

National Endowment for the Arts

TEACHER'S GUIDE



NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S

**The Thief
and the Dogs**

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS



**THE BIG
READ**

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S

The Thief and the Dogs

TEACHER'S GUIDE



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

A great nation
deserves great art.



The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development.

Arts Midwest connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years.

Additional support for The Big Read has also been provided by the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation**.

Published by

National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20506-0001
(202) 682-5400
www.nea.gov

Sources

Al-Ghitani, Gamal. *The Mahfouz Dialogs*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.
El-Enany, Rasheed. *Naguib Mahfouz: His Life and Times*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.
Kennedy, X. J. and Dana Gioia, eds. *An Introduction to Fiction*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.
Mahfouz, Naguib. *Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber: Reflections of a Nobel Laureate, 1994–2001*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001.
Mahfouz, Naguib. *The Thief and the Dogs*. 1961. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.
Salmawy, Mohamed. *The Last Station: Naguib Mahfouz Looking Back*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.
El Shabrawy, Charlotte. "Naguib Mahfouz: The Art of Fiction, No. 129." *The Paris Review* 123 (Summer 1992), <http://www.parisreview.com/literature.php>.
"The Life and Work of Naguib Mahfouz, 1911–2006." New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006.
Eye Witness Travel: Egypt. New York: DK Publishing, 2007.

Acknowledgments

David Kipen, NEA Director of Literature, National Reading Initiatives
Sarah Bainter Cunningham, PhD, NEA Director of Arts Education
Writer: Molly Thomas-Hicks for the National Endowment for the Arts, with a preface by Dana Gioia
Series Editor: Molly Thomas-Hicks for the National Endowment for the Arts
Graphic Design: Fletcher Design/Washington DC

Image Credits

Cover Portrait: John Sherffius for The Big Read. Page iv: Book cover courtesy of Random House, image by Three Lions/Hulton Archive/Getty Images. Page 1: Caricature of Dana Gioia by John Sherffius. Inside back cover: Courtesy of The American University in Cairo Press.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Suggested Teaching Schedule.....	2
Lesson One: Biography	4
Lesson Two: Culture and History	5
Lesson Three: Narrative and Point of View.....	6
Lesson Four: Characters.....	7
Lesson Five: Figurative Language.....	8
Lesson Six: Symbols	9
Lesson Seven: Character Development	10
Lesson Eight: The Plot Unfolds.....	11
Lesson Nine: Themes of the Novel	12
Lesson Ten: What Makes a Book Great?.....	13
Essay Topics	14
Capstone Projects.....	15
Handout One: The Stream of Consciousness Technique	16
Handout Two: The Sheikh As a Moral Voice in the Novel.....	17
Handout Three: The Literary Legacy of Naguib Mahfouz.....	18
Teaching Resources	19
NCTE Standards	20



“Leaving his hideout made him all the more conscious of being hunted. He now knew how mice and foxes feel, slipping away on the run. Alone in the dark, he could see the city’s lights glimmering in the distance, lying in wait for him.”

—NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

from *The Thief and the Dogs*





Introduction

Welcome to The Big Read, a major initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American culture. The Big Read hopes to unite communities through great literature, as well as inspire students to become life-long readers.

This Big Read Teacher's Guide contains ten lessons to lead you through Naguib Mahfouz's classic Egyptian novel, *The Thief and the Dogs*. Each lesson has four sections: a thematic focus, discussion activities, writing exercises, and homework assignments. In addition, we have provided suggested essay topics and capstone projects, as well as handouts with more background information about the novel, the historical period, and the author. All lessons dovetail with the state language arts standards required in the fiction genre.

The Big Read teaching materials also include a CD. Packed with interviews, commentaries, and excerpts from the novel, The Big Read CD presents first-hand accounts of why Mahfouz's novel remains so compelling four decades after its initial publication. Celebrated writers, scholars, and actors have volunteered their time to make The Big Read CDs exciting additions to the classroom.

Finally, The Big Read Reader's Guide deepens your exploration with interviews, booklists, time lines, and historical information. We hope this guide and syllabus allow you to have fun with your students while introducing them to the work of a great Egyptian author.

From the NEA, we wish you an exciting and productive school year.

Dana Gioia
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

Suggested Teaching Schedule

1

Day One

FOCUS: Biography

Activities: Listen to The Big Read CD. Discuss the life of Naguib Mahfouz and his work. Begin keeping a Reader's Journal. Write a short essay on how studying Mahfouz's life might be important while reading *The Thief and the Dogs*.

