

BLACK BUTTERFLIES

Book Club Questions

Discussion questions for your reading group to choose from:

1. Do you remember the events of the 1990s Siege of Sarajevo unfolding during your lifetime, and did reading *Black Butterflies* make you reflect on them differently? If not, how did you respond to finding out about this war in Europe?
2. To what extent do you think that the themes of the book pertain to its specific historical context, and how might they be considered universal and relevant to our times today?
3. Zora describes her day-to-day work and caring activities (p.3), which are representative of the responsibilities of many middle-aged women. To what extent can you identify with her at the opening of the novel? Does she remind you of anyone you know?
4. This is how Zora describes her hometown: “She loves Sarajevo. She knows all its alleys and courtyards, all its scents and sounds—the way the light falls at the end of their street in wintertime, the rattle of the tram, the blowsy roses that bloom each June in the mosque gardens, the plums and fogs in the autumn, the ponderous old men playing chess in the cafés, the mahalas—the old neighbourhoods—that radiate from the centre like the spiral of a snail’s shell.” (p.36). Do you have strong feelings about the place you consider home? If so, would you like to share how you would describe it?
5. Why does Zora insist on staying in Sarajevo when her husband takes her sick mother to England? Do you think that there were other unspoken reasons too? Would you have stayed in her position?
6. How does the lunch party scene (pp.38 - 45) illustrate some of the different political views in Sarajevo at the beginning of the siege? Where else in the novel do characters express their political views? Did you experience this as a political novel?
7. How does Morris use the symbol of the bridge to represent the once-glorious diversity of Sarajevo?
8. What is the effect of the addition of Zora’s first person letters to the third person narrative? Why do you think Morris included them?
9. Why do you think Morris chose the title *Black Butterflies*?

10. Mirsad tries to rescue books from the burning National and University Library. He says, "Have you ever heard of such a thing? A human chain to rescue books. [...] But what good did it do? They say almost two million documents burnt in there. First editions, rare manuscripts, land records, newspaper archives. Our heritage destroyed in a night." (p.149). How would you feel if your local or national library was destroyed? Could you ever imagine yourself running into a fire to rescue books? Why do you think libraries are sometimes targeted during periods of conflict? What is lost when a library is destroyed?
11. How does *Black Butterflies* show us that art, storytelling, and community can enrich our lives even in the darkest times or most difficult moments in our lives? Have you found this to be true in your own life?
12. Can you understand why Samir may have finally decided to join the fighting after resisting it for so long?
13. Why do Zora's students think she is a figure of resistance and why does she think she's a fraud? Do you think Zora or any of the characters are "heroic"? Why or why not?
14. Explore the relationship between Zora and Mirsad. Do you believe they love each other?
15. What do you make of the Bosnian folktale of the wife walked into the bridge? What does it add to the novel and why do you think Morris included it?
16. Did reading the Author's Note make you reflect on the novel differently in any way?
17. Why do you think Morris chose to end the novel where she did? What do you imagine happens to Mirsad and Zora after the end of the novel?

Some of the above questions are from www.sallyflint.com/black-butterflies-by-priscilla-morris/, which gives a great summary of the novel, reflection and questions. Others have been kindly shared by book clubs in the UK and Luxembourg. I've been told there have been very lively discussions about *Black Butterflies*, especially with the last question!

Happy reading and discussing!

Thank you for reading. I'd love to hear from you
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