

SUSAN FLETCHER

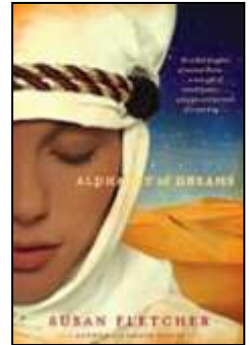
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR LITERATURE CIRCLES, BOOK CLUBS, OR WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Alphabet of Dreams

by Susan Fletcher

- 1) Find the place where the title appears within the book. Reflect on the title and share what it means within the context of the book. (Ch. 52)
- 2) People are always saying you should *follow your dreams*, but does it matter *which* dreams you follow? In other words, are some dreams more worthy than others? What do a person's dreams reveal about him/her? And what is this book saying about dreams – dreams in the sense of longing and aspirations?
- 3) With Koosha, the issue of Mitra's "being seen" comes up. What does it mean to be *seen* by another person? Are there times when we feel that people aren't really seeing us – that they're seeing what they want to see, instead of who we really are? Why do they do that? (Why do *we* do that to other people?) Or, in the case of women who are aging, why are they becoming invisible?
- 4) There are some *images of light* in the book. At the beginning, Mitra craves light; she can't bear to go into the caves without it. But in the cave near the end, she no longer craves light, and when she closes her eyes, her memories and her dream are full of images of light. What do you make of this? Does this feel like religious imagery to you, or do you think it's a softer metaphor? If the latter, a metaphor for what?
- 5) *Caves* are always showing up in Susan Fletcher's books. There are three cave-like places in this book: the caves at the beginning, the qanat, and the cave near the end. How do the caves function, in terms of Mitra's development? What does it do for her to spend time in these dark, quiet places? Can you trace her development by touching base at the scenes in the cave-like places?
- 6) The three Magi are also following their dreams on this journey. At one point Mitra reflects that Melchior is pursuing power; Gaspar, knowledge; Balthazar, matters of the spirit or heart. Some have reflected that people over the centuries have approached their religions for a variety of reasons – and power, knowledge and matters of the spirit are perhaps the top three. Do you agree with this? Can you think of other reasons? Can you think of historical or personal examples of people approaching their religions for power, for knowledge, and for matters of the spirit or heart?



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- 7) How does Mitra change over the course of the novel? What about her dream, her dream of uniting again with her noble family? “There was heart in it,” she thinks near the end, “but twisted by bitterness.” How did it have heart? How was it twisted by bitterness? What, specifically, are some of the things/characters/events that bring about her change? (You might think about the function of the animals here, for example, or how her sexual awakening plays into it.)
- 8) Did Mitra trust Zoya too much? Why do you think she did or didn’t? Zoya claims that she’s done Mitra a favor and Mitra doesn’t even know it. Is this true? Has she done Mitra a favor? Is Zoya a villain, a hero, or....what?
- 9) There’s been some discussion lately about the prevalence of girls dressed as boys in children’s literature. Why do you think this happens? Is it a negative trend? Positive? Has it been overdone? Is it believable that girls at various times in history might have dressed as boys?
- 10) One blogger opined that Mitra should have been a boy. What would that have done to the story? Would the story have worked as well that way?

Social Studies Group Response Activity ~

Compare the map at the front of the book to a modern map of the Middle East today.