

Teachers' notes
written by Jean Yates



DESTINATION ABUDAI

By Prue Mason

SUMMARY

When twelve year old Jaz decides he wants to find out who his father really is, he gets more than he bargained for. Whilst his grandparents had always pretended that he and his sister Cassie shared the same father, Mike, Jaz had always felt this couldn't be true as he didn't look like anyone he knew. Much to everyone's surprise, his real father turns out to be a wealthy Arab named Mohammed who offers to fly Jaz to his home in Abudai and put him into Sheikh Abdullah's School for Boys.

Mohammed's unexpected letter and offer force Jaz's mother, Madonna, to tell her son about his identity. She reveals that as a young flight attendant she travelled to Abudai where she quickly fell in love with both the land and Mohammed. In spite of her friends' warnings about the dangers of cross-cultural marriages, Madonna agrees to marry Mohammed, especially when she hears of a special wedding ceremony that enabled the marriage to be easily annulled within a year. She tells Mohammed that if it all works, she will then marry him again in a more formal service after that time. Although Mohammed would have preferred a more immediately permanent arrangement he agrees to this marriage.

Initially, their's is a happy marriage in which they dream of building their palace together. Mohammed is clearly a romantic and delights in telling Madonna the magical stories of his culture. Then one day, not long into their marriage Mohammed was called away on business and Madonna went exploring in the old city. Here she unexpectedly stumbles upon a young woman who is clearly startled by her appearance. In her confusion, Madonna discovers that this woman is in fact Mohammed's first wife, Khadija. Both women are horrified at the fact that Mohammed has two wives, but for very different reasons. Khadija is overwhelmed by Madonna's western appearance which she believes to be beautiful beyond compare and fears that her husband will now want to divorce her, forcing her to abandon her daughter to him and return to her own family. Madonna, in contrast, is appalled by the very idea of polygamy which is abhorrent to her western way of thinking.

In horror, she returns to Australia, telling Mohammed that she must return to visit her dying father. She fails to tell him that she is in fact pregnant, knowing that

once the child is seven his father can lay claim to him. Therefore when Mohammed is told of Jaz's existence twelve years later it is the first he has known about the existence of his son.

Although unhappy to leave his mother, sister Cassie and his grandparents, Granmaggie and Paddy Paba, Jaz decides to take his newfound father up on his offer and go to Abudai. On his arrival he is immediately amazed by his father's obvious wealth and prestige. Whilst there are many aspects of his new life that he enjoys, everything is new and unfamiliar to Jaz and his relationship with his father is somewhat strained. To make matters worse, his older cousin, Tariq is openly hostile towards Jaz, a situation that is exacerbated when Mohammed asks him to keep an eye on the newcomer.

His twelve-year-old sister, Noora is delighted by his arrival and the excitement it has brought to her otherwise rather dull life. She is disappointed however to discover that he does not look like a typical westerner, but rather like her. Craving adventure, Noora has ambitions to be a spy and has determined upon Tariq as her first subject. She is convinced that he has terrorist ambitions, a belief that she quickly passes on to Jaz. Following him closely, the pair soon become convinced of Tariq's guilt.

Gradually, Jaz begins to fit in to his new life. He makes good friends at school and enjoys building a relationship with his father. But when he receives news that Paddy Paba is dying of cancer, Jaz determines to return to Australia. When he approaches Mohammed for permission, however, he is refused. Especially when it is to visit the grandfather whose 'death' necessitated Madonna's departure twelve years earlier. In his anger, Jaz points out that Mohammed can hardly be angry with Madonna for lying to her when he lied to her about his marital status.

Noora decides to help Jaz leave the country against her father's will. While he is away, they manage to outwit Tariq and head for the airport. But the plan quickly gets out of control and Noora is placed in a dangerous situation. In the ensuing confusion, Jaz and Noora discover the truth about Tariq and Jaz sees another side to his cousin and, in his sympathy, he makes a great personal sacrifice to protect him.

When Mohammed returns home, he brings Jaz's Australian family with him. In so doing, he proves that just as his grandmother, Zuleika-jaddah predicted and his name says, Jaziru has acted as a bridge between the two families.

THEMES / POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Family
- Telling Lies
- Cultural differences

- Prejudices
- Attitudes towards women
- Misunderstandings
- Social Attitudes
- Analysing Perspectives
- Symbols and Motifs

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- Examine the front cover. What predictions can you make or information can you gain about the novel based upon the front cover?
- Locate Abudai on a map. (We know that it is a fictitious place, but it lies between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates).
- What do you think of when you think of this geographic area?
- What do you actually KNOW about the Middle East?