Homework: Read "Introduction to the Novel" from the Reader's Guide (p. 3), the novel's Introduction (pp. 5–9), and Chapters One and Two (pp. 13–33).*

2

Day Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Activities: Discuss the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Read the beginning of the novel aloud in class and consider the ways the political turmoil in his country might have affected Mahfouz's writing. Write a three-paragraph essay examining the way freedom is portrayed in the novel's opening paragraphs.

Homework: Read Handout One and Chapters Three, Four, and Five (pp. 34–62).

* Page numbers refer to the 2008 Anchor Books edition of *The Thief and the Dogs*.

3

Day Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

Activities: Discuss Mahfouz's use of both third-person narration and first-person interior monologue. Have students write a journal entry discussing the narrative technique they prefer.

Homework: Read Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine (pp. 63–88).

4

Day Four

FOCUS: Characters

Activities: Discuss the major characters, examining the ways each affects Said. Write a journal entry considering whether Said Mahran is heroic.

Homework: Read Chapters Ten, Eleven, and Twelve (pp. 89–116).

5

Day Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Activities: Discuss the ways Mahfouz uses imagery, metaphor, and simile. Have students write a short analysis of the way simile and metaphor are used in the novel.

Homework: Read Chapters Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen (pp. 117–135).

6

Day Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Activities: Read and discuss “An Interview with Naguib Mahfouz” from the Reader’s Guide (pp. 10–11). Discuss the ways Nur can be seen as a symbol of Egypt. Examine Said’s declaration, “Whoever kills me will be killing the millions...” and the ways it creates a symbolic link between his character and the average Egyptian citizen. Write a short essay on a symbol in the novel.

Homework: Finish reading the novel. Have students list the novel’s three major turning points in their Reader’s Journal.

7

Day Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Activities: Create a timeline for the novel. Write a character summary of Nur. Discuss the sheikh’s claim in Chapter Seventeen that Said could still save himself.

Homework: Have students note instances in their Reader’s Journals where Mahfouz uses symbols, action, imagery, and dialogue to foreshadow the novel’s conclusion.

8

Day Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

Activities: Examine symbols, actions, imagery, and dialogue that foreshadow the novel’s end. Read and discuss Handout Two. Examine each of Said’s visits to the sheikh. Write a different ending to the novel.

Homework: Write a paragraph about the novel’s most compelling theme.

9

Day Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Activities: Discuss the way *The Thief and the Dogs* examines freedom, morality, and justice. Ask students to identify other themes of the novel.

Homework: Begin essays. Outlines are due the next class period.

10

Day Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Book Great?

Activities: Read Handout Three. Discuss how Mahfouz viewed literary excellence and the goals of a writer. Write a letter encouraging a friend to read *The Thief and the Dogs*.

Homework: Students will finish their essays.

1

Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

Examining an author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to understand the novel more fully.

Naguib Mahfouz was born in Cairo, Egypt, on December 11, 1911. Gamaliya, the neighborhood where he spent his early childhood, was a crowded, bustling place. For Mahfouz, it was a microcosm of Egyptian society, a place where the dramas of ordinary people played out in streets and alleyways. In March and April of 1919, young Mahfouz witnessed the uprising of Egyptian citizens against British colonial rule. Demonstrations and rallies disrupted daily life. These events had a profound effect on Mahfouz, and their influence on his fiction is unmistakable.

After college Mahfouz entered the Egyptian civil service, and he held various government posts until his retirement. For many years, Mahfouz made little money from the publication of his fiction. He supplemented his government income by screenwriting. Many Egyptians are more familiar with Mahfouz's TV and film work than his novels and short stories. Mahfouz's cinematic experience influences the timing and pacing in many of his novels, including *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961).

Discussion Activities

Listen to The Big Read CD. Students should keep a reader's journal while they are studying *The Thief and the Dogs*. Ask them to take notes in their journals as they listen to the CD.

Distribute photocopies of the Reader's Guide essays "Naguib Mahfouz 1911–2006" (pp. 6–7) and "Mahfouz and His Other Works" (pp. 12–13). Divide the class into two groups and assign each an essay. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what it has learned.

Writing Exercise

Using their reader's journal, have students list the three most important points they learned about Naguib Mahfouz from the essays and CD. Ask them to write two or three paragraphs examining how the things they learned might influence Mahfouz's work and why the information could be important to understanding *The Thief and the Dogs*.

