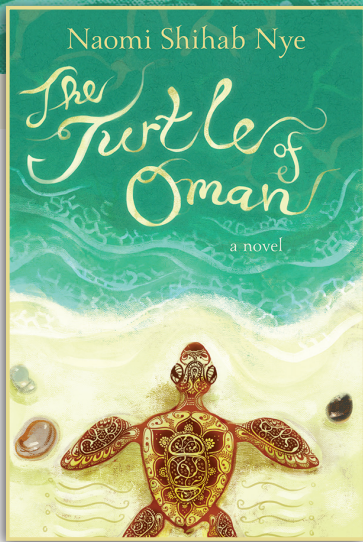


The Turtle of Oman

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Discussion Guide



ABOUT THE BOOK: Aref does not want to move from his native Oman to spend three years in Michigan, where his parents will be studying. Unhappy about leaving his familiar city, his friends, and his cat, Aref stalls his packing and feels miserable; but during his last week at home, Aref's grandfather, his beloved Sidi, takes him on adventures in the countryside and in his own mind to help them both accept the impending departure. When the week is over, Aref has learned much about his home, his grandfather, and the importance of patience.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY: SETTING THE SCENE: Locate the country of Oman on a map of the world. Draw your own map of the Middle East region, showing the relative size of the countries and distance from Oman to other places such as Syria, Iran, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Indicate the city of Muscat on your map and show how far it is from India. Refer to your map as you read the story about Aref. *CCSS.RL.3-5.7*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Key Ideas and Details

1. Why does everyone in Aref's family make lists? What do their lists mean to each of them? What different methods do they use to make their lists? What does this tell you about their different personalities? *CCSS.RL.3-5.1*
2. Why are the turtles so important to Aref? What do they represent for him? What does he learn about the turtles by himself, and what does he learn from his grandfather? Why is the book called *The Turtle of Oman*? *CCSS.RL.3-5.2*
3. Why is Aref reluctant to share his room and his cat with his cousins who will be staying in their house while he is away? What makes him change his mind about sharing? *CCSS.RL.3-5.2*
4. Compare Aref's feelings about moving to his father and mother's feelings. What does the move to Michigan mean to each of them? Why does his mother become impatient with his reluctance to pack? *CCSS.RL.3-5.3*
5. Aref wonders, "What makes a place your own? What makes a home a home?" (p.116). How does his grandfather help him to answer these questions as they spend their week together? *CCSS.RL.3-5.2*

Craft and Structure

6. Discuss the idea of homesickness. Why didn't Aref ever wonder before if his friends from other countries felt homesick? Compare the idea of homesickness to Sidi's memories of his earlier life in Oman. What does Aref mean when he says, "Sidi's memory was very deep" (p. 123)? *CCSS.RL.3-5.4*
7. Describe the journey Aref and Sidi take to the desert camp. Why does Sidi take his grandson to that place? What are the most important parts of the journey for Aref? What does he learn that will help him get ready to leave home? *CCSS.RL.3-5.5*

8. What does Aref learn from the falcon, Fil-Fil, and his handler, Jamal, at the desert camp? What does Sidi mean when he says to Aref, "You will be like my falcon" (p. 182)? How does this experience help Aref prepare for his move away from home? *CCSS.RL.3-5.4*
9. What does Sidi mean when he says, "The use of a puzzle is patience" (p. 263)? What is Sidi trying to tell Aref? How does working on the puzzle help Aref to understand and integrate everything he is learning from Sidi about his move? *CCSS.RL.3-5.6*
10. Discuss the meaning of the word "contagious" to Aref (p. 275). How does he use this word to help him turn his mind around about leaving home? How many meanings can you think of for the word "contagious"? How can you apply it to your own life? *CCSS.RL.3-5.4*
11. Discuss the importance of the stones Aref's grandfather gives him throughout the story. Why does his grandfather give him stones from different places around the country? What does each stone mean to Aref? *CCSS.RL.3-5.5*

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

12. Compare *The Turtle of Oman* to other books or stories you have read in which a character has to go on a long journey and feels reluctant to leave home. What other stories do you know in which a human character feels a strong connection to an animal and compares himself or herself to a wild creature? What other stories have you read in which a young person has a strong relationship with a grandparent who teaches him or her important lessons about life? *CCSS.RL.3-5.9*



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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1. Take a Tour of Oman.** Look for pictures on the Internet that will help you understand Aref's home country. Look up the place names he mentions and describe them to others in your class: Musandam Peninsula, Masirah Island, Wadi Shab, Jebel Shams, Al-Hajar Mountains. Photographs of these beautiful places will give you a sense of Aref's country. Find images of these sites in Oman: Jabrin Castle, Al-Hazem Fort, Mutrah Souq. Which of these exciting places would you want to visit in Oman? *CCSS.RL.3-5.7*
- 2. Traveling with the Turtles.** Aref mentions several different kinds of turtles in this story. See images of the turtles that are found in Oman by going to www.fishingoman.com and then clicking on "Wildlife & Fish," then "Turtles." Follow the links to find out more information about each type of turtle. Draw your own pictures of the different turtles, paying close attention to the shapes of the shells and the colors. Compare the turtles of Oman with those found in Michigan by going to www.michigan.gov/dnr; click on "Wildlife & Habitat," then "Wildlife Species," then "Amphibians & Reptiles." *CCSS.RL.3-5.7*
- 3. Feasting on the Food of Oman.** Prepare an imaginary feast to include the foods that Aref mentions in this book: zaater bread, curried vegetables, kousa mahshi, makloubi, falafel, rice pudding. Work with a group to research how each food is made, what it looks like, and how it will taste. How are these dishes similar to food that you eat, and how are they different? *CCSS.RI.3-5.3*
- 4. Wonderful Wildlife and Amazing Animals.** In addition to the turtles, Aref encounters many other animals on his journey with his grandfather. If you are unfamiliar with these animals, look for pictures of them so you can imagine what they look like: hyena, crane, falcon, oryx, camel, gecko, flesh-footed shearwater, Indian roller, black-bellied storm petrel. Compare these to animals you might see in your own habitat or at a nearby zoo. *CCSS.RI.3-5.7*



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naomi Shihab Nye was named a National Book Award finalist for 19 Varieties of Gazelle: *Poems of the Middle East*, among numerous other honors. She is also the editor of the poetry anthologies *Salting the Ocean*; *What Have You Lost?*; *This Same Sky*; *Time You Let Me In*; and more; as well as the author of the novels *Habibi* and *Going Going*; the essay collection *I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You Okay?*; the short story collection *There Is No Long Distance Now*; the picture books *Baby Radar*, *Sitti's Secrets*, and *Come With Me*; and the poetry collections *Honeybee* and *A Maze Me*. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.

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Discussion guide prepared by Connie Rockman, youth literature consultant and adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature.

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