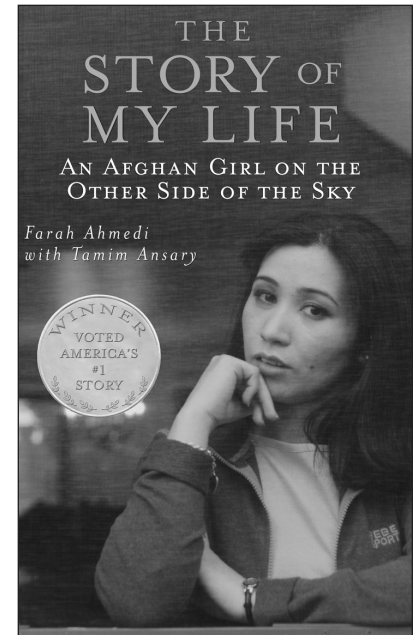


An Educator's Guide to
*The Story of My Life:
An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky*
By Farah Ahmedi



ABOUT THE BOOK

Farah, (pronounced Far uh), a spirited young woman, takes us on a heroine's journey from her native Afghanistan village to Germany, Pakistan, and, finally, to America where she and her mother now reside. Now an Afghan-American, Farah recounts her trials and triumphs in remarkable travels where she faces both evil and good forces. She experiences terrible losses, including her leg in a land mine accident and the death of several family members. She also experiences supreme compassion from unexpected people, including her sponsor Alyce. Her ability to overcome tragedies comes from surprising places as she reminds us of our own capacities to surmount challenges. What larger lessons does Farah learn and teach us?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Farah, 17, was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, where she lost her leg to a landmine at age seven. Today, Farah is a successful student at Wheaton North High School, and has the interests of almost any teenage girl—music, movies, and cooking. She enjoys her history and computer classes, and also spends a great deal of her free time studying and improving her English language skills.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Farah's Childhood in Afghanistan and Germany

1. What are several similarities and differences between Farah's childhood in Afghanistan vs. people's childhoods in America? Consider issues of family life, home, and schooling.
2. Why was Kabul initially the safest place for Farah's family to live in Afghanistan?
3. In which ways are Farah and her father similar in their character traits?
4. How does a "single careless moment" change Farah's life forever? How does Farah cope with this complicated physical and emotional challenge of her life?
5. Describe Farah's feelings when she realizes her leg has been amputated and she must stay in the German hospital for longer than expected.
6. Which conflict arises in Farah when she returns from Germany to her family in Kabul? How does she resolve this conflict?
7. Due to their Hazaras ethnicity, Farah, along with her family and neighbors, experience the Taliban's great prejudice and poor treatment. What are some examples of this treatment? What can Farah's story teach us about overcoming prejudice toward others?
8. How are the words of Farah's father, "Well, my child, this is the world. We just have to live in it and get by as best we can" a foreshadowing of serious events forthcoming in their lives?

Farah's Adolescence in America

1. What does the Gondola ride at the carnival prompt Farah to remember? Why is this particular memory significant?
2. Why does Farah desperately want to wear high heels? What do these shoes symbolize for her?
3. How are weddings and marriage in Afghanistan different from weddings and marriage in America? How does this difference relate to Farah's exclamation, "Maybe I would be married [now], or at least have prospects"?

Farah's Journey

1. Joseph Campbell, an expert in mythology, introduced the idea that myths or stories of any given culture, for instance, Roman, Greek, Celtic, Biblical, Native American, and others hold a similar purpose and follow a similar pattern. This pattern, the Monomyth or hero's journey, is evident in movies such as *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* as well as other literature: *Hamlet*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*. Farah's story follows the Monomyth also.
2. Begin with Farah and her mother's departure from her homeland as their "Call to Adventure," defined as leaving one's familiar world, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to venture into the unknown. The purpose of the journey is to recover or discover something of importance.

Departure:

1. Who are the unexpected helpers on Farah's journey? What do they have to offer her and her mother?

Initiation:

1. Identify the tests (Ex. The harrowing ordeal of Farah and her mother's escape to Quetta, Pakistan as a "Night Journey") that initiated them into this journey. What were the ultimate benefits? consequences?
2. What is the rite of passage of Farah's story? What is the significance of this event for Farah?
3. When do Farah and her mother experience the need for "flight" defined as an escape from present circumstances that is ultimately prevented to ensure the hero/heroine complete the journey?
4. How does the tragedy of September 11, 2001 change the course of plans for Farah and her mother's move to America?
5. Once they are in America, why do Farah and her mother have such a difficult time coping with their new lives?
6. Explain Farah's revelation about her new role in life: "I had become the parent, and my mother had become the child."

Return:

1. What is the outcome of Farah's journey?

At the end of the journey, a hero/heroine experiences an enlightenment, a positive change, and freedom or little enlightenment, a negative change, and a flight from original place.

1. How does Farah finally fulfill her wish of wearing high-heeled shoes?

2. What is the one thing Farah thinks that she did right in her life?
3. How does she reconcile her identity as both an Afghani and an American? At what conclusion does she arrive to help herself become whole once more?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Comparison/Contrast Essay

1. Write an essay in which you compare/contrast Farah's life in Afghanistan and Pakistan with her life in America. Consider issues of family life, home, and schooling.

Expository Essay

1. Study Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, which is also entitled the Hero's/Heroine's Journey. Trace Farah's journey and describe both the events that match the steps on the Monomyth and their significance. What is the "lesson learned" by Farah?

Literary Essay

1. Read Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and compare/contrast (1) Amir and Hassan's childhood in Kabul with Farah's; (2) Hassan's conflict within himself with Farah's conflict within herself; (3) Hassan's heroic journey with Farah's; or (4) portrayal of the Taliban and other political forces.

Narrative Essay

1. Write an essay that explains a common adolescent rite of passage and its significance toward becoming an adult.

Persuasive Essay

1. Write an essay in which you persuade a land mine (or other) organization to bestow an award upon Farah for her ability to overcome unusual obstacles.

Poetry

1. Write a poem to describe overcoming a challenge such as a broken leg, a team loss, the breakup of a relationship, bad weather on a vacation, lost luggage, or other topic.
2. Write a poem as a tribute to a "magical helper" who appeared on your own journey and how he/she assisted you during a difficult time.
3. Write a poem about compassion: How did you help another person without an expectation of something in return for your efforts?

SUGGESTED INVESTIGATIONS

1. Select a country: Afghanistan or Pakistan and research its governmental system in the past few decades and in current times.
2. Locate articles on the current state of affairs for Afghani citizens. Discuss with other readers the relation to Farah's story.
3. Research the Taliban and its purpose and influences, both yesterday and today.

4. Compare/contrast the living conditions or political state of affairs of Afghanistan vs. America.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Create a timeline of events on Farah's journey from Afghanistan to America. Note her "lessons" or opportunities for emotional growth during each event.

2. Write a letter to Farah (in care of Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing) explaining ways in which you identified with her story.

3. Draw a map of Afghanistan, Germany, Pakistan, and America that reflects the places where Farah visited or lived.

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ISBN-10: 1-4169-0670-3

ISBN-13: 978-1-4169-0670-4

Simon Spotlight Entertainment

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