



High School Teacher's Guide

Reading Lolita in Tehran

A Memoir in Books
by Azar Nafisi

- ▶ Winner of the 2004 Non-fiction Book of the Year Award from Book Sense
- ▶ Winner of the Frederic W. Ness Book Award
- ▶ Winner of the 2004 Latifeh Yarsheter Book Award
- ▶ Finalist for the 2004 PEN/Martha Albrand Award for Memoir
- ▶ A New York Times Bestseller

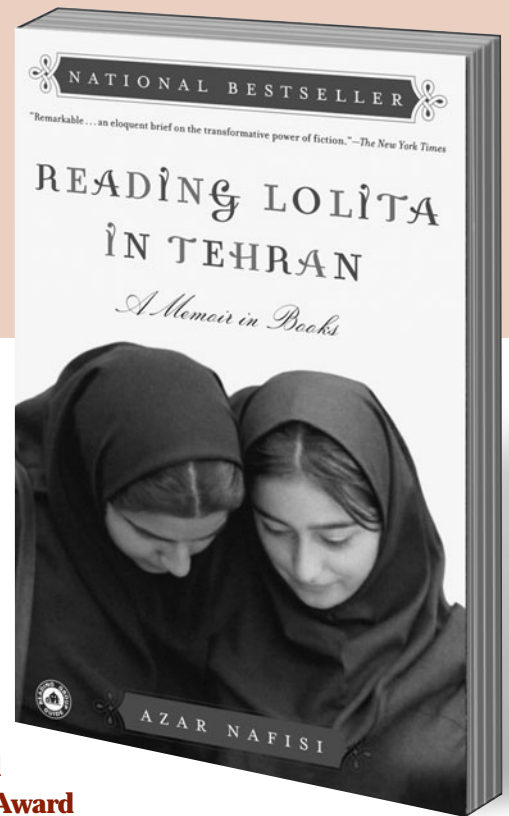
“This book transcends categorization of memoir, literary criticism or social history, though it is superb in all three.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Note to Teachers

Reading Lolita in Tehran chronicles the life of Azar Nafisi, a Professor of English, during her years in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The book offers great challenges to young readers, and promises to enlighten them in a myriad of ways. Nafisi's experience in Iran will provide opportunities to discuss several key themes in class, such as: personal freedom, social obligations, tyranny and democracy, love and commitment, ethics and moral courage. Although few younger students will find themselves in as extreme a situation as those living in revolutionary Iran, many of their experiences can be explored through empathetic reflection.

Nafisi's book is rich and flexible enough to be read at any number of levels, thus making it appropriate to high school, freshman, and upper-class college study. Moreover, because of its focus on personal narrative, literary analysis, and historical context, it has an interdisciplinary quality that will enhance any teaching focus one may apply. Since it is a “memoir in books”, one obvious way to teach it is to make explicit connections to the books Nafisi features; e.g.



Random House | Trade Paperback
0-8129-7106-X | 384 pages | \$13.95/\$21.00
Reading Level: 10

The Great Gatsby or *Pride and Prejudice* can be assigned along with the corresponding section of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Class discussion can then focus on: a. Nafisi's interpretation of the novel(s), b. her students' responses (often very critical or enthusiastic), c. the book's many reflections on the function and value of literary study. In addition, the book's engaging personal voice and perspective will make these important but distant historical events closer and more intelligible to most students, thereby providing opportunities to discuss world politics, religion, and human rights, as well as research and writing projects.

In what follows, various subheadings are employed to introduce teachers to the text, to offer a handy source of historical information, and to provide study questions and essay topics. The writing assignments ask the students to focus attention on specific issues that can be effectively handled in a limited number of pages, as well as in a range of forms including expository, personal, research, and literary analytical.

