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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

Some of the major turning points in the novel include Sana's rejection of Said, Rauf Ilwan's unwillingness to help Said find a job, the accidental murder of the man at Ilish Sidra's old apartment, and the death of Rauf's doorkeeper. Each of these events causes Said's mental state to unravel a bit further. Near the novel's end, he is "ravenously gnawing on leftover bones like a dog" while he waits for Nur's return.

Said turns to the sheikh for the last time, asking, "Would it be in your power, with all the grace with which you're endowed, to save me, then?" The sheikh replies, "You can save yourself, if you wish."

Discussion Activities

Read aloud in class Handout Two: The Sheikh as a Moral Voice in the Novel. Using the timeline as a reference, examine each of Said's visits to the sheikh. How often do they coincide with the shifts in the novel's action? What specific advice does the sheikh give Said on each of these occasions? How does Said respond?

Ask your students if they agree with the sheikh's claim in Chapter Seventeen that Said could still save himself. At this point in the novel, what options are still available to Said? Why is he unwilling to change, even when facing certain death?

Writing Exercise

In their journals, ask students to write a different ending to the novel.

Homework

Have students come to the next class with the three major themes of the novel. Ask them to choose the theme they find most compelling and write a paragraph explaining why.