Complete a KWL chart:

What I KNOW	What I WANT to Know	What I LEARNED

- Web quest: Find images of places in the Middle East (such as Dubai) and images of Nambour. Make a graphic organiser of the differences between the two.

Research activity: What is Ramadan? What restrictions come into force during this time? Why? What is Eid? What does it entail?

CHARACTERS

Jaz

Jaz is a twelve year-old boy who leaves his family in Australia to fly to Abudai to meet his father. He is very brave and accepting of all the new experiences in his life. In spite of the many obstacles he encounters and the somewhat hostile reception he receives from both his father and his cousin, Taqir, Jaz remains cooperative and positive.

He is clearly a loving and affectionate child with a close bond to his family in Australia. He speaks fondly of his grandparents – Granmaggie and Paddy Paba, his mother, Madonna and his sister Cassie. He is also very fond of his new sister, Noora. It is his overwhelming love for his family – and his devastation at the thought of losing Paddy Paba – that ultimately results in his attempt to escape Abudai and return home.

Noora

Like Jaz, Noora is also 12 years old. She is the middle of three girls, born to Mohammad's first wife, Khadija.

Noora wants to be a spy and spends much of her time spying on the family members. Why does she do this? *'How will I learn anything about my family? No one tells me any news of importance until all others know it too'* (p23).

- What does this tell you about her status in the family?

Her nickname, Bibi Djinn means baby mischief maker.

- In what ways is this an appropriate name for her?

Noora is excited about the arrival of a western brother.

- Why?

She plans to marry her best friend Aisha off to her brother so that they can live together.

- Why is she disappointed when she first sees Jaz?
- Would you have expected Noora to be jealous and suspicious of Jaz in the way that Taqir is? Why is she not?

Madonna (Jaz's mother)

Madonna was a flight attendant who fell in love with both Abudai and then Mohammed. Like many western women, in her youth and naivety she agreed to marry him, especially after finding out about a marriage that could be easily annulled within 101 days. Whilst her love for Mohammed was genuine, her understanding of his culture and all it entailed was not and she could not cope with the differences between his Islamic values and her western ones. Claiming that her father was dying, she fled Abudai without telling Mohammed that she was pregnant.

Mohammed

Mohammed is the head of the Finance Ministry and, as such, is one of the most important men in the country. He is *'at least six foot four inches and he wasn't just dark, his skin was black....his hands and face were so dark and shiny it looked as if he'd been polished'* (p55). *'He looked like a prince, straight out of the Arabian Nights.'* (p56)

Mohammed has lived in America and been educated in a western university, which have given him an understanding of some western ways but he cannot accept western practices that go against any of his own customs and, like many Muslims, believe that Christians are misguided for not accepting Islam. Whilst he genuinely loved Madonna, he failed to tell her that he already had a wife, a perfectly acceptable situation in his Islamic culture.

His immediate acceptance of Jaz and determination to provide the best for him, as well as his treatment of his daughters and his nephew, Tariq, show him to be a compassionate man, even if he appears to be someone distant and formal. He is clearly well respected in his country and has the nickname The Black Prince.

Tariq

Tariq is Jaz's cousin, the son of Mohammed's dead brother, Yustaf. He and his mother live with Mohammed and his family and their grandmother, as is customary.

Tariq resents Jaz's arrival at his house and fears his place in the family will be usurped. He is an angry and dangerous young man, who Noora is convinced is a Jihad terrorist.

'Not even Priti, his mother, likes Tariq very much, That is because he is always cruel and mean.' (p82)

Hannan

Hannan is Noora's older sister. At the age of only seventeen, she is engaged to Raman Al-Rasheed, a man whom she has never actually met. She is the epitome of the devoted obedient daughter of an Islamic family.

Cassie

Cassie is Mohammed's half sister back in Australia. Although she is only a minor character, her outspokenness and relaxed personality provide a marked contrast to Noora and her life. Cassie enjoys freedoms that are alien to Noora's existence. Unlike Noora, she knows exactly what is happening in her family and it is in fact Cassie who tells Jaz about Paddy Paba's illness.

