

READING GROUP GUIDE

The Girl from the Garden by Parnaz Foroutan

1. How do you interpret the book's title, *The Girl from the Garden*?
2. Why does the author begin the prologue with two versions of the same story? What are her intentions in doing so? How does Mahboubeh's mental state factor into your reading of the novel?
3. Rakhel and Korsehed's relationship shifts in significant ways over the course of the novel. In what ways does their relationship change, and in what ways is it affected by the decisions of the rest of the family?
4. Rakhel's explanation for Korsehed's death is that she died "from the complications of womanhood." How do you think Mahboubeh interpreted this as a child? How do you think she interprets it now? Do you think Rakhel feels guilty about the circumstances of Korsehed's death, and why or why not?
5. Kokab is not happy in her marriage to Asher, yet she stays until Rakhel, a woman whom she knows does not have her best interests at heart, asks her to make a decision that she knows will infuriate Asher. Why do you think Kokab decides to follow Rakhel's instructions?
6. Very little is revealed about Mahboubeh's own marriage, but what *is* revealed is ultimately tragic in a very different way than the circumstances of her ancestors' marriages. Why do you think the author withholds most of the details of Mahboubeh's past from the reader? What role do you think Mahboubeh's own former marriage plays in her incessant imagining and reimagining of her family's past?
7. Though most women experience some sort of oppression at the hands of the men around them, Mahboubeh manages, for the most part, to avoid it. In what ways does Mahboubeh transcend the role

ascribed to her as a girl?

8. The men in the story are Jewish minorities living in a relatively hostile environment, which is confounded further by the historical circumstances, in that Iran is relatively “colonized” by Britain and Russia; therefore, even the ‘majority’ (the Muslim male population), is ruled by a higher power—Imperialism. In what way are the male characters in this story oppressed? How is the violence that the tailor enacts upon Ibrahim a reflection of a larger socioeconomic struggle?

9. Though most of the novel takes place in a markedly different setting and time period from contemporary America, there are some comparisons that can be made between the way women were treated in the early part of the Twentieth Century in a predominately Muslim country and the way women are treated now, in both ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ cultures. Do you see any similarities between the political and cultural climates for women today and for the women in this story?