Mohammed Reza Shah succeeded his father to the throne in 1941 and ruled Iran until his overthrow in 1979. Although many acknowledge him for his efforts to industrialize and modernize the nation, his rule was both dictatorial and oppressive, thus fomenting opposition from a wide spectrum of the religious and secular populations. Chief among his critics was the powerful Shia scholar, Ayatollah Khomeini. Although the Shah exiled Khomeini in 1964, the Ayatollah still maintained a powerful core of disciples dedicated to the deposition of the Shah. Increasing political unrest throughout 1978 reached its zenith by the end of the year and the Shah fled the country on January 16, 1979. Later that year, the Shah entered the US seeking treatment for cancer (he died two years later in Cairo, Egypt). Because the US would not extradite the Shah to Iran for trial, the US became a target of revolutionary ire, resulting in the taking of hostages at the US Embassy by a motley group of students. The hostage crisis finally came to an end after 444 days.

Meanwhile, the Ayatollah Khomeini had returned to Iran after his long exile spent in Turkey, Iraq, and France. On April 1, 1979, Iranian voters cast their ballots in a national referendum establishing an Islamic Republic. However, this did not make for a stable and fluid political transition. Throughout the year, rival political groups, ranging from conservative Islamic to communist, struggled to create a new nation, to write a constitution, and to determine a foreign policy; indeed, the whole identity and set up of the nation was up for debate. The Islamic Republican Party's conservative agenda was most successful and strict policies and new laws were implemented. For women especially, the influence on their daily lives was immediate and intense. Although Reza Shah had "unveiled" Iranian women in 1936, they were forced again to adopt what the new regime defined as proper Islamic dress: either a chador or a long dark robe. *(For more on women's issues see the summary of section three).*

During this same period, Iran was besieged by its neighbor, Iraq. Throughout 1980, Iran and Iraq fought over a border which had been in dispute since the modern nation of Iraq was created at the close of World War I. This culminated in September 1980 with Iraq staging a full-scale military invasion of Iran, which ushered in eight years of armed conflict. Iraq thought it could take advantage of the political instability within Iran, and secure gains easily. However, Iranian resistance proved far greater than was expected; for their part, the new Iranian leaders used the war as a test for its own citizens' loyalty to the Islamic Republic. Anyone expressing dissent could be accused not only of counter-revolutionary activities, but treason. In this way, many were sent to fight in the front, jailed, or executed.

The effects of this war were widespread and deadly: not only was poison gas used against troops, but civilians were routinely targeted with missile and rocket attacks. The war caused the death and injury of more than a million people. Despite all this destruction and death, the war did not resolve the border dispute.

Since the late eighties, a reform movement has tried to change Iran's political, cultural, and religious environment. Indeed, since a majority of the population was born after the 1979 revolution, many young people in Iran are eager for such reforms. Leaders such as Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami have advocated for more tolerance in cultural and political affairs, have opposed censorship, and arbitrary government. Their efforts have frequently been thwarted by conservative leaders, most notably, the Council of Guardians, which has the power to disqualify candidates for office.

The very earliest paragraphs of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* not only establish the general context of the book, but also introduce its key terms and themes.

Azar Nafisi begins with a description of a dream she fulfilled in her final years of life in the Islamic Republic of Iran: to hold a private literature workshop with a select group of dedicated students. Over the course of this first section, Nafisi introduces us to the seven students in the group and recreates their discussions about two primary texts: Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Lolita*. In so doing, she makes both implicit and explicit connections between these novels and the lives of these women living in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and by extension, explores the links between literature and reality generally.

Nafisi characterizes her seven students one by one as they enter her home on their first workshop; for instance, Mahshid is distinguished as one who willingly wore the veil before the revolution, and who was jailed for five years because of her "affiliation with a dissident religious organization" (13), whereas Azin is described as sporting a kimono-style robe, and wearing large golden earrings and pink lipstick. The contrast between these two women demonstrates that a great deal of heterogeneity among Iranian women's dress, attitudes and beliefs yet prevails, despite the regime's attempts to define them only as Muslim women (28).

The discussions pertaining to Nabokov's two novels highlight their exploration of the relationship between the individual and tyranny: "What Nabokov captured was the texture of life in a totalitarian society, where you are

completely alone in an illusory world full of false promises and where you no longer differentiate between your savior and your executioner" (23). Since the Islamic Republic is just such a totalitarian regime, the students and Nafisi are insightful readers of Nabokov's book; they experience similar aspects of arbitrary rule and find relief in the reading of such experiences.

