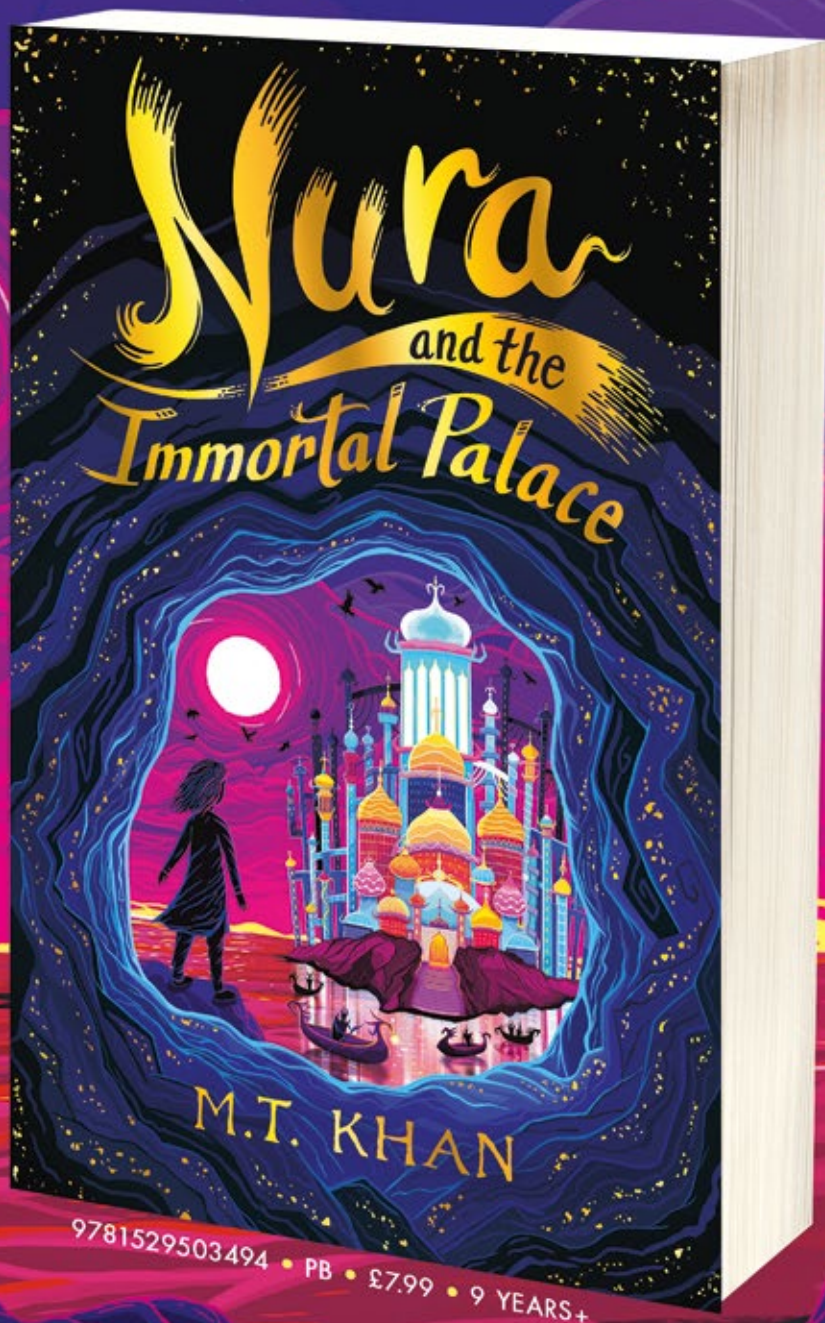


DISCUSSION GUIDE

"Gorgeous and atmospheric"

XIRAN JAY ZHAO



"A twisty, atmospheric tale with a fierce protagonist" JENNIFER BELL

"Magical and luminous" JASBINDER BILAN



WALKER
BOOKS



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Nura and the Immortal Palace

M.T. KHAN

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Nura and the Immortal Palace is a vivid and spectacular debut novel, sparkling with magic, adventure, compassion and heartfelt realism. Nura is twelve years old and works in the mines every day, sifting for mica. She desperately wants to provide a better future for her mother and family, until searching for the legendary Demon's Tongue causes a collapse that buries her best friend, Faisal. As she tries to rescue him, she finds herself in a world as far from the mines as possible, full of trickery, magic, splendour, and beings of legend: the jinn.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M.T. Khan is a writer from Pakistan, now living in Canada. She focuses on stories close to her heart, evoking cultural and societal conversations through her works. When she's not writing, M.T. Khan has her nose deep in physics textbooks or glued to her CAD computer as she majors in Mechanical Engineering. She currently resides in Toronto, Canada, with a hyperactive cat and an increasing selection of fantasy video games.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

