

I AM Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced – Review Questions

Discussion Questions

1. Honor is obviously very important to the men of Nujood's family. What does the notion of honor mean in rural Yemeni culture, and how does it differ from Western ideas of honor? When Nujood, Shada, and their allies go to court to seek a divorce for Nujood, what conception of honor are they defending?
2. Nujood mentions a tribal proverb that says "To guarantee a happy marriage, marry a nine-year-old girl." How does this traditional view of a "happy marriage" differ from the Western view? Are there any ways in which they might be similar?
3. Nujood says that when her family was driven from Khardji, they lost "a small corner of paradise." How do the injustices endured by Nujood's father and brother, Fares, show that life in a patriarchal society can be hard not just for women, but for male Yemenis, too? Consider how the actions of Omma, Mona, Nujood's mother-in-law, Dowla, and Shada reflect differences in their life experiences, personalities, backgrounds, and relationships with Nujood. For example:
4. What do you think Omma was thinking when Nujood told her about the abuse? Can you understand her lack of action?
5. Conversely, why was Dowla willing and able to give Nujood the help and advice that no one else was willing to provide?
6. Were you surprised when one of Nujood's primary oppressors turned out to be a woman? Nujood's mother-in-law is a strong personality who treats the young girl harshly and fails to come to her defense on her wedding night. How does this play, paradoxically, into the idea of Yemen as a highly patriarchal society? Do you see any similarity, for example, between the mother-in-law's behavior and the fact that in some African societies, it is the women who enforce the practice of female circumcision?
7. How do you interpret the behavior of Mona, not only in her attempts to protect Nujood, but in her difficult relationship with her older sister, Jamila?
8. What enables Shada to take up Nujood's cause so quickly and effectively? How does Shada, whom Nujood calls her "second mother," open up Nujood's world? Who else teaches Nujood about what a "real" family can be like?
9. The urban elites Nujood encounters in the courtroom and at the *Yemen Times* lead very different lives from those of Nujood and the country people of Yemen. How are these "enlightened" people actually disconnected from the rest of their society? For example, Nujood tells us several times that child marriage is common in Yemen, so why did the judges seem so shocked by Nujood's tender age? Do you think they were unaware of their society's problem with early marriage, or were they simply blind to the real-life consequences for girls like Nujood? Was there something special about Nujood that prompted the judges to help her, or was she simply the first girl who had come to them asking for a divorce?
10. Shada and Nujood chose the less "elitist" option for Nujood's schooling. Do you think Nujood made the right decision—to stay in Yemen for her education? Do you think she will become a lawyer and help other girls like herself, as she says she hopes to do? Closer to home, Nujood talks about her protective feelings

toward her sisters Mona and Haïfa, and even toward her big brother Fares. Do you think Nujood will be able to protect her siblings? What might stand in her way?

11. How has the international publicity surrounding the divorce affected Nujood's family and community? Has it enlightened her relatives and neighbors? Or do you think it may have caused dissension within the family and alienated them from their own society?

12. Khat plays a small but sinister role in Nujood's story. Khat is illegal in the United States, but some people in immigrant communities compare it to coffee and support its important traditional role in social situations. U.S. authorities counter that it is more like cocaine than coffee. After reading this book, what effect do you think khat has on its users and on Yemen in general? Do you feel that it contributed to Nujood's father's problems? If so, how? How do you think its use and effects might compare to social drugs in the United States? And most important, what does it tell us about any society that devotes so much of its valuable resources to tuning out from itself, so to speak?