

Questions on chapters 6

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1. At the beginning of chapter 6 Sami and Ziba are going to move house; what is Maryam's feelings about the move? Why do you think she holds these attitudes?
2. Why do you think Tyler places the description of the house move just before Maryam's visit to her cousin?
3. 'Living in an area where everyone else was a native, married to an ex-hippie she had met while she was studying in Paris, she had chosen to become exaggeratedly Iranian. She met Maryam's plane in an outfit so exotic that even in Tehran, people would have gawked ...' What impression do you get of Maryam's cousin, Farah, both from this description and from the rest of the visit?
4. At dinner with Farah and her husband, William, Maryam listens to Farah reminisce about their childhood in Iran. Tyler writes, 'She had a sunnier vision of the past than Maryam did. All her memories seemed to involve hilarious parties, or wagon rides at the family's summer place in Meigun, or daylong picnics with every single relative on both sides in attendance. Where were the quarrels and the schisms, the uncle who took opium and the uncle who embezzled, the aunts' endless, bitter competition for their father's grudging notice? Did Farah not remember the cousin who killed herself when they forbade her to go to medical school, or the cousin who was refused permission to marry the boy she loved?' What does this suggest about memories generally and also Maryam's own memories of her life back in Iran? In what ways might this make you question all the memories that are mentioned in the novel?
5. What sort of picture does Tyler paint of Maryam and Dave's growing friendship and the ways in which the other characters get involved? Do you find it poignant; unrealistic; funny; irritating; dull or something else? Try to find one word to summarise the way it is described and then explain your decision, using quotations and incidents to illustrate your view.
6. Re-read Maryam's thoughts and memories of her courtship and 'arranged' marriage. What view are we encouraged to have of this relationship? Does anything later on in the novel change your impressions of the marriage? Why do you think Tyler does this?
7. What references does Tyler make to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in USA? Bearing in mind their magnitude, do you think she pays enough attention to the events in her narrative? Give reasons for your ideas.
8. When Jin-Ho and Dave are on their way to the airport to collect Xiu-Mei, Bitsy and Brad Jin-Ho asks after remembering that her and Susan once tried to dig a hole to China, "So the kids in China," Jin-Ho said. "Are they digging to America?" Why do you think Tyler chooses this throw-away remark for her title?