

INFIDEL Book Club Guide

*This reading group guide for **Infidel** includes an introduction, information about the AHA Foundation, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

INTRODUCTION

Raised in a strict Muslim family and extended clan, Hirsi Ali survived civil war, female genital mutilation, brutal beatings, and life in four troubled, unstable countries largely ruled by despots. As an adolescent, she was a devout believer in Islam, at a time when the Muslim Brotherhood was on the rise. In her early twenties, she escaped from a forced marriage and sought asylum in the Netherlands, where she earned a masters degree in political science, became a Dutch Parliamentarian and fought for the rights of Muslim immigrant women and the reform of Islam. Even though she is under constant threat—demonized by reactionary Islamists and politicians, disowned by her father, and expelled from her family and clan—she refuses to be silenced.

THE AHA FOUNDATION

In response to ongoing abuses of women's rights in the name of religion and culture, activist and academic Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her supporters established the AHA Foundation in 2007 as a charitable organization to help protect and defend the rights of women in the West. Through research, the dissemination of knowledge, and outreach, the Foundation aims to combat several types of crimes against women, including the abridgement of the education of girls, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, honor violence, and honor killings. For more information, please visit www.theahafoundation.org.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Hirsi Ali tells us that this book is "the story of what I have experienced, what I have seen, and why I think the way I do" (page xii). Which experiences does she highlight as being integral to forming her current views?
2. "No eyes silently accused me of being a whore. No lecherous men called me to bed with them. No Brotherhood members threatened me with hellfire. I felt

safe; I could follow my curiosity" (page 185). This passage refers to Hirsi Ali's initial impression of walking the streets in Germany. What other significant differences between the West and tribal Africa did she observe during her first days in Europe? Upon arriving in Holland, what were her initial impressions of the Dutch people and the Dutch government? Did these change significantly as she lived there?

3. How did Hirsi Ali's immigration experience and integration into Dutch society differ from those of other Somalis?

4. Discuss the differences that Hirsi Ali noticed between raising children in tribal settings and raising children in the West. In particular, what did she notice about Johanna's parenting?

5. As seen through Hirsi Ali's eyes, what factors contributed to Haweya's death? How might members of her family describe events differently?

6. Although Hirsi Ali mostly refrains from criticizing her father, she publishes the personal letter he wrote her upon her divorce. Why do you think she included this letter? Were you surprised by any other intimate details of her life that she revealed in the book?

7. On page 295, Hirsi Ali lists the three goals she wished to accomplish by joining Parliament. By the book's end has she accomplished all three? How did her views of the Dutch government change over time?

8. Examine Hirsi Ali's relationship with her brother. How did Mahad's and Abeh's reactions to her political work differ?

Enhancing Your Book Club

1. Go to www.youtube.com to watch a version of Theo van Gogh and Hirsi Ali's film, *Submission: Part One*.

2. Take a look on the web for Hirsi Ali's most recent statements about freedom of speech or women's rights. Bring in a copy of any interviews you find and share with your group.

3. The AHA Foundation, founded by Hirsi Ali and her supporters, constantly updates its website with news articles relating to issues discussed in *Infidel*. Go to <http://theahafoundation.org/category/news/> and choose some recent articles of interest. Use them to start a discussion with your fellow book club

members on events happening today that directly relate to topics discussed in *In fidel*. Which topics seem to be most prominently featured in current events? What improvements, if any, are being made to better protect the rights of girls and women?