

A Thousand Splendid Suns: Part One
Chapters 1-15 Discussion Questions

Please answer these questions in your notebook. Present a group copy for a group grade.

1. The novel opens with a curse word, uttered in frustration by Mariam's mother, when Mariam breaks a treasured heirloom. What does Mariam's memory of this suggest about her sense of herself and her relationship with her mother? How does this open the tone for the novel?
2. Based on Nana's and Mariam's experiences, what can you infer about the lives of women in Afghanistan in the sixties? Why does Nana forbid Mariam to go to school? What does Nana want for herself and for Mariam? Is Nana's goal realistic?
3. Jalil, Mariam's father, is a complex character. Does he love his daughter? How does he show his love? How does he show that he does not fully recognize her as his daughter? Why does he treat her as he does?
4. Why does Mariam ask her father to take her to the cinema for her fifteenth birthday present? What does she want?
5. Is Mariam right to feel guilt about the suicide of her mother?
6. What is the motive of Jalil's wives in finding a suitor for Mariam? Why does Jalil go along with them in this plan?
7. Why does Mariam finally say "yes" in the marriage ceremony to Rasheed? What does Mariam realize about her father? How does this make her feel? Does this explain why she goes along with the marriage to Rasheed?
8. The beginning of Mariam's marriage to Rasheed seems to promise happiness. What are the signs that this may be short lived?
9. How does Rasheed feel about the westernization of Afghanistan? What shows his ambivalence?
10. What are the reasons for making Mariam wear a burqa and what do they tell us about his ideas about his role as a husband and his expectations for Mariam?
11. Mariam learns some of her husband's history when she looks inside the drawers in his room. Why does she rationalize about what she sees?
12. Why does Rasheed want a boy? How might life have been different for the family if Mariam could have had a baby?
13. Why does Rasheed become abusive?