Although the new Islamic rules of behavior affected all Iranian citizens, Nafisi explains that after the revolution, women's position in society was significantly curtailed specifically due to the implementation of the so-called Islamic dress code; indeed, "the streets have been turned into a war zone, where young women who disobey rules are hurled into patrol cars, flogged, fined..." (27). Perhaps the most powerful illustration of this life under tyrannical rule is the unfortunate experience of Sanaz. Without any justification, she and a group of friends are arrested, subjected to "virginity tests", forced to sign "confessions" and sentenced to 25 lashes for vague accusations of vice (72-4). The sense of frustration, violation, and helplessness in the face of such abuses of power would be unbearable if it were not for the escape made possible in literature. This points to the book's major theme of the relationship between literature and reality. Although it is true that literature provides solace, escape, and joy it also inexorably leads back to reality: "Curiously, the novels we escaped into led us finally to question and prod our own realities about which we felt to helplessly speechless" (38-39). Thus, art not only serves to enhance life through the experience of beauty, it helps us to understand our own reality.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is the Blind Censor? How does Nafisi utilize this figure to help articulate what she and her girls hope to do in their weekly workshop? (24-25)
2. What is the meaning of "posh lust"? (23)
3. How do the students explain Nabokov's mysterious word "upsilamba"? Why was the concept so intriguing to them?
4. What are the three kinds of women in *1001 Nights*? How might women in Iran relate to their problem?
5. How did *Invitation to a Beheading* relate to life in Iran (23, 67)?
6. What happened to Sanaz when she went on a brief vacation with her friends?

Writing Assignments:

- 1. Expository:** In her explanation of the workshop, Nafisi writes not only about their literary discussions, but also about their lives in Iran. In an expository essay, show what their lives in the Islamic Republic of Iran were like. Refer to specific situations as Nafisi describes them.
- 2. Personal:** Nafisi narrates the incident of Sanaz' arrest and punishment although she and her friends are completely innocent. Was there ever a time when you felt yourself to be a victim of injustice? Tell the story and explain how you felt. What, if any, lasting changes have you experienced as a result of this injustice?
- 3. Literary:** Of *Lolita*, Nafisi writes: "Lolita belongs to a category of victims who have no defense and are never given a chance to articulate their own story. As such, she becomes a double victim: not only her life but also her life story is taken from her" (41). Write a literary analytical essay in which you explain this quotation.

Section II

In the second section, Nafisi goes back in time to recount her return to Iran in 1979 after many years of living abroad. She experiences an uncanny feeling of unfamiliarity while awaiting her luggage at the airport. Although happy to be home, the changes wrought by the revolution give her a sense of uneasiness. When going through customs, a young guard "picked up [my books] disdainfully, as if handling someone's dirty laundry" (82). Although she notes that the guard did not confiscate her books, Nafisi warns us that this would come later. Such an observation indicates that the revolution for which they had such high hopes, would result in a more closed off society.

In September 1979, Nafisi began teaching at the University of Tehran, a year which concurred with the critical events of the Islamic Revolution, including the rise of Khomeini, the American hostage crisis, and the forced veiling of women. Nafisi decries the summary trials and executions of religious, political and cultural leaders. During this time, many of her colleagues were purged from the university, and her own position was in jeopardy, especially with regard to the content of her courses and her public stand against the veil.

Although Nafisi's classes were routinely interrupted by major revolutionary events, she managed to lead the group through readings of important literary works, most notably F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. According to Nafisi, this novel, while seemingly apolitical, has an important revolutionary quality. Many of her students however, object to it as immoral and decadent because its characters are adulterous. One might argue that the high point of this section is the "trial of Gatsby" which Nafisi organizes and her students stage. The trial discussions not only express a valuable reading of the novel itself, but also demonstrate what kinds of lines of inquiry or interpretation are appropriate in literary analysis.

