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Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the book in specific ways. Using historical references to support ideas, explore the statements *The Thief and the Dogs* makes about the following themes and other themes your students identify during their reading of the book:

Freedom

Examine what freedom means to Said. How do politics, economics, and the social limitations of his world affect him? What does freedom mean to the novel's secondary characters such as Nur, the sheikh, or Rauf Ilwan? Do they handle the restrictions placed upon them differently than Said? If so, how?

Morality

Though Said is a career criminal, he has a personal moral code. Examine his ethics. What does he value most, and why? Which characters do you believe are the most honorable? Which are the least honorable?

Justice

Said sees his quest for revenge as a way of obtaining justice. Examine the ways his anger at Nabawiyya, Ilish, Rauf, and society might be justified. How might he have pursued justice without resorting to violence?



Homework

Ask students to begin their essays using the essay topics in this guide. Encourage students to refer to the entries in their Reader's Journal to help them build an essay thesis. Outlines are due during the next class period.