

# THE PARTITION PROJECT

By Saadia Faruqi



## INTRODUCTION:

When her grandmother comes off the airplane in Houston from Pakistan, Mahnoor knows that having Dadi move in is going to disrupt everything about her life. She doesn't have time to be Dadi's unofficial babysitter—her journalism teacher has announced that their big assignment will be to film a documentary, which feels more like storytelling than what Maha would call "journalism." As Dadi starts to settle into life in Houston and Maha scrambles for a subject for her documentary, the two of them start talking. About Dadi's childhood in northern India—and about the Partition that forced her to leave her home and relocate to the newly created Pakistan. As details of Dadi's life are revealed, Dadi's personal story feels a lot more like the breaking news that Maha loves so much. And before she knows it, she has the subject of her documentary.

## ABOUT THE GUIDE:

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text including examining key ideas & details, craft & structure, and integration of knowledge & ideas. This teaching guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 4-8 as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently. The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and National Core Art Standards Anchors that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of the text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10

Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout The Partition Project:

1. When we first met Dadi in Chapter 2, what was Maha's first impression? What was Dadi's first impression of Maha? Revisit at the end of the book: How did their perceptions of each other change by the end of the book?
2. Ammi and Abba both act nervous around Dadi. Why do you think this is? How is their need to impress and placate similar to how a child is around their parents?
3. On page 17, Ammi states, "I'm sure that's not the only change that's coming around here." Do you think one person can cause a large change in an environment/family?
4. Kim and Maha found connection through words. What connects you with your friends?
5. At the beginning of the book, Kim and Maha disagree about the best type of books to read. Why do they each like the genre that they do? Revisit at the end of the book: How was Maha wrong about fiction? Do the two friends still disagree about books? Explain.
6. On page 25, Maha is complaining about Dadi but Kim points out a different way of thinking about the situation. How did the change in perspective make Maha think differently? What does this show you about perspective?
7. Why does it bother Maha so much when people say she is from Pakistan or that she isn't American? How does this microaggression erase Maha's experiences?
8. Maha's 7th grade history class is all about Texas history. Why do you think that certain states choose to focus a certain grade level specifically on their state's history? Do you think this is beneficial or hurtful to students' history education?
9. On page 68, Mrs. Escobar asks each student to write a short essay answering: Why do we learn history? What would you include in your essay?
10. On page 100, Maha points out that we learn about the Holocaust in schools but not about the Partition even though they are very similar and affected a large group of people. Why do you think that American schools teach about one but not the other?
11. On page 105, Mr. Goode points out that history shapes people. What does he mean by this?
12. When Dadi is telling her stories, Maha often mentions that she looks "unemotional" like on page 117. Why do you think this is?
13. On page 122, Maha shares that she won't read a certain book because of the author. This is one example of authors who are problematic; however, their books continue to be read. What is your opinion on this? Should an author's works still be read and enjoyed if the author has done or said something hurtful or hateful?
14. Ms. Singh began the 1947 Archives because over time, the people who lived through the Partition will no longer be with us. Why is it important to get firsthand accounts of historical events? The archives in the story are inspired by a real archive: <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/> which you should check out.
15. On page 181, we learn about Dadi's family leaving their home to begin their migration to Pakistan as refugees. Why did her family decide to leave when they did?
16. From pages 219-223, Mrs. Escobar's class plays Agree or Disagree: History edition. Where do you stand on each of the statements? Which of the characters do you agree or disagree with and why?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONT'D:

17. On page 236, when Maha shares her idea for a documentary, she is met with a bit of resistance because some people at the senior center believe that white Americans would not care about the Partition. Why would they think this?
18. As it is revealed to Dadi that Maha has been recording their conversations and planned on using them for a documentary, Dadi feels betrayed and hurt. Are her feelings valid? What should Maha have done differently? Extension: Maha compares herself to a poisonous insect. Why do you think she made that comparison? Do you think it is valid?
19. How does Abba's and Ammi's tendency to be workaholics affect Maha?
20. Maha truly does not like Tiffany at all. What makes Tiffany so taxing for Maha? Would you consider Tiffany a bully? Why or why not? What do you think Tiffany's perspective would be?
21. On page 310, Dadi shares that the refugee camp seemed worse to her than the train ride, even though they had arrived safely in Pakistan. Why is that?
22. When Kim and Maha fight, they both think they are in the right. What are your feelings on their fight? What could both sides have done differently?
23. Maha points out to Kim that she is struggling with the English project for many reasons but one is that the exclusion of any eastern mythology in the book they are reading. How does this lack of inclusion cause erasure? How does this make Maha feel?
24. On page 321, Maha talks about identity. Why was Maha, and potentially Kim, so opposed to Pakistani-American (or Korean-American) and instead insisted they were just American? What does the lack of hyphenation mean? How did Maha's point of view change about this?
25. In chapter 33, Maha is able to see comparisons between the history of Mexico/Texas and the Partition, pointing out that both have boundaries that were made by politics but no one asked the "regular folks" what they wanted. What other times in history can be compared to this?
26. Why was *Inside Out and Back Again* the perfect book for Maha to do her English project on?
27. Maha is able to finish her documentary because her whole community, including members from the senior center, Ahmad, Dadi, and Talha, join together to help her. At the beginning of the book, Maha didn't have this community—how did it come to build around her?
28. How does the senior center represent almost a utopia?
29. Maha, at first (chapter 5), is very judgmental about different types of media and feels that the news is the only true journalism. How does this change throughout the book? How do you think that Maha at the end of the book would define media?
30. There are debates over how to define history and when something is historical versus contemporary. What do you think the distinction between the two is? Is the partition history since Dadi and others are still alive that lived it? If so, when does history end and modern begin?
31. Why do you think the author chose to use a script structure for the parts of the book where Maha is speaking to Dadi about her childhood and history?
32. Using the Note from the Author and the descriptions of author's purpose on page 118-119 describe the author's purpose of this book.

## CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS:

Use these activities to extend your students' thinking and experience with The Partition Project:

### 1. Character Development:

The main characters in The Partition Project all evolved throughout the book. Complete this character analysis table sharing:

CHARACTER	FIRST IMPRESSIONS	EVENTS THAT CHANGED THE CHARACTER	FINAL IMPRESSIONS
Maha			
Dadi			
Ahmad			
Abba			
Ammi			

### 2. Documentary:

- Ms. Singh shared (page 193) that she chooses her topics by asking the following questions: Will it help others understand something better? Will it remove misconceptions?
- Have your students brainstorm topics/history that they believe should be understood better and have misconceptions surrounding them.
- Have each student pick a topic/history to focus on, give them time to research and gather sources, then have them complete a documentary (or a presentation for a less intensive project) on the topic sharing what they believe others need to understand about the topic/history and the misconceptions.

### 3. Research:

Have your students do independent or group research about the Partition, and present their findings to the class.

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school librarian in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog [Unleashing Readers](#); Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) 2024 President and a member of the 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors; a jury member then co-chair of the 2020-2021 Schneider Family Award Jury; a member then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012-2014; and a member of NCTE, ALAN, AASL, and ALA. Kellee can be reached at [Kellee.Moye@gmail.com](mailto:Kellee.Moye@gmail.com).