In her closing remarks on the novel, Nafisi seeks to channel her students away from a narrow condemnation of the characters' immorality, and instead to have them focus on the theme of the dream. Although one might say that Gatsby's theme of the dream is quintessentially American, Nafisi eventually demonstrates the link between his dream (and its destruction) and the destruction of the revolutionary dream of many Iranians.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Nafisi feel so exhilarated and yet uneasy at the airport? (81-82)
2. Describe Nafisi's experiences abroad. How do they relate to her life in Iran? How do they contrast? (82-86; 113-15)
3. According to the author, what should the "best fiction do"? What do you think? (94)
4. In Iran during this time, show trials and executions were routinely aired on television; how did Nafisi feel when she saw the arrest of the general who had been responsible for the framing and imprisonment of her own father? (101)
5. What happened at the US embassy in Tehran in November 1979? Why was it called "the nest of spies"? (104-06)
6. During the trial of *The Great Gatsby* what are Mr. Nyazi's arguments against the novel? (124-28)
7. How does Zarrin answer Mr. Nyazi? How does she defend the novel? (128-35)
8. How did Nafisi ultimately feel about the outcome of the trial? (136)
9. The author shows that the regime placed writers in a position of high esteem. Why was this a problem? (136)
10. Nafisi states that "I did not tell them what I myself was just beginning to discover: how similar our own fate was becoming to Gatsby's" (144). Please explain this quotation.

Writing Assignments:

1. **Expository:** What is Mr. Nyazi's objection to *The Great Gatsby*? Do you believe these are valid and useful ways to respond to literature? In contrast, what does Nafisi say about the function of literature?
2. **Personal:** Nafisi begins with an explanation of a return to her home where she felt strange. In an essay please describe Nafisi's experience and then relate it to an experience that you have had. Have you ever felt out of place at home? Why?
3. **Research:** Throughout this section, Nafisi alludes to major political developments. In a research paper, please explain the revolutionary events in Iran between the Shah's leaving (January 1979) and the beginning of the Iraq war (Summer 1980). Use Nafisi as one of your sources.
3. **Literary:** Of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* Nafisi writes: "It is about loss, about the perishability of dreams once they are transformed into hard reality. It is the longing, its immateriality, that makes the dream pure" (144). Write an essay in which you explain and support this statement.

In the third section of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi narrates the events of the years 1980-1988, which included not only ongoing revolutionary activities but also the war with Iraq. On the personal front, in 1980, Nafisi was expelled from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear the veil; she subsequently pursued an independent writing career, bore two children, and, after a long hiatus from teaching, she took a full-time job at Allameh Tabatabai University where she resumed the teaching of fiction.

The coming of the war directly upon the heels of the revolution impacted life in Iran thoroughly. The new regime used the war as a weapon against anyone expressing dissenting political views; anyone critiquing the government was labeled a traitor. In addition to traditional military battles, the civilian populations of Tehran and Baghdad were subjected to a brutal campaign of missile and rocket attacks. In much of this section of the book, Nafisi describes their experiences of blackouts, sirens, air raids and deaths as well as the psychological impact and coping mechanisms of living under such pressures; e.g. after missile attacks there would be a regular round of phone calls amongst family and friends confirming everyone's safety. Nafisi and her husband struggled to decide the safest location in the apartment for their children to sleep, and moved them several times. For entertainment and diversion, many people watched movie videos procured on the black market or from banned satellite dishes. The anxiety and threat of constant attacks were frequently compounded by the pro-war propaganda of the regime. For instance, Nafisi specifically describes the revolutionary motorcycle squads who would circle missile attack sites, sometimes barring help to the victims, so that they could chant victory slogans.

Nafisi's return to teaching was both a compromise and a thrill for her. In leaving her position at the University of Tehran, she had taken a moral stand against the regime's mandatory policy of veiling. However, many saw this as a moot point since the imposition of the veil affected all women in all walks of life: in short, Nafisi would soon be wearing a chador or robe anywhere in public anyway. In a meeting with her student, Mr. Bahri, he asked her why she

wanted to jeopardize the revolution for a "piece of cloth" (164). Nafisi protests the regime's confiscation of the veil as a symbol for its fight against "Western Cultural Imperialism" by refusing to wear it in her official capacity as a professor, despite the fact that she must wear it as a private citizen. It is for this reason that her return to teaching is so fraught with difficulties for her. Although some advise her to teach because the spreading of ideas is a useful form of resistance to the oppressive policies of the regime, she struggles with the fear that she is compromising her moral position, and being a hypocrite.