There is a huge amount to discuss in this novel, both fantastical and true-to-life. Group members should be encouraged to discuss talking points amongst themselves, but be aware of sensitivities that may be present – the themes of child labour, familial loss, poverty and others may need to be treated with care. Ensure that adequate support is in place, should any of these themes affect group members. It may also be worth some preparation before the discussion for members not familiar with central elements of the book – not only child labour or mica mining, but also the mythologies of the jinn, Pakistani geography and some of the language, foods, customs and practices shared in the novel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask for members of the group to give their opinion on the book. How would anyone describe the book? What did anyone like most about it? What was the most interesting or exciting part? What did anyone learn from reading it? Encourage group members to expand on their answers. If feasible, and for a particularly exciting session, you might like to source or make some gulab jamun to try while you're discussing the novel.

1. Mythologies

'They aren't fairy tales. It's kala jadu – black magic. My uncle once met a jinn, and he stopped going out at night ever since.' - p.26

Ask who in the group was familiar with the traditions in the book before they read it. If so, would anyone like to talk about them, or how they know them? Maybe someone in their family told them stories of the jinn, or they once lived

somewhere where these stories were common. Even if so, ask for everyone to think of all the different creatures or words in the book, and work together to look up words such as jinn, demiurge, Sijj (you might like to look up/consider if this is a play on the islamic belief 'Sijjin'), qareen, etc.

2. Nura

'My feet are light and quick as a burst of wind.' - p.28

How does the author portray Nura, as a character? How would anyone in the group describe her personality? Why does she make a good lead character, or protagonist, for the book? What are her best qualities? Her worst? Why does Khan write the story from Nura's point of view, in the first person?

3. Faisal

'Faisal should've been a poet. He has the wistful gaze and delicate features of someone who's good with words.' - p.15

How does Faisal compare to Nura? What is their relationship like? How does the character change as the book progresses? Is he really as Nura sees him from the start – someone who needs looking after – or does he have his own strengths?

4. The Jinn

'And then it hits me. These aren't just any nightmarish creatures. These are jinn – born of fire and living for trickery.' - p.50

Discuss how the Khan portrays the jinn in the novel. What are they like? Who found it easy to imagine them? Who found it difficult? Talk about their characters, as well as their physical appearances. At this point, include discussion of the idea of the 'qareen' – can anyone imagine having a demon counterpart in another realm? Can anyone think of other stories, books, films, etc. that feature jinn? How do they compare? (First, check understanding that 'genie' is a derivation of 'jinn'.)

5. Mica and the mines

'Most of the kids don't know why we dig these tunnels or what mica is used for, but I've overheard plenty of conversation from the contractors... It's used in paint and cosmetics – to make things sparkle.' - p.11

Before entering the jinn realm the novel is set in the very real world of child labour and mica mining. Who had heard of mica mining before they read the book? Read (part of) the author's note at the end together as a group – what does anyone think of this? How does anyone feel? What can be done to change the situation?

6. The Sijj Palace

'But now I know it's not a curse – it's magic. From the outside, the hotel looks like just one giant building, but it's not attached at all...' - p.156

Who would like to visit the Sijj Palace? What does anyone think it would be like? Who wouldn't want to visit? Why? Is it really a palace? Revisit the description of how the palace works – who understands this? What about the way they destroy the palace?

7. Aspiration

'If anyone says that they work for passion or world peace and not the delicious food on their plate, they're lying.' - p.6

What does Nura aspire to – what does she want? How does this change throughout the novel? What motivates her? Does she want to be rich, or something else? Why is she after the Demon's Tongue? What about, for example, Faisal – what does he aspire to?

8. Greed

'That's what true greed is, what Mirza has, what the owner has, when you keep on wanting things until you forget why you wanted them in the first place.' - p.200

How do these aspirations compare to the greed they encounter in the Sijj Palace? What is the different between this

greed, and what Nura and Faisal want? What part does greed play in both the realm of the jinn, and the real world that Nura and Faisal come from? How do the two realms compare?

9. The Demiurge

“The Demiurge is gone. And I don’t think he’ll ever be back.” - p.175

Discuss the Demiurge – look up a definition of the word and share with the group. What did the group make of the character? Did anyone guess or work out that he was the Craftsman before it was revealed? If so, how did they know? Why is he trapped in something he built? What might it be like to create something out of good intentions, only to be trapped by it later? Can anyone think of any other examples where this has happened, either in stories or real life?

10. Power

‘I raise my brows at the stick of wood. Does this thing hold that much power?’ - p.30

Who has power in this book? What does power look like in the jinn realm versus the real world? How is that power used? Who uses it for good? (The Craftsman, for example, and his lessons.) Who uses it for ill? Read the passage relating to the dropped pencil together – is that power? What’s the relationship between power and education? Discuss education throughout the novel – how is it important, and how do Nura’s attitudes towards it change?