

**Discussion Guide for
Half a Cup of Sand and Sky by Nadine Bjursten**

1. The novel is set against the backdrop of the anti-shah protests in Tehran during 1977. How does the political turmoil in Iran influence the characters' lives and choices? In what ways does the author use historical events to shape the narrative?
2. Amineh is portrayed as a unique character who deviates from the typical aspirations of her peers during the protests. How does her focus on literature, rose harvests, and Rumi poetry set her apart? How does this perspective evolve throughout the story?
3. The chance encounter with Farzad, an opposition leader and nuclear disarmament activist, propels Amineh into a different life. How does this unexpected turn of events impact her character and the overall trajectory of the story?
4. Amineh's struggle for acceptance and love is central to the story. How does her perception of family and home evolve throughout the novel? In what ways does the book she is writing reflect her personal struggles?
5. The desert village of Qamsar, known for rose oil production, plays a significant role in Amineh's childhood. How does this setting shape her character, and what impact does it have on her life in Tehran and subsequent homes? Explore the symbolism of the rose in the story.
6. Discuss the influence of Iran's ever-changing politics on the characters. Were you familiar with Iran's political history before reading the book? What surprised you, and did you notice any parallels with the political history of other countries, such as the United States?
7. The book spans over two decades, and readers witness Amineh's growth, love, loss, and challenges. How does the author depict the passage of time, and how does it contribute to the character development of Amineh?
8. Amineh's journey involves themes of love, loss, and personal transformation. Which aspects of her story resonated with you the most, and how did her experiences shape your understanding of womanhood and resilience?

9. The novel received praise for its exploration of Iranian history. In what ways did the book enhance your knowledge and understanding of the political and cultural context in Iran during the specified period?
10. The narrative includes a time jump that fast-forwards to a couple of decades later. How did this narrative choice affect your connection with Amineh and the overall flow of the story? Did it enhance or detract from your reading experience?
11. The novel delves into the portrayal of Islam, with Jalalod-Din as a pious character. How does the book's depiction of Islam compare to mainstream portrayals in Western media? Were you surprised by the significance of mystic poets in Iranian culture?
12. Cooking holds great significance for Amineh, particularly the concept of letāfat, the tender touch. Consider the cultural aspects of preparing a meal and explore whether there are similar notions in Western culture. Share any meal scenes that resonated with you.
13. Reflect on your knowledge of nuclear arms control and disarmament activism before reading the book. Did anything surprise you, and how does Amineh's perspective on Farzad's activism change throughout the novel?
14. Amineh carries guilt over her parents' death. How does this guilt shape her worldview and actions? Consider how loss affects other characters in the novel and whether guilt plays a role in their experiences and transformations.
15. How did the author's background in nuclear arms control and disarmament diplomacy influence the portrayal of Farzad's character and the exploration of nuclear weapons warfare in the story?
16. The book delves into the cultural aspects of Iran, including references to Persian literature, poets, and culinary delights. How did these cultural elements enrich the storytelling and provide a deeper understanding of the characters and their experiences?
17. Were there any specific passages from the book that stood out to you? Share your favorite quotes and explain why they caught your attention.
18. Identify your favorite character and discuss the character you empathized with the most. How did they change by the end of the novel? Were there any characters you disliked, and why?

19. Compare Amineh's relationships with Farzad and Patrik. Do you believe Amineh and Farzad were well-suited for each other? Share your thoughts on Amineh's choices in her relationships.
20. How did you feel about the ending of the novel? Do you have any lingering questions or aspects of the story that you would like to discuss further?
21. Would you recommend this book to others? Provide reasons for your recommendation, including any caveats. Consider what kind of reader would most enjoy this book.
22. How did your personal experience with "Half a Cup of Sand and Sky" align or differ with a book club member? What elements of the story left a lasting impression on you?