Khadija

As Mohammed's first wife, you would expect Khadija to be secure in her status and place within the family. Yet surprisingly she feels inferior to Madonna, whom she believes to be beautiful. She is concerned that now that he is married to a beautiful and good nasrani girl, Mohammed will want a divorce from her. She is never completely at ease and is always fearful of being divorced, even after seventeen years of marriage.

Yet she is a kind and compassionate woman as it is she who insists that Mohammed bring Jaz to Abudai, in spite of the fact that the arrival of a son (and his mother) could very much jeopardise her position within the family. In this, she also shows herself to be a dutiful wife, ensuring that her husband has a son.

Granmaggie and Paddy Paba

Jaz's maternal grandparents are loving and accepting. Their names are in themselves perhaps illustrative of the unusualness of this family. Whilst perhaps disappointed by their daughter's first marriage and divorce, they hold no grudges

and do not criticise her for her behaviour. They clearly love Jaz and Cassie equally in spite of their different parents and backgrounds. Paddy Paba is particular shows how protective he is of his grandson, when he gives Jaz an emergency \$1000 so that he can remain independent of his new family. The gesture takes on extra significance with the discovery that it is hard-earned money saved for a much longed for last return trip to Ireland. His diagnosis of cancer adds a level of sadness to the story, but ultimately unites the extended family.

Zuleika-jaddah

Jaz's paternal grandmother, despite her blindness, is a very knowledgeable and wise woman. She is very much in touch with all of the members of her family and their thoughts and feelings. It is she who first tells Madonna of her husband's other family. Without being told she knows that Madonna is pregnant and she foretells that this child, Jaziru, will be the bridge between the families. She is completely accepting of Jaz and pleased to meet the first born son of her first-born son.

Priti

Priti, Tariq's mother was a Pakistani servant before marrying Mohammed's brother, Yusaf. She is warmly accepted by the family, yet her inferior status is apparent, as is her lack of security with her status within the family. Her character provides a good insight into the class structure and cultural attitudes.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Family

- What constitutes a family? How would you feel if you didn't know who your father was? Why do you think Jaz wants to find out about him?
- How would you feel if you found out your father's identity when you were thirteen? Would it change your sense of identity? Would it affect your relationship with your family?
- How would Mohammed feel to suddenly discover that he has a son living in Australia?
- Jaz *'couldn't stop the warm feeling in his chest, knowing he had a father, a real father, who wanted him'* (p20). Why would Jaz have felt this way? Even though he was very happy with his family, why do you think Jaz needed to know about his father and felt good to know that his father wanted to get to know him?
- Consider the first meeting between Mohammed and Jaz. Why is it so strained and awkward? Would you have expected this given that they are father and son? Is there more to being part of a family than just sharing a blood line?
- Why does Jaz feel so proud when he is praised in front of his father? Why is Mohammed's opinion of him so important to Jaz?

- Jaz's new grandmother, Zuleika-jaddah, thanks Allah that she has lived to know the first-born son of her first-born son. Why does she give Jaz her prayer beads?
- What is his status in this new family? *'You are part of this family, Jaziru. Through your blood you are tied to this land and yet you are also part of a family that comes from el-gharb, the western lands.'* (p70) Where does Jaz really belong?

Activity

Hot seat activity: Students are to take on the persona of either Jaz or Mohammed. Other students ask them questions about how they are feeling. (This could occur at a number of different points in the novel – eg when they first meet; when they go hunting; when Jaz first asks to go home; when Mohammed brings the rest of Jaz's family to Abudai). Students in the hot seat must respond in character.

Telling Lies

Telling lies is a key theme in this novel.

- Make a list of all of the lies or the deceits that are made by each of the characters during the story.
- Why do we tell lies? Is it always for bad reasons?
- Why might Jaz's mother never have told him anything about his father? Was she trying to protect her children or herself? Did she make the right decision doing this?
- How would you feel if you discovered your parents were keeping something as important as this from you?
- Why did Jaz's mother never even tell Mohammed that she was pregnant?
- *'You were the one who lied first. You never told Mum about already being married. She only found out when she fainted in your doorway. Ask Zuleikah-jaddah. She knows.'* (p122) How does Mohammed react to this accusation? Do you think he ever knew this before now?
- What lie does Madonna tell Mohammed when she first decides to return to Australia?
- How does this lie come back to make life difficult for Jaz?
- Is it ever acceptable to tell lies of this magnitude? Is it acceptable to tell lies if it is to protect another person?
- In what ways did Madonna (Jaz's mum) hurt those around her in trying to protect them?

