

Playing Atari with Saddam Hussein

Guide for Educators and Book Groups

- Prereading
- Vocabulary
- Setting
- Theme
- Technology
- More Activities
- Figurative Language
- Discussion Questions

Prereading

Before reading the book, answer the follow questions.

Topic Choices:

- Persian Gulf War
- Iraq - History, culture, modern life
- Kuwait
- President George H.W. Bush
- Saddam Hussein
- Chemical Ali
- Arabic
- Baghdad
- Mesopotamia
- Atari

What do I already know about this topic?

What questions do I have?

Where can I find out more about this topic?

Vocabulary

- Word
- Definition
- Part of speech
- Word or picture clue to help you remember

advance	deadline	oil
alliance	dictator	oil well
Arabic	ethnic	persecute
Arabs	invade	Persian Gulf
Ba'ath party	Iran	Republican Guard
Baghdad	Iraq	retreat
biological weapons	Israel	ruthless
brutal	Kurd	seize
bunker	Kurdish	Shiite
campaign	Kuwait	Smart bomb

casualty	Mesopotamia	strategy
chemical weapons	minority	Sunni
civilian	missile	surrender
coalition	Muslim	United Nations
conflict		

Characters

- Ali
- Shirzad
- Ahmed
- Shireen
- Mama
- Baba
- Mustafa
- Omar
- Umar
- Saddam Hussein
- Chemical Ali
- The Professor
- Two young girls
- Cousin Gilad

Technology

Cassette Gold - research, make an 80's playlist

@quizlet - for vocabulary review

Keynote for collaborative work on vocabulary

Telestory for summarizing

@ThinkCERCA for critical thinking, discussion, to differentiate the lessons, immediate feedback

@activelylearn for reading

@mywriteabout to post a response question that connects to the text

@wonderopolis and Discovery Ed to build background and support specific content

@EpicKidsBooks to send students books or collections of text

@Flipgrid

@Quill.org - immediate feedback.

@padlet to share books; (ex. A book-head-heart collaborative padlet with read aloud)

Goodreads for book reviews

Google Docs

Storybird for publishing

Nearpod - inferencing

360 cities - to teach students about imagery

Adobe Spark - to make thinking about text visible and creative

Video recorder on iPads to reread with a partner

(Thanks to Teacher2Teacher followers for help with this list!)

More Activities

Create a character web

‘Interview’ a character from the story

Write a short story from the point of view of a character

Create a Wanted poster for Saddam Hussein

Imagine Ali was born in the United States instead of Iraq. How would he be different?
The same?

Write an article as if you were a reporter on the scene. Include the 5 W’s.

Create a timeline of events during the war

Learn about the Epic of Gilgamesh

Research oil production to product. Investigate the importance of oil to the United States economy.

Make a visual map:

Iraq in 1991 vs. modern Iraq

Middle East

The town of Basra

The world's oil supplies by country

Biography:

Choose a person from the book and answer:

- Who is this person?
- When was this person born?
- Is this person alive? How old is he/she?
- Why is this person interesting?
- What mistakes did this person make?
- What positive things did this person do?
- What lessons can I learn from his/her life?

Research (or make!) Iraqi cuisine:

Mezza

Tabbouleh

Baba Ganoush

Hummus

Lentil soup

Kebabs

Masgouf

Kibba

Dolma
Flatbread, pita
Labneh
Mana
Kleicha cookie
Burech
Baklava
Chai - Iraqi chai is stronger and has cardamom
Meats + Fish

Iraqi holidays -

Ramadan
Eid al-Fitr

Discuss these quotes:

Saddam Hussein:

- We are ready to sacrifice our souls, our children and our families so as not to give up Iraq. We say this so no one will think that America is capable of breaking the will of the Iraqis with its weapons.
- Politics is when you say you are going to do one thing while intending to do another. Then you do neither what you said nor what you intended.
- I am not going to answer to this so-called court, out of respect for the truth and the will of the Iraqi people. I've said what I've said, and I'm not guilty.

George W. Bush:

- The United States of America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. The killers will fall, and the Iraqi people will live in freedom.

Interview a parent or grandparent or adult you know. Ask him or her what (s)he remembers about the First Gulf War.

Research the Atari games of Ali's era:

Defender

Asteroids

Ms. Pac-Man

Space Invaders

Pitfall Harry

Kaboom

Compare them to today's video games

Create a video game that Ali would like.

Figurative Language:

p.1 - I am champion of the universe - hyperbole

p.12 - Something I like our president is like Shireen - simile

p.25 - If war is hell, then football is heaven - metaphor

p.36 - BOOM! Kaboom! - onomatopoeia

p.45 - It's like watching a high school football game with weapons - simile

p.69 - Curse words that drop like bombs - simile

p.71 - The air smells like Baba's card games - simile

p.72 - I feel like Pitfall Harry - simile

p.72 - I am the war version of Pitfall Harry - metaphor

p.83 - Girls are a foreign species - metaphor

p.88 - Gilad's name means "Camel Hump". Shireen's means "sweet". What does Ali's name mean? Do you think the meanings fit their characters?

p.93 - A small piece of chocolate is heaven - metaphor

p.119 - This air is killing me - hyperbole

p.124 - The wall is your face, Saddam Hussein - metaphor

p.127 - What do Ali's comics symbolize?

p.146 - We sit in silence heavy with hope and fear - personification

p.154 - I am a statue - metaphor

Discussion Questions:

p.1-2 - What is the mood of the book at the very beginning? How does it change in the first few pages?