Nevertheless, after much soul searching, Nafisi agrees to accept the position at Allameh Tabatabai University where she teaches Henry James among her other novelists. This section resembles others of the book in that Nafisi introduces us to a few key students and recreates for us some of their responses to two main texts. In this case, we have the return of some of the same students, such as Nassrin and Mahshid, as well as some new ones, such as the virulent and uninformed Mr. Ghomi. Two texts take center stage this time: Henry James's *Washington Square* and *Daisy Miller*, novels which challenge her students very much. The character of Daisy Miller in particular became an obsession with the students; she is both an example of courage and misbehavior, and, like *Gatsby*, some readers see her as immoral and believe that she actually deserves the death she suffers in the end.

Although James's prose is difficult, Nafisi shows that his world, or "counter-reality," was a powerful antidote to the ugliness of the world that he saw in both the American Civil War and World War I. Nafisi shows that the students, citizens of Iran, could thoroughly understand and appreciate his dramatization of lack of empathy because that is what they experienced everyday at the hands of those currently in power. According to Nafisi, James illustrates the way in which compassion is central to the novel as a genre and lack of it defines the villain. Moreover, like the protagonists of James's novels, the people of Iran can strive to achieve an "aura of victory" by maintaining "self respect," even though this may not also include "happiness" (225).

The end of the war unfortunately does not bring relief to the people of Iran. For those not in the war it was a kind of anticlimax. Although the ceasing of missile attacks was certainly good, there was a prevalent feeling of “disillusion and disenchantment” (239) since Iran lay in ruins, and the nation suffered from rampant unemployment. For many of those young men who truly believed in the war, it was even worse. This fact is illustrated in the final chapter of the section. Nafisi narrates a

typical day in class. As she is making her final comments on the theme of courage in James’s work, a student in another class immolates himself. Although he was a veteran of the front, little was known about him. Nafisi wonders whether he was privately mourned since there was never any official commemoration or memorial. He represents the average young man who had gained a sense of “purpose and power” with the war, but who “lost all that as soon as he returned from the front” (252).

Discussion Questions:

1. What happens during Nafisi’s discussion about the veil with her student, Mr. Bahri? (164-65)
2. Describe the missile attacks and bombings that the residents of Tehran experience.
3. How does Nafisi use the term “irrelevant” to describe herself? (169)
4. Who is Mrs. Rezvan? What does she encourage Nafisi to do?
5. What are the students’ responses to *Daisy Miller*? Do you agree with them? If not, what do you make of the novel? (194-98)
6. What happens when the female students were mocking one of the male students who had died in the war? What does Nassrin say? What does Nafisi say? (210-12)
7. What is the relevance of the narration of Henry James’s biography in chapter 23? How especially does the quotation about “counter-reality” gloss James’s art? (216)
8. According to Nafisi, in what way is Catherine Sloper an unusual heroine? (223)

Writing Assignments:

1. **Expository:** In this section, Nafisi explains why she resisted wearing the veil in 1980, and how she accepted dismissal from her job at the University of Tehran because of it. Later, however, she returned to teaching at Allameh Tabatabai University, and consented to wear the veil in class after all. Explain the initial dilemma and the steps she took in deciding to go back.
2. **Personal:** Have you ever gone through an experience where you had to stand up for your convictions and take the punishment? Have you ever had to compromise your principles? Write an essay that tells the story of your ethical decision, and why you had to change your mind.
3. **Research:** In this section Nafisi refers to the Iran-Iraq war. Write a research paper in which you identify the events leading up to the war, its key characteristics, and results. Use Nafisi as one of your sources in order to show how the average citizen coped with the war.
4. **Literary:** According to some of Nafisi’s students, *Daisy Miller* is an immoral character and by extension, the novel is immoral. Write an essay in which you either agree or disagree with this assessment.
5. **Literary:** Nafisi points out that in Washington Square, Catherine Sloper is an unconventional heroine. Write a character analysis of Catherine which shows how she is unconventional. Explain if you think that Catherine does, as Nafisi suggests, reach a kind of victory at the end of the novel.
6. **Literary:** Write an essay in which you show how both *Daisy* and *Catherine* show distinct kinds of courage.