Cultural differences

A number of cultural differences between Australia and Abudai are mentioned in this story.

- Make a list of all the differences you can find (giving page references). Present your findings in a table, such as a venn diagram, or a comparison matrix.

- Why would Madonna's friends have been opposed to the idea of her marrying an Arab man? What sorts of complications can occur in a cross-cultural marriage?
- Why did Mohammed not tell Madonna about his first wife? Why was it ok to tell Khadija about Madonna?
- Was Mohammed a bad man for taking a second wife?
- What social norms or expectations are you judging him by in your response?
- Is it fair to judge everyone's actions by our standards no matter what their culture?
- Why does Khadija offer to divorce Mohammed when she realises she can no longer have children and therefore not provide him with a son?
- What does this reveal about the Moslem attitude to males?

Prejudices

Many of the complications and much of the intrigue in this story come about as the result of preconceptions and prejudices.

- Consider the notion what is prejudice? What does it mean to pre-judge someone?
- How do the people at the airport react when Jaz tells them his father's name? What assumption does he make?
- Noora is excited at the prospect of meeting her western brother. *'Aisha said to me that he must have yellow hair and blue eyes for all nasranis look this way.'* (p48) What does this comment reveal about their attitudes towards westerners?
- What assumptions do we make about people's physical appearance?

Activity

Using magazines, or images from the internet, find pictures of people who you think represent 'typical' people from a range of different countries – eg Australia; Japan; the United Arab Emirates; Africa; Norway; America etc.

- Compare your images with others in the class. How similar are they?
- Do you think that any of these images are a true representation of the people from these countries?
- What stereotypes have you all relied on?
- What people have been marginalised in these images?
- What are the dangers of having preconceived ideas about people based on their place of origin?

Attitudes towards women

Research Activity: How are Islamic women expected to behave? What restrictions are placed upon them by society? How are they required to dress?

Consider the following quotes:

- *'Everyone who lives and works here has their own special knock so anyone inside hears it and knows who it is. It's an old tradition and it gives any women who might be around a chance to get away so they won't be seen by a man who's not a member of the family.'* (p53).
- *'She sneaked a look at him from underneath her lashes. Jaz was surprised. She didn't seem the shy type.'* (p67)
- What do these comments reveal about women in this society?
- As a western child, how do you feel about these customs?
- Do the women in this novel seem unhappy about this situation?
- Can you think of any benefits it may have for women?

Hannan is to be married even though she is only just seventeen. Mohammed knows the fiancé and his family, but Hannan herself has not met him and won't do until the seventh night of the wedding celebrations when she will go with him to his family's home (p77).

- How would you react to this style of betrothal? In what ways is it abhorrent to our way of thinking?
- *'Hannan is to be given a good dowry. That way she will be rich even if her husband has a divorce with her'* (p77). What does this reveal about Islamic attitudes to marriage?

Jaz warns Noora that if Mohammed hears about her involvement in his escape she will be grounded for life (p142). Noora comments that that is her life.

- What sort of restrictions does Noora have in her life?
- *'Noora wasn't like Cassie. She wasn't used to crowds and shouting men. Her life was indoors, surrounded by family and people who cared about her.'* (p159) How would Noora react if she suddenly came into your world? What aspects of your life would she find hard to cope with?

Khadija is never comfortable with her status and position within the family. When Mohammed marries Madonna, she is convinced that he will divorce her. If this were to happen he would keep their daughter, Hassan, whilst Khadija would be sent back to her family and become like a servant. As the fifth and not so beautiful daughter her chances of marrying again would be slim (p 17). Once she discovers that she can have no more children and therefore not provide Mohammed with a son, she is again constantly fearful that he will divorce her.

- What does this reveal about the status of women?

Activity

Imagine that you are Hannan. Write a conversation that might take place between you and your mother, Khadija the night before your wedding celebrations begin.

- How are you feeling? What might your concerns be?

Imagine that you are a western journalist writing an article on marriage. Design a set of questions you would ask and 'interview' Madonna, Khadija, Mohammed and Hannan about their attitudes towards marriage.

Misunderstandings

Both the tension and the humour in this story are the result of misunderstandings. Noora has trouble understanding some of the things Jaz says to her. Jaz misunderstands many things about his father and his cousin, Tariq.

Make a list of all of the understandings you come across as you read the novel.

- Why does Mohammed ask Jaz to come to Abudai? Is it, as Jaz fears, to take Jaz away from his mother, to pay her back? (p60)

When we realise the truth about Tariq, the reader's attitude towards Tariq changes and you begin to sympathise with him.