Homework

Distribute photocopies of the Reader's Guide essay "Introduction to the Novel" (p. 3). Have students read the essay, the novel's Introduction (pp. 5–9, written by its translator, Trevor Le Gassick), and Chapters One and Two (pp. 13–33). Ask students to consider what the sheikh is trying to communicate to Said and the role the sheikh might play as the story unfolds.

Lesson Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the center of the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating intricate details of the time and place help readers understand the motivations of the characters.

Though fascinated by the pyramids, pharaohs, and riches of ancient Egyptian civilization, many of us know little of modern Egyptian culture or history. The country was part of the British Empire when Naguib Mahfouz was born in 1911. The British government purchased Egypt's share of the Suez Canal in 1875 hoping to secure control of this strategic passage for shipping between the United Kingdom and India. This led to outright British occupation by 1882.

The uprising that young Mahfouz witnessed in 1919 was a result of a nationalist movement against British rule. In 1922, the British agreed to Egypt's immediate independence but insisted troops remain in the country to protect imperial interests. Anti-British sentiment ran high. Many Egyptian citizens viewed their king as merely a British puppet. In 1952, a group of officers including Gamal Abdel Nasser seized power in a bloodless coup that became known as the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, or what many Egyptians call the Second Revolution.

Discussion Activities

Read and discuss the Reader's Guide essay "The Egyptian Revolution of 1952" (pp. 8–9) in class. *The Thief and the Dogs* was published in 1961, less than a decade after the Revolution of 1952, and in many ways is Mahfouz's examination of its successes and failures. The story begins with Said Mahran's release from prison. Read the first three paragraphs of the novel aloud in class. Ask students to consider how the political turmoil of his country might have influenced how Mahfouz opens the novel.

Writing Exercise

In their journals, ask your students to write three paragraphs considering why Mahfouz chose to begin the novel with Said's first hours of freedom. How is freedom described? What, if any, parallels can be drawn between Said's experience and the 1952 revolution?

Homework

Photocopy and distribute Handout One: The Stream of Consciousness Technique. Have students read the handout and Chapters Three, Four, and Five (pp. 34–62). Ask students to pay close attention to the way Mahfouz uses interior monologue to allow the reader access to Said's private thoughts. If they become confused while reading, ask them to mark those places to discuss during the next class period.

Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using “I.” A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third-person (he, she, and they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters’ thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

The Thief and the Dogs is told from third-person point of view by a narrator who does not participate in the novel’s action. Like most of Mahfouz’s work, the novel is realistic fiction that attempts to faithfully reproduce the appearance of ordinary people in everyday situations. However, Mahfouz sometimes chooses to give the reader access to Said Mahran’s private thoughts through interior monologue, an extended presentation of thoughts and ideas that read as if Said is speaking aloud. These thoughts are written in the first person from Said’s point of view. Interior monologue is one of the most common literary devices used in the stream of consciousness technique.

Discussion Activities

Mahfouz switches between traditional third-person narration and first-person interior monologue from Said’s point of view. In the English version of *The Thief and the Dogs*, the translator signifies the change by putting Said’s thoughts in italics. Still, many readers might have trouble making the transition between the two forms of narration. Encourage your students to share examples of specific places in the novel’s first five chapters where they had difficulty following the narrative. If necessary, read the sections aloud to help students become accustomed to the way Mahfouz transitions between the narrative voices.

Writing Exercise

Ask your students to examine the differences between the two narrative forms. In their journal, ask them to write three paragraphs considering which narrative technique they prefer to read. Which allows them to feel closer to the action of the story? To Said? To the other characters?

Homework

Read Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine (pp. 63–88). Ask students to identify the main characters of the story. How do they influence Said’s actions?

4

Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The central character in a work of literature is called the protagonist. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw, such as weakness or ignorance, to achieve a new understanding by the work's end. A protagonist who acts with great honor or courage may be called a hero. An antihero is a protagonist lacking these qualities. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, the antihero may be cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The protagonist's journey is enriched by encounters with characters who hold differing beliefs. One such character type, a foil, has traits that contrast with the protagonist's and highlight important features of the main character's personality. The most important foil, the antagonist, opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

The first chapter sets up the friction between Said Mahran, the novel's protagonist, and his ex-wife Nabawiyya's new husband, Ilish Sidra. Said believes Ilish and Nabawiyya betrayed him to the police. Later, he seeks refuge with the sheikh but cannot follow the cleric's spiritual advice. When Rauf Ilwan refuses to give Said a job at the newspaper, Said loses his only hope for legitimate employment. He returns to his old friend's villa intending to rob it but is caught in the act. Only the café owner, Tarzan, and his patrons seem genuinely pleased by Said's release. Nur, a prostitute who frequents the café, loves Said and hopes his liberation will offer them both the chance at a better life. In various ways, each of the characters serves as a foil to Said—either by attempting to lead him away from trouble, by aiding his illegal activities, or by refusing to help him adjust to life outside the prison walls.