p.3 - What do the details of page 3 tell you about the setting?

p.4-6 - How does Ali feel about the leader of his country?

p.9 - Find an example of foreshadowing on p.9

p.9 - "Soon, America - the land that I love - is going to try to kill me. I'll try not to take it personally." Discuss this statement.

p.16 - Ali makes a list of his favorite foods in his head to distract himself from fear. How do you distract yourself from uncomfortable feelings?

p.17 - Contrast the mood of the song the family sings with the situation.

p.22 - Why include sensory details on page 22?

p.27-30 - What does the game of football (soccer) mean to Ali?

p.33 - How does the title of the book connect to the Voice of America report on the radio?

p.34 - What is different than yours about Ali's school day? What is the same?

p.39 - "You have to be patient in war," says Ali. Why? Is that how you would think living in war would be?

p.43 - Ali's prized possession is his collection of Superman comics. What is your prized possession? Do you collect anything?

p.47 - "They were acting tough and brave but really the brave people are the ones trying to stay safe and get through the day. These are my people."

p.52 - Why do you think Baba has an outburst at the table?

p.55 - Find an example of foreshadowing on p.55.

p.56-59 - Does the description of Ali's younger years surprise you? If so, why?

p.57 - "You'll see," I say. "I'll get there someday." Do you think a boy living under Saddam's rule has a chance to go to America? What about a boy living in Iraq now?

p. 60-4 - In Chapter 12, Ali and his brothers play games but also make something that Baba says is "not a toy". Football, hide and seek, tag and Monopoly... and a Molotov cocktail. Look up the word "incongruous". How does that word apply?

p. 62 - How do you think Shireen felt when Mama says "nice try", when the little girl tries to join her brothers?

p. 63 - Ethnic and religious differences cause problems within Ali's country. Is this unique to Iraq? Discuss how this is similar or not similar to the country (or world) today?

p.77-82 - The mood of the book intensifies as Ali heads for home. What emotions do you think Ali experiences during these events? As a reader, how do you feel going with Ali on his journey.

p.94-7 - Find evidence that Ali's father is still alive. Why is Ali feeling that Baba may be dead. Select sentences that show why Ali is concerned.

p.97 - One spin of the globe seems to connect Ali with America but... “In real life you don’t go from Iraq to America. The closest I’ll ever get to the United States is a finger on the globe.” Why is Ali so pessimistic?

p.98 - Ali’s father is away, and the dynamics of the household change. How is Ali feeling about these changes?

p.104 - Mama says, “I want you to know that not long ago, things were very different. Life was different. And I believe that it can be that way again.” How does this statement make you feel? What words does it bring to mind?

p.105 - Chapter twenty-one is a very different scene. How do the characters and setting contrast from the rest of the story? Why do you think this scene was put in?

p.116 - How does the geography of Iraq work against Ali’s family?

p.118 - Why do you think Ali has to do chores during a war?

p.119 - Find evidence of foreshadowing on p.120-2

p.126 - Ali hits an emotional low point on p.126-7. “A slice of light penetrates my dark thoughts.” Hope. Determination. Resilience. How do these qualities help Ali? Have you ever used these qualities in your life?

p.126-132 - Ali goes through many mood changes. How does it translate into action? Do you think it will work?

p.128 - Compare written Arabic to written English.

p.132 - Find evidence that Ali’s heritage helps him take action.

p.134 - What is propaganda? How does it differ from reality?

p.134-136 - Six weeks of air war plus one hundred hours of ground war. Then a temporary cease-fire. What is the mood in the house. How does it change on p.136? Why?

p.136 - How does Ali’s perspective change in regard to Shirzad.

p.138 - Are you surprised how Ali deals with his anger? What does English mean to him?

p.139-142 - Describe the changes in Ali’s mood and Ali’s perspective on his mother.

p.144-5 - What facts lead the soldiers to call Route 80 the Highway of Death?

p.150 - Find evidence of foreshadowing on p.150

p.150 - “Finally!” says Shireen. “It went on forever!” Why do Shirzad and Ali respond by laughing?

p.151 - What do you think the “new normal” will be?

p.153 - Is President HUssein the triumphant, fearless leader that the radio claims? Why does the Iraq media say he is?

p.153 - “What was it all for?” Ali wonders. “Even the Americans couldn’t get rid of Saddam.” What do you think of the end of the war? Does it feel like there was a resolution?

p.154 - Ali wants to play Atari, like he was doing when the war begins. How would you feel about having no electricity?

p.154 - The end of the war does not bring jst happiness to Ali. What other feelings does he experience?

p.156 - What does the Iraqi proverb “You will discover your true friends in moments of crisis” mean to Ali in that moment.

p.156 - Ali tells Shireen, “There’s no war now. And if another one comes, we’ll get through it. Together.” That’s a comforting statement. But how do you feel when you find out that there will be another war coming due to Saddam Hussein?

p.157 - “In the comics, the good guys always win,” Ali thinks. “In real life? It’s not always so obvious who the good guys are. The world may only see Saddam Hussein. But we Iraqis are so much more than that.” Discuss the meaning of this statement. Does it pertain to the world today also?

p.158-163 - Group discussion conflicts:

Ali vs. Saddam Hussein

Kurds vs. Saddam Hussein

United States vs. Saddam Hussein

Mr. D in real life is author Jennifer Roy's twin sister's husband. How do you think that influenced Jennifer Roy's writing and the book?