In the final section of the book, Nafisi returns to the description of the literature workshops with which the memoir began. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is the primary novel that acts as a touchstone throughout the section. The reading of *Pride and Prejudice* offers interesting insights into the nature of love and communication, as Nafisi and her students cope with the challenges peculiar to women living under the regime's oppressive interpretation of Islamic tradition. The author thoroughly develops this theme in this section, although it has an important presence throughout the memoir, in repeated stories of vice squads' arbitrary powers, the sexual molestations that pass for security searches, and the arguments about the veil itself. It seems that the regime is intent on controlling all aspects of their sexuality. In one provocative statement, Nafisi observes that: "Living in the Islamic Republic is like having sex with a man you loathe" (329).

Of course, one key issue is the veil. In section three Nafisi had referred to her grandmother's wearing of the veil as a special pious act which defined her personal relationship with God and which was not political in nature. In the fourth section, she elaborates on this theme by discussing Mahshid's relationship to the veil: she willingly wore it before the revolution, and yet after it becomes mandatory for all women, it is oppressive to her. Although this may seem confusing if not downright contradictory, the reason is clear: in making it mandatory for all, the special significance of it in her life as a choice has been nullified. No one in looking at her could tell if it were her desire to veil or if it were simply thrust upon her. This results in self-doubt, depression, and self-loathing.

Because mandatory veiling (either in the form of a robe or a chador) is so important, it has tended to overshadow the debate about other issues that are equally important to women; for example, marriage, divorce, and child custody laws, and access to education and health care. Indeed, some have argued that keeping the veil in the forefront of women's issues has been an effective way to detract attention away from other issues of grave importance to women.

Nafisi gives a brief history of marriage laws in Iran to make the irony of women's position in

Iran clear. The main point is that they are living in a time warp, where four generations of women have had wildly different experiences. In the early twentieth century the age of marriage had been raised to 18; women were being elected to parliament, and women enjoyed rights comparable to those of women in Western democracies. However, after the revolution, the family protection law was repealed, thus negating many of the rights of women both at home and work. The age of marriage was lowered to nine, the punishment for adultery and prostitution was stoning, and women were considered to have half the worth of men (261). Whereas Nafisi and her mother enjoyed a relative degree of freedom, her young daughter's position in society has regressed. In fact, it is more akin to that of her own great-grandmother.

Throughout this section, the author presents many other problems commonly faced by women. She demonstrates the difficulties of open courtship through the experiences of Sanaz and Yassi (263, 269-70, 278-80, 283-88) and they all voice their frustration that then-President Rafsanjani, hailed by many as a liberal reformer, had advocated the ridiculous rule of "temporary marriage" (259). The narration of the plight of Azin exposes the discriminatory divorce and child custody laws (272, 286). Nafisi even touches on the ambiguous psychological effects of Iran's oppressive laws by describing Nassrin's fundamental alienation from her own body (295-96).

Multiple personal anecdotes illustrate Nafisi's own frustration with the situation in Iran; for example, she notes that menopause is little discussed or understood among many women and their husbands (302). In another scene she is in a café with her friend known as "the magician" when the Vice Squad arrives for a raid. Since they are not related, it is illegal for them to be together like so, however, Nafisi initially refuses to part from her friend since they are not doing anything wrong. It is the constant pressure of this level of control by the government that she and the women of the group find unbearable.

Despite the current deplorable situation, there is still hope for reform and improvement. Nafisi notes that although the younger gener-

ation did not have the chance to benefit from the earlier establishment of women's rights, the knowledge that such rights existed in the not-too distant past, inspires them to work for more in the future. It is precisely for this reason that the question of leaving Iran for the West is so tantalizing, and yet vexing for these women. Not only Nafisi, but nearly all the girls in the group, struggle with the question of whether to flee the country to attain greater personal freedoms, or stay and fight for change at home.