Discussion Activities

Photocopy and distribute the essay "Major Characters in the Novel" from the Reader's Guide (pp. 4–5). Divide the class into six groups. Assign each group a character (Nabawiyya, Ilish, Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi, Rauf, Nur, or Tarzan) and ask them to examine the novel's first nine chapters, looking for ways in which their character influences Said's behavior. Is the character a positive or a negative influence? Have each group present its findings to the class.

Writing Exercise

In his interview with the *Paris Review* Mahfouz stated, "A hero today would for me be one who adheres to a certain set of principles and stands by them in the face of opposition. He fights corruption, is not an opportunist, and has a strong moral foundation." Ask your students to write a short essay considering whether or not Said Mahran is a heroic character according to Mahfouz's definition.

Homework

Read Chapters Ten, Eleven, and Twelve (pp. 89–116).

5

Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste)—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

Some figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. Simile is a comparison of two things that initially seem quite different but are shown to have significant resemblance. Similes employ connective words, usually “like,” “as,” “than,” or a verb such as “resembles.” A metaphor is a statement that one thing is something else that, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association that underscores an important similarity between these two things.

Discussion Activities

Mahfouz often uses imagery combined with metaphor and simile to evoke a certain mood or to foreshadow the novel’s events. Examine the first paragraph of Chapter Ten:

What a lot of graves there are, laid out as far as the eye can see. Their headstones are like hands raised in surrender, though they are beyond being threatened by anything. A city of silence and truth, where success and failure, murderer and victim, come together, where thieves and policemen lie side by side in peace for the first and last time. (p. 89)

Ask your students to consider how the simile “headstones are like hands” and the metaphor of a cemetery being “a city of silence and truth” aids our understanding of the novel and its setting. What specific mood does the paragraph create? How might this foreshadow the novel’s subsequent events?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to find another example where Mahfouz uses simile or metaphor to describe setting or evoke a mood. Have them cite the example and write a short analysis of it in their journals.

Homework

Read Chapters Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen (pp. 117–135). Have students pay close attention to the paragraph in Chapter Fifteen that begins, “Whoever kills me will be killing the millions” (p. 133).

6

Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are persons, places, or things in a narrative that have significance beyond a literal understanding. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols to present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to refer to (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal, or figurative, meaning attached to the object. Symbols are often found in the book's title, at the beginning and end of the story, within a profound action, or in the name or personality of a character. The life of a novel is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and reinterpreting the main symbols. By identifying and understanding symbols, readers can reveal new interpretations of the novel.

Sometimes writers create symbols deliberately. At other times, they are unaware of the associations they are creating. In this lesson, examine instances when Mahfouz intentionally uses symbolism and an instance where the association between a character and a larger concept was purely subconscious.

Discussion Activities

Photocopy and distribute “An Interview with Naguib Mahfouz” from the Reader’s Guide (pp. 10–11). Read the interview aloud in class. Ask students to pay close attention to what Mahfouz says about his female heroines. Keeping in mind the politics of the time period in which the novel is set, discuss how Nur’s character can be read as a symbol of Egypt. Are your students surprised to discover that Mahfouz did not consciously create this association?

Read the following passage from Chapter Fifteen aloud in class:

Whoever kills me will be killing the millions. I am the hope and the dream, the redemption of cowards; I am good principles, consolation, the tears that recall the weeper to humility (p. 133).

Here, Said declares himself to be a symbolic representation of the Egyptian people. Ask your students to identify principles Said might share with the average law-abiding citizen. How might Said’s frustrations reflect those of the era? In what ways would Said fail to represent the average person?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a short essay in their journal exploring the symbolic value of one of the following: dogs, the cemetery, or books. Ask them to cite at least three references from the text where the object they chose acts as a symbol.

Homework

Finish reading the novel. Have students identify three major turning points and note them in their journals.

Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters who encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist may undergo profound change. A close study of character development maps, in each character, the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next and the protagonist's eventual success or failure.

