel in this way?