

## Reading Check Questions for Under the Persimmon Tree

### **Chapter 1**

1. Najmah and her family live in Northern Afghanistan. Describe their life.
2. Who are the mujahideen? Who are the Pashtun talib?
3. What are Baba-jan and Nur forced to do when the Pashtun talib visit Najmah's home?
4. What does Baba-jan tell Najmah and her mother as he is forced to leave?

### **Chapter 2**

1. Each chapter switches between Najmah and Nusrat's point of view. Explain Nusrat's character and her role in Pakistan.
2. Why does Nusrat's husband, Faiz, go into Northern Afghanistan?
3. Who are the people Nusrat visits in this chapter? What role do they play in her life?

### **Chapter 3**

1. What motive does Najmah's uncle have in wanting to help her?
2. What new character is introduced to us in this chapter? What is the character's relationship to Najmah?
3. Why is Najmah forced to accept more responsibility around her home? Explain.

## **Chapter 4**

1. Why is Nusrat worried about her husband?
2. How does the persimmon tree factor into Nusrat's life in Pakistan?
3. List two facts relating to Nusrat's life back in America.

## **Chapter 5**

1. How does looking at the stars comfort Najmah?
2. What is the irony as Najmah watches the stars and sees "arcs of yellow, blue, and green that cut across the darkness" (Staples 64)?
3. What tragic event occurs in this chapter? Predict how this will impact Najmah's life.

## **Chapter 6**

1. Who does Nusrat help and why do these people come to her?
2. When Nusrat explains stars to the children, it is thought of as an "un-Islamic" idea by Taliban extremists. What are other extreme ideas the Taliban forced on the people of Afghanistan?
3. What occurs at the bazaar?

## **Chapter 7**

1. Who are Akhtar and Khalida? How do they help Najmah?
2. Explain why both Khalida and Najmah dress like boys for their journey across the mountains.

3. Explain why the roads are filled with women and children refugees.

### **Chapter 8**

1. This chapter is told as a flashback in Nusrat's life. Explain why Nusrat and Faiz made the decision to return to Peshawar, Pakistan.
2. What happened to Asma, Nusrat's sister-in-law, as she was waiting for her son to arrive home from school?

### **Chapter 9**

1. Who is Najmah constantly worried about?
2. As Najmah travels with Khalida and Akhtar, what do they encounter in each town?

### **Chapter 10**

1. This chapter is a flashback to when Nusrat meets her future husband. Give two examples of how his beliefs and lifestyle are different than hers.
2. What three things does Nusrat discover about spending time with Faiz?
3. Why is the Koran Faiz has in his apartment so special to him?

### **Chapter 11**

1. Where does Najmah end up in this chapter?
2. Najmah has taken the male name, Shaheed, to hide her identity as a girl. Despite that, what is her plan after reaching Torkhum?

## **Chapter 12**

1. How does Faiz explain to Nusrat the difference between the interpretation of the Koran between Muslims and Islamic fundamentalist fanatics?
2. Islamic names are “meaningful as ideals”. What does Nusrat’s name signify?
3. How does Nusrat attempt to get letters to her husband while in Afghanistan?
4. What exciting news does the malek (administrative assistant) bring about Kunduz?

## **Chapter 13**

1. Why has Najmah begun to resent Khalida?
2. Explain why Najmah believes the 12th night in the refugee camp is her chance to leave and travel back to Peshawar.
3. Why are the roads unsafe to travel at night?
4. Describe the event at the end of the chapter that puts Najmah in peril.

## **Chapter 14**

1. Describe Najmah’s escape from the fruit truck.
2. Describe the bazaar.
3. Najmah now finds herself in a dangerous place, alone and without friends or family. What does she do to survive?

## **Chapter 15**

1. What happens to the two young boys Nusrat has been teaching?
2. What does Nusrat name her school?

## **Chapter 16**

1. Najmah sees firsthand how life in the cities differs from living in the mountains. Give two examples of how women face extreme risks living under Taliban rule.
2. How does Najmah end up at Nusrat's refugee school?
3. Describe the refugee camp through the eyes of Najmah.

## **Chapter 17**

1. Nusrat's kindness makes Najmah feel safe. How does Nusrat figure out Najmah is pretending to be a boy?
2. What does Najmah tell Nusrat about her name?
3. Make a prediction about these two characters' relationship.

## **Chapter 18**

1. Why is it difficult for Najmah to trust Nusrat?
2. What does Nusrat offer to Najmah? Why would Najmah be suspicious?
3. What is the name Najmah decides to call Nusrat? What does this name mean?

## **Chapter 19**

1. How does Najmah reveal her trust in Nusrat?
2. What does Najmah tell Nusrat about her uncle?
3. What stranger arrives at the gate and why does Najmah fear him?

## **Chapter 20**

1. Stars and symbolic of two different meanings for each of these characters. What does the starry sky mean to Nusrat in this chapter?
2. How does Najmah explain her fear in seeing the meteor in the evening sky?
3. What is the deeper meaning to Najmah's words "it's the most constant star, and I'm never lost knowing it's there" (Staples 226)?

## **Chapter 21**

1. Why are the people of Pakistan feeling optimistic?
2. What has Nusrat finally come to terms with?
3. What decision does Nusrat make about her future? Why does she decide this?
4. What is Najmah's response to Nusrat's offer to live in America with her? Explain.

## **Chapter 22**

1. Why is Najmah scared to stay in Pakistan with Nusrat?

2. Who arrives at Nusrat's school?

### **Chapter 23**

1. In your own words, retell what happened to Nur.

2. Where does Nusrat take the children to hide them from their uncle and the Taliban?

3. How does Sultan, Nusrat's brother-in-law, help Najmah and Nur?

4. Do you feel this ending is realistic? Explain why or why not.

**\* Reading Check packet due day of Under the Persimmon Tree test!**