Said Mahran is motivated not just by a need for revenge, but also by his own skewed internal code of conduct. He repeatedly seeks Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi's spiritual counsel but is ultimately only able to follow his own moral voice, the one telling him he must try to right all the wrongs that have been perpetrated upon him, even if he loses his life in the process.

Discussion Activities

Ask your students to create a timeline of the novel's turning points on a blackboard or on large sheets of paper. They will also use this timeline for the next lesson.

Use the timeline to examine Said's mental deterioration. What clues does Mahfouz provide that Said is becoming increasingly unstable? Ask students to give us specific examples of symbols, actions, images, or dialogue that foreshadow the novel's end. How does this foreshadowing affect the level of suspense?

Writing Exercise

Though Nur is not living a "moral" life by most societal standards, she is portrayed as a good woman whose love for Said is genuine. Ask your students to write a three-paragraph character summary of Nur citing specific examples from the book. Does Nur's character develop and change during the course of the story? What do they believe happened to her at the novel's end?

Homework

Ask students to reflect on the ways Mahfouz constructed the plot to reach its dramatic conclusion. In their journals, have them note one instance each where a symbol, an action, imagery, and dialogue foreshadow the novel's conclusion.

8

Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

Some of the major turning points in the novel include Sana's rejection of Said, Rauf Ilwan's unwillingness to help Said find a job, the accidental murder of the man at Ilish Sidra's old apartment, and the death of Rauf's doorkeeper. Each of these events causes Said's mental state to unravel a bit further. Near the novel's end, he is "ravenously gnawing on leftover bones like a dog" while he waits for Nur's return.

Said turns to the sheikh for the last time, asking, "Would it be in your power, with all the grace with which you're endowed, to save me, then?" The sheikh replies, "You can save yourself, if you wish."

Discussion Activities

Read aloud in class Handout Two: The Sheikh as a Moral Voice in the Novel. Using the timeline as a reference, examine each of Said's visits to the sheikh. How often do they coincide with the shifts in the novel's action? What specific advice does the sheikh give Said on each of these occasions? How does Said respond?

Ask your students if they agree with the sheikh's claim in Chapter Seventeen that Said could still save himself. At this point in the novel, what options are still available to Said? Why is he unwilling to change, even when facing certain death?

Writing Exercise

In their journals, ask students to write a different ending to the novel.

Homework

Have students come to the next class with the three major themes of the novel. Ask them to choose the theme they find most compelling and write a paragraph explaining why.

Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the book in specific ways. Using historical references to support ideas, explore the statements *The Thief and the Dogs* makes about the following themes and other themes your students identify during their reading of the book:

Freedom

Examine what freedom means to Said. How do politics, economics, and the social limitations of his world affect him? What does freedom mean to the novel's secondary characters such as Nur, the sheikh, or Rauf Ilwan? Do they handle the restrictions placed upon them differently than Said? If so, how?

Morality

Though Said is a career criminal, he has a personal moral code. Examine his ethics. What does he value most, and why? Which characters do you believe are the most honorable? Which are the least honorable?

Justice

Said sees his quest for revenge as a way of obtaining justice. Examine the ways his anger at Nabawiyya, Ilish, Rauf, and society might be justified. How might he have pursued justice without resorting to violence?



Homework

Ask students to begin their essays using the essay topics in this guide. Encourage students to refer to the entries in their Reader's Journal to help them build an essay thesis. Outlines are due during the next class period.

FOCUS:
**What Makes
 a Book Great?**

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

 **Discussion Activities**

As a class, examine the following quotations by Mahfouz from *Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber: Reflections of a Nobel Laureate 1994–2001*:

There are no features that are the exclusive prerogative of good literature, beyond the comprehensiveness of the ideas in which it deals, and the depth and vision of the work.

Literary excellence is a standard that applies across national boundaries.

The ultimate goal of any writer is to satisfy both the elite and the average reader. Shakespeare's ideas may be profound, his characters of a complexity that must be studied, yet his plays are never wanting in humor and humanity. These traits make them accessible even to those who cannot understand the many references and allusions with which they are rife. Because of this uncanny ability to touch the cultured and the uneducated alike, Shakespeare's plays have universal appeal.

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Write these on the board. What elevates a book to greatness? Ask them to discuss, within groups, other books that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Thief and the Dogs*? Is this a great novel?

Read Handout Three: The Literary Legacy of Naguib Mahfouz. A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Mahfouz create in *The Thief and the Dogs*?