- Create two different readings for Tariq, one a hostile reading (see him as a bad and dangerous person) and the other a sympathetic reading (see him as a sad and lonely young man).

Activities

Create a "Detective's Dossier" on Tariq. Record any information about the suspect, including name, age etc. Write in your dossier any unusual facts or behaviours that could be used to build a case file against him.

Because of misunderstandings, Noora and subsequently Jaz become convinced that Tariq is a terrorist bomber. Make a list of the 'evidence' against him as they discover it. Place the evidence in a table and later return to it and fill in the correct reason for his behaviour.

EVIDENCE AGAINST TARIQ	JAZ AND NOORA'S INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOUR	REAL REASON FOR THE BEHAVIOUR
Always on telephone	Talking to other terrorists	Calling world time to make himself look popular and important

- Can you think of another story in which one character's actions are misunderstood by another? Write your own story in which this happens.

Social attitudes

- Why is Priti of a lower social status because she comes from Pakistan?

Consider the following comments from Tariq:

- *'You westerners are all the same. Nothing is ever your fault. But look at the problems you have created in our lands due to your interference. You always think that your ways are the best and we must all be like you, but how can an Unbeliever – and one ungrateful to God and arrogantly opposed to God – ever be right?'* (p84)
- *'How can I be sharing with an Unbeliever and one ungrateful to God? Especially now at this time when the tensions between the cultures are greater than ever due to the interference of the westerners in our lands?'* (p73)
- Why are many Moslems so critical of westerners? What recent behaviours would make them suspicious of western people?
- *'My uncle wants to convert you to Islam so he can be sure of his place in Paradise. He would not want you here otherwise. He would not want everyone to know he consorted with an infidel and made a half-blood. You are worse even than a westerner. You are not one or the other and never will be.'* (p60)
- How would converting Jaz to Islam ensure Mohammed a place in Paradise?

Many cultures have these attitudes towards children of mixed race origins.

- Consider the attitudes towards half-caste aborigines in Australia; Vietnamese-American children left in Vietnam after the war etc.
- Why do mixed race children often suffer more and face more racism than those of non-mixed race? Do you think that our attitudes in this regard are changing?

Analysing Perspectives

Much of the confusion, unhappiness and humour in this story is caused not by what is said, but by what others think has been said.

Like the game Chinese whispers, conversations, comments and throw-away lines can be easily distorted, misheard or misunderstood. Our interpretation of things can also be affected by external factors and by how we are feeling at the time.

Throughout the novel we hear and see things from Jaz's perspective, through his eyes and ears. This means that we as a reader are affected by Jaz's attitudes, prejudices or wants.

- How does that affect our reading of the novel? How might the story change if we heard from a different character?

To what extent do Jaz and Noora's personal lives influence their interpretation of Tariq's behaviour?

Activities

Choose a scene in the story that you think is a pivotal moment. Re-write this scene through the eyes of a different character. Consider how the tone of the story or our interpretation of a situation is altered when we look at it from a different person's perspective.

- As you read the novel write a series of diary entries or emails as a range of different characters eg Cassie, Jaz, Mohammed, Tariq, Madonna or Noora. In each entry, try to explain how you feel about what has just happened.

(To explain this to students more clearly, take the well known story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Read Roald Dahl's version in *Revolting Rhymes*. How does our interpretation of the situation differ when we view the story from a different perspective?)

Symbols / Motifs

Jaz's name, Jaziru, means bridge.

- In what ways is he a bridge between the two families?

The Hawk:

- As Jaz watches the hawk from his bedroom window he realises that '*nothing here was quite as it seemed.*' (p88) What things are not as they seem?
- '*Sheba... is an intelligent bird. Too clever, for it makes her angry that she is not able to fly free.*' (p133) How does the falcon's imposed imprisonment reflect that of many of the characters in this story? Which characters are 'imprisoned' and for what reasons?

FURTHER READING

Camel Rider by Prue Mason

Does My Head Look Big in This? by Randa Abdel Fattah

Mahjar by Eva Sallis

Parvana by Deborah Ellis

Under the Same Stars by Suzanne Fisher Staples

BLACKLINE MASTER: VENN DIAGRAM

On the diagram below, make a list of facts about the culture of the Middle East and Australia. In the overlapping parts of the circle, list any similarities.

Middle East

Australia

