

Task for *Mahtab's Story*

Chapter Questions

Chapter 1:

1. Describe what Mahtab's life in Afghanistan was like before the Taliban.
2. What things changed after the Taliban became more powerful?
3. After Mahtab's father is injured, the family develops a plan to leave Afghanistan. Outline the details of this plan.
4. Why does Mahtab want to go to Iran rather than Australia?

Chapter 2:

1. Why does Mahtab's family leave at night-time?
2. Which members of Mahtab's family stay in Afghanistan? Why do they stay?
3. Mahtab's father tells Mahtab and her siblings about a special signal he will use during their journey, knocking twice on the wall of the cabin. What is this signal for?
4. How long does Mahtab's father predict their journey to Pakistan across the mountains will take?
5. How do you think Mahtab was feeling during the truck journey? Provide two quotes as evidence to support your answer.
6. What is the author's intended effect, in using a sequence of short sentences on page 24?

Chapter 3:

1. Surprisingly, there are moments of humour between the characters during the truck journey. Why do you think the author used humour?
2. Throughout the journey, Mahtab's mother recounts folk tales to the children. Why do you think she does this? What is the effect of the stories on the children, and on the reader?
3. What aspects of her previous life does Mahtab think about during the truck journey?
4. What is the meaning of Mahtab's name?
5. Why do you think Mahtab's mother takes a jar of dirt from the roadside?

Chapter 4:

1. What language used in the opening to Chapter 4 suggests that Mahtab's family feels a sense of freedom and relief after arriving in Pakistan?
2. In your own words, describe what the place that Mahtab and her family are to stay in is like.
3. On page 44, the onward journey from Pakistan is described. Which other places will Mahtab's family need to travel through to reach Australia?
4. What makes Mahtab's father change his mind about insisting that the family travel together?

Chapter 5:

1. What new danger is explained to Mahtab's mother by Hairy Man at the beginning of Chapter 5?
2. Why do you think that Mahtab tells Soraya that their father has been in contact with Hairy Man?

Chapter 6:

1. Why does the man behind the counter at the airport shake his head? Why does Mahtab feel angry about this?
2. At the bottom of page 81, and on page 87, Mahtab thinks about a series of questions. What effect does this have on the reader? This technique is used in other parts of the story as well. Why do you think the author uses this technique?

Chapter 7:

1. Why do you think that Farhad seems notably happier at the beginning of Chapter 7?
2. Why do you think Mahtab chooses to use her bracelet to ensure Hamida and her children can travel on the boat?
3. Find two quotes that describe what the boat is like. Do you think it will be safe for Mahtab and her family to travel on the boat?

Chapter 8:

1. Describe the effect of the use of similes and metaphors to describe the storm, on pp. 107-109. Give at least two examples from these pages.
2. "*her burqa fallen to her shoulders, her loose hair streaming behind her*" (p. 114). What is the significance of Mahtab's mother's burqa falling? What does it suggest about how she is feeling at this time?

Chapter 9:

1. How are the officials at Darwin Harbour characterised? (pp. 118-119). Find at least three specific adjectives, verbs or adverbs used to describe them.
2. Chapter 9 ends with Mahtab's mother singing a lullaby that has appeared several times in the text. This is called a *motif*. What effect does this motif have on the reader?

Chapter 10:

1. The author presents a sense of hope in the way that Mahtab reflects on her memories, and the younger children find new friends and laugh and play together. Why do you think Libby Gleeson has included these elements in her narrative?
2. How does Mahtab react when her mother tells her what was said in the meeting? Why do you think she feels this way?

Chapter 11:

1. Why do you think the episode of the girl drinking shampoo is presented alongside Mahtab starting to pace along the fenceline?
2. How would you describe the language used when Mahtab's dreams are recounted on pp. 153-154? How does this affect the reader?

Chapter 12:

1. When she recovers from her illness, Mahtab starts writing a diary. How do you think this helps her to deal with the hardship of being in the detention centre?

Chapter 13:

1. Who is Moustafa and what does he tell Mahtab's mother?
2. Birds are a symbol used throughout the novel, including on page 175. Can you find any other mentions of birds? What do you think they might signify?

Chapter 14:

1. How is Mahtab feeling during the train journey? Explain why you think this.

Epilogue

1. The story begins and ends with accounts of kite flying. Why do you think the author chose to use this structure?