 **Writing Exercise**

Ask students to write a letter to a friend in their journals. The student should make an argument that explains why *The Thief and the Dogs* has meaning for all people, even those who have no interest in other times or other places. What can be learned from reading the literature of other cultures? Is *The Thief and the Dogs* just an Egyptian story, or can it also be considered universal?

 **Homework**

Students will finish their essays and turn them in at the next class.

Essay Topics

The discussion activities and writing exercises in this guide provide you with possible essay topics, as do the Discussion Questions in the Reader's Guide. Advanced students can come up with their own essay topics, as long as they are specific and compelling. Other ideas for essays are provided here.

For essays, students should organize their ideas around a thesis about the novel. This statement or thesis should be focused, with clear reasons supporting its conclusion. The thesis and supporting reasons should be backed by references to the text.

1. When Said is released from prison he goes directly to the home of Ilish Sidra. At the beginning of the novel is Said more motivated by revenge or by his love for his daughter? How does he react when he sees her? Why doesn't he insist on taking her with him when he leaves? How might Said's character have developed differently if Sana had not rejected him?
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Nur and Nabawiyya. Why does Nabawiyya betray Said? How can Nur's profession and her love for Said be reconciled? Which of the two women does Mahfouz portray more sympathetically? Why?
3. Are the teachings of the sheikh universal or do they represent only one particular religious viewpoint? Why is the sheikh cryptic when speaking to Said? Can Said recognize any wisdom in the sheikh's message? If so, why does he choose not to accept it?
4. Mentors can have an enormous impact on their students. Examine the influence of Rauf Ilwan on Said's youth. Why did Said admire him so much? Did Rauf ever feel the same about Said? What happened that made each man change?
5. Why does Tarzan welcome Said to the café and become an accomplice in his crimes? Is he a true friend to Said or simply enabling him to pursue a path of self-destruction? In what ways might Tarzan's actions portray the dissatisfaction the average citizen might have felt with life in post-revolutionary Egypt?
6. Said has neither education nor money. Which is more valuable in the world portrayed in the novel? Why? Which characters value education most? Which place more value on money? Support your answer with passages from the text.

Capstone Projects

Teachers may consider the ways in which these activities may be linked to other Big Read community events. Most of these projects could be shared at a local library, a student assembly, or a bookstore.

- 1. Photo Gallery:** Divide students into four groups. Assign each group one of the following topics:
 - Ancient Egypt
 - Egyptian countryside, including crops grown today
 - Modern Cairo
 - Twentieth-century political leadersAsk each group to find and print photographs relating to its assigned topic and write captions for each. Assemble the photographs into a gallery that can be shown at a school assembly or in conjunction with a Big Read event in your community.
- 2. Performance:** Work with your school's drama instructor to produce a reader's theatre or stage version of the novel. Students who do not feel comfortable acting can work on lighting, set creation, or costume design.
- 3. Artist's Gallery:** Ask students to draw or paint a scene from the novel or design a new jacket for the book. Display the artwork in your school's hallway or at a local Big Read event.
- 4. Read-a-thon:** Naguib Mahfouz was known to frequent cafés in Cairo. Ask a local coffee shop to sponsor a read-a-thon of *The Thief and the Dogs*. Team with a culinary arts program at a local high school or college to provide typical Arabic sweets for patrons to enjoy with their coffee.
- 5. Adaptation:** Divide the class into groups. Ask students to adapt their favorite scenes from the novel using your town or city as a setting. They should write all the dialogue and take the parts of all the characters. Ask each group to perform its scene for the entire class or at a student assembly. Afterward, discuss the shift in setting. How did it change the story? Do the types of characters in *The Thief and the Dogs* exist in our society? If so, what issues do our cultures share? If not, why are Americans different?
- 6. Cultural Appreciation:** Teaming with a world history, current affairs, or social studies class, plan a day to explore Egyptian culture. Play Egyptian music, show the subtitled movie of *The Thief and the Dogs* (1962), enjoy Egyptian food, and talk about recent news events that have special relevance to the Egyptian people.

The Stream of Consciousness Technique

An Introduction to Fiction defines stream of consciousness as “a kind of selective omniscience: the presentation of thoughts and sense impressions in a lifelike fashion—not in a sequence arranged by logic, but mingled randomly.” Psychologist William James first coined the term “stream of consciousness” in his book *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the way humans respond to daily life through thought and emotion.

