

Questions and Activities for *The Librarian of Basra*

1. The author and illustrator, Jeanette Winter, begins her book with a quote from the librarian of Basra. The librarian, Alia Muhammad Baker, tells of an instruction from the Koran, the religious text of Islam. Alia states that in the Koran, God told his messenger Muhammad to read. Why do you think reading is important? How did Ms. Winter share her opinion of the importance of reading in the illustration on the first page of the book?
2. We are told that Basra is a port city. Locate Basra on the map of Iraq. Iraq is just slightly larger than the state of California. Why do you think that a port city would be important to other countries both in times of peace and in times of war?
3. The citizens of Basra enjoyed meeting at the library for discussions. What do you like to talk about when you meet friends at your library?
4. During the war, what changed about the way in which the library was used? Why did this worry the librarian?
5. Alia was very protective of the books in the library. What are some things that are found in your home or school that you would want to save if a fire or natural disaster damaged your building? Why are these items important to you?
6. The librarian came up with a special plan to save the books in her library. What other ideas could you add to her plan? What plan could you make to save your own important objects? Explain the steps that you would follow to save your valuables.
7. Jeanette Winter feels that Alia Muhammad Baker is a hero. She read about her in a newspaper article and was inspired to write this story. Why do you think that the author felt the librarian was a hero? Share information about someone that you read about or saw on the news that you found inspirational.
8. Compare the illustrations that Ms. Winter uses to show Basra during the time of war and during the dream of peace. What differences do you notice in these illustrations?
9. At the end of the story, Alia Muhammad Baker is dreaming that a new library will be built. Where could you research to find out if this ever happened?

Follow-Up Activities

1. Did you know that written communication has always been important in the land that is now Iraq? One of the oldest forms of writing, the cuneiform writing system, was developed in ancient Babylon in 3200 B.C. This writing system used pictographs that were marked into tablets made of materials like clay, stone, and metal. Using your imagination, develop symbols for each of our alphabet letters and use your symbols to create a short message about the need to rescue the books from Ms. Baker's library.
2. Find out how many books are housed in your neighborhood library. Interview a librarian who works there to find out what plans are in place there to protect the books in the event of a fire, flood, or unexpected disaster.