In this section Nafisi does not make as many explicit connections between the literary text (*Pride and Prejudice*) and their lives as she did in previous sections; for instance, in section two she made a very explicit connection between

Gatsby's dead dream and those of the Iranians. Nevertheless, in several passages here (265; 266-69; 304-07; 315) she devotes her attentions to a thorough reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, highlighting how Austen incorporated a multiplicity of voices which coexist within the texture of the novel, and which need not cancel any other voices out. This stylistic technique is mirrored in the novel's plot, in which characters "risk ostracism and poverty to gain love and companionship and to embrace that elusive goal at the heart of democracy: the right to choose" (307). Naturally, there is an implicit connection between this and Iranian women's struggle to regain the right to choose how to live their lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. Explain in what way "four generations of women—my grandmother, my mother, myself and my daughter—lived in the present but also in the past" (262).
2. How does Nafisi use dancing as a way to describe and understand the novel *Pride and Prejudice*? (264-69)
3. According to Nafisi, what is the relationship between the personal and political? (273)
4. How does the magician challenge her when she complains to him? (277-82)
5. What is the "Ordeal of Freedom" of which Nassrin speaks? (323)
6. Before the revolution, Mahshid voluntarily wore the chador; explain her feelings about mandatory veiling. (326-28)

Writing Assignments:

1. **Expository:** In this section, Nafisi and her husband finally decide to leave Iran and immigrate to the United States. Explain their feelings about this and the steps leading up to the decision.
2. **Personal:** Write about a time when you did not have the power to change a situation and the only option was to remove yourself from it.
3. **Research:** Nafisi writes that women in Iran once enjoyed rights comparable to those of women in the West. Write an essay in which you explain the status of women in Iran: begin with the reforms of the early-twentieth century and describe the legal status of women after the revolution. Use Nafisi as one of your sources.
4. **Literary:** After her discussion with the magician, Nafisi admits that: "Fiction was not a panacea, but it did offer us a critical way of appraising and grasping the world—not just our world but that other world that had become the object of our desires" (282). Explain this quotation by directly utilizing texts of your own choosing.

Epilogue

In the memoir's brief epilogue, Nafisi tells us that she left Iran on June 24, 1997 and now lives and teaches in the US. She concisely describes the efforts of some of the younger generation to reform and liberalize the political

system in Iran and she provides a few parting sentences about each of the women from the literature workshop, many of whom have since immigrated to the West.

Glossary

Ayatollah Khomeini: Charismatic leader of the revolution and holder of the office of Faqih until his death in 1989.

Chador: Islamic dress for women characterized by a tight black head covering and a long flowing cape; along with robes, the chador is a common form of public attire for women in the Islamic Republic.

Council of Guardians: Twelve-member council which ensures that legislation of the Majles (Iranian parliament) conforms to the principles of Islam and the constitution. Also approves candidates for elected office; in recent years it has rejected many potential candidates from running for office.

Faqih: Official governmental position translated as Supreme Spiritual Leader; although he is not supposed to interfere with the daily business of government, his role is always to ensure its adherence to the principles of the Islamic revolution.

Great Satan: Disparaging name applied to the United States by Khomeini and his followers.

Imam: A clerical position in Islam; Khomeini was sometimes referred to as "the Imam".

Islam: Religion based on the revelation of the prophet Mohammed.

Islamic Republic of Iran: Official name adopted by the nation after the revolution of 1979.

Mohammed Reza Shah: The monarch of Iran who ruled from 1941 until he fled the revolution in January 1979.

Muslim: Adherent to the religion of Islam.

Persia: Ancient name for the nation of Iran. The word is of Latin derivation and has been used in recent years by those who wish to distance themselves from the current Islamic regime.

Saddam Hussein: Former Iraqi President who invaded Iran in 1980, touching off the eight year Iran-Iraq war.

Tehran: The capital of Iran.

Veil: A general word used to refer to Islamic dress for women; it can range from a simple headscarf to a chador.

About the Author

Azar Nafisi is a professor at Johns Hopkins University. She won a fellowship from Oxford and taught English literature at the University of Tehran, the Free Islamic University and Allameh Tabatabai University in Iran. She was expelled from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear the veil and



left Iran for America in 1997. She has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New Republic*, and is the author of *Anti-Tera: A Critical Study of Vladimir Nabokov's Novels*. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and two children.

About this Guide's Writer

Filiz Turhan is Assistant Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College. She is the author of *The Other Empire: British Romantic*

Writings about the Ottoman Empire (Routledge) and articles on the Romantic period and contemporary Muslim and Middle Eastern literature.