One of the most important choices an author faces when choosing a point of view is the ability to manipulate the distance between the novel’s characters and the reader. Early writers of fiction had mostly limited themselves to presenting a character’s thoughts and feelings through action or dialogue with other characters. Stream of consciousness writing was first used in the late nineteenth century by writers hoping to break away from the formality of Victorian literature. The technique was a bold innovation that allowed readers to experience emotional, moral, and intellectual thought from inside a character’s head and opened up new possibilities for point of view beyond traditional first or third person narration.

Many of the first writers to use stream of consciousness were modernists such as James Joyce (1882–1941), Virginia Wolff (1882–1941), D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), and William Faulkner (1897–1962). In their realistic writing, they strived to portray characters, events, and settings in plausible, authentic ways.

Stream of consciousness writing allows an author to create the illusion that the reader is privy to sensations and uncensored thoughts within a character’s mind before the character has ordered them into any rational form or shape. These

thoughts are often portrayed through *direct interior monologue*, the presentation of a character’s thoughts as if he or she were speaking aloud. The narrator disappears, if only for a moment, and the character’s thoughts and emotions take over. Interior monologue lays bare the character’s private ideas and feelings. The way a character thinks—either scattered and disorganized or logical and orderly—provides clues to the character’s mental condition, intellect, and emotional stability.

Like modernist writers in Europe and America, Naguib Mahfouz combined realism and stream of consciousness narration to great effect. *The Thief and the Dogs* pioneered psychological realism in Arabic fiction. Access to Said Mahran’s internal experiences enhances the reader’s understanding of his external reality. In the novel’s first chapter Said thinks of his daughter Sana: “I wonder how much the little one even knows about her father? Nothing, I suppose. No more than this road does, these passersby or this molten air.” Yet, he is ultimately unprepared for the child’s refusal of his affection. Moments later he asks himself, “Doesn’t she know how much I love her?” Seeing Said’s nervous anticipation and his eventual reaction to Sana’s rejection gives the reader clues as to how Said might react to challenges later in the novel.

Through stream of consciousness writing and internal monologue, the reader views Said’s struggle to control his circumstances. As his burning desire for revenge carries him closer to self-destruction, his thoughts become less rational, his emotions increasingly volatile. He tells himself, “Think only about what you’ve got to do now, waiting here, filled with bitterness, in this murderous stifling darkness.” Alone and desperate, Said commits to a course of action that will bring either salvation or death.

The Sheikh As a Moral Voice in the Novel

In the opening scene of *The Thief and the Dogs*, Said Mahran walks out of prison after four years of waiting for the day he will confront the man and woman who betrayed him and ruined his life. Naguib Mahfouz based the character of Said on real-life villain Mahmoud Suleiman, a criminal whose attempt to kill his wife and her lawyer became popular newspaper fodder in Egypt and made him a notorious national celebrity.

Like his real-life counterpart, Said Mahran briefly wins the admiration of a public sympathetic to his fight against personal betrayal and political corruption. But Said's plans fall apart and result in deeper trouble than he'd ever imagined. As Mahfouz scholar Raymond Stock notes, "Said's impulses are selfish, not noble, and his self-absorption twice leads him to kill the wrong person while stalking those who wronged him."

Mahfouz portrays Said as a man desperate to find meaning in a world he feels is completely corrupt. Said believes the guilty prosper while the innocent fail. "A world without morals is like a universe without gravity," he laments. He seeks the company of his late father's spiritual advisor, Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi, a Sufi Muslim.

Sufism, a sect of Islam, combines mysticism and quietism in order to approach God (Allah) in a state of serene reflection. Many are familiar with Sufism through the poetry of Jalalud'din Rumi, a revered mystical poet born in 1207. Sufi principles consist of dedication to worship and to God, disregard for material possessions, and abstinence from vice, wealth, and worldly prestige. Sufis are known for the peaceful, meditative nature of their religion.

Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi's first words to Said are "peace and God's compassion be upon you," yet he recognizes that Said's concern is an immediate need for food and shelter, not dedication to God. "You seek a roof, not an answer," the Sheikh admonishes. "Take a copy of the Koran and read. . . . Also repeat the words: 'Love is acceptance, which means obeying His commands and refraining from what He has prohibited and contentment with what He decrees and ordains.'"

The cleric's soothing influence is repeated throughout the novel, but Said is unable to accept the sheikh's guidance. After accidentally killing a man at the door of Ilish Sidra's old apartment, Said visits al-Junaydi again. This time Said ignores the morning prayers of the sheikh's followers and falls asleep for many hours. When he wakes the cryptic sheikh observes, "You've had a long sleep, but you know no rest. . . . Your burning heart yearns for shade, yet continues forward under the fire of the sun."

Said cannot comprehend the sheikh's simple wisdom. After the pointless shootings outside Ilish's apartment and Rauf Ilwan's villa, the public sympathy Said once enjoyed erodes. His inability to accept the sheikh's offer of redemption through religion results in tragic consequences. "I am alone with my freedom," Said laments, "or rather I'm in the company of the Sheikh, who is lost in heaven, repeating words that cannot be understood by someone approaching hell."

The Literary Legacy of Naguib Mahfouz

In Egypt and throughout the Arab world, the novels of Naguib Mahfouz are more than modern classics—they provide the foundation on which much of contemporary Arabic fiction is built. Today’s Arabic novels are invariably compared to and contrasted with those of Mahfouz, who is widely regarded as the father of the modern Arab novel. When presenting him with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, the Swedish Academy observed, “In Arabic literature, the novel is actually a twentieth-century phenomenon, more or less contemporary with Mahfouz. And it was he who, in due course, was to bring it to maturity.”

Mahfouz’s impressive body of work—drama, non-fiction, novels, and short stories—continues to influence writers around the world, including many contemporary Egyptian authors. Alaa Al Aswany, whose novels *The Yacoubian Building* (2005) and *Chicago* (2008) have hit international best-seller lists since their translation, credits Mahfouz for having “opened doors for five generations of Arab novelists.” Ibrahim Aslan, author of *Nile Sparrows* (2004) and *The Heron* (2005), writes:

Mahfouz ... was able to create from Arabic, with all its phonetic characteristics, a language able to be the vehicle for modern literature, a modern storytelling form. And he forged the Arabic novel in a fashion that speaks to the Western understanding of the genre, a fact that has had a profound effect. The achievement is of barely imaginable magnitude.

Indeed, the translation of Mahfouz’s novels bridged a gap between Arabic literature and that of the European and American traditions. History and current events often served as inspiration for Mahfouz, infusing his novels with a distinctly Egyptian flavor. While Mahfouz’s novels are wrapped in Arab culture and have a specific national setting, they also address the human condition and implore readers to examine the sociology of the world around us. According to Raymond Stock, “[Mahfouz] left an incredibly rich and varied legacy. He gave the everyday flavors of life, but his great genius was that he could transcend the local and make it universal.”

On December 11, 1996, to celebrate Mahfouz’s eighty-fifth birthday and the publication of his *Echoes of an Autobiography*, the American University in Cairo Press established the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature to recognize an outstanding work of Arabic literature. Five years later, the AUC Press announced the Naguib Mahfouz Fund for Translations of Arabic Literature. By encouraging emerging Arab writers and supporting the translation of Arabic literature, the press continues to honor the memory of Egypt’s most recognized and beloved writer.

Teaching Resources

Books

Al-Ghitani, Gamal. *The Mahfouz Dialogs*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.

El-Enany, Rasheed. *Naguib Mahfouz: His Life and Times*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.

Salmawy, Mohamed. *The Last Station: Naguib Mahfouz Looking Back*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.

Serour, Aleya, ed. *Naguib Mahfouz: Life's Wisdom from the Works of the Nobel Laureate*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006.

"The Life and Work of Naguib Mahfouz, 1911–2006." New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006.

Eye Witness Travel: Egypt. New York: DK Publishing, 2001.

Web sites

www.aucpress.com

The American University in Cairo Press Web site contains a complete bibliography of Mahfouz's works (including those in English translation), information about the author, and biographies written about Mahfouz.

www.nobelprize.org

The Web site of the Nobel Prize includes biographical information, a bibliography, an interview, and a transcript of Mahfouz's Nobel lecture.

NCTE Standards

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards*

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

* This guide was developed with NCTE Standards and State Language Arts Standards in mind. Use these standards to guide and develop your application of the curriculum.



“There can be no doubt that a well-structured educational system could restore literature to its former status. The basis of any appreciation for literature is education and a concern for language. . . . With these in place, the written word would be well able to withstand the competition constituted by television.”

—NAGUIB MAHFOUZ
from *The Thief and the Dogs*

**“A world without morals is like
a universe without gravity. I
want nothing, long for nothing
more than to die a death that
has some meaning to it.”**

—NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

from The Thief and the Dogs

**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS**



The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

A great nation deserves great art.

