

Naguib Mahfouz, Sugar Street

Monthly discussion group, ch. 1-16

1. Eight years after the deaths of Aisha's husband and two sons (as well as the death of Sa'd Zaghlul), much has changed.
 - How has the house on Palace Walk been rearranged to adapt to changes in the family of Ahmad and Amina? How is the household (now including Aisha and her daughter, Na'ima) confronting their tragic family losses and the social/cultural changes swirling around them?
 - How has the neighborhood around Palace Walk changed, and what social changes are evident?
 - How are the inhabitants of the Sugar Street house (Khadija and Ibrahim; their sons, Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad) adapting to the changes in their family, as well as to the social/cultural changes swirling around them?
 - In the house on Palace of Desire Street, how has Yassin's growing family (his wife, Zanuba; his young daughter, Karima; and his son by his first wife, Ridwan) incorporated itself into the lives of the other houses? What kind of father has Yassin become? What kind of mother has Zanuba become?
 - What social/cultural changes are reflected in the lives of the third generation of Ahmad's extended family?
2. As Sugar Street opens, Kamal is twenty-eight, and he seems stuck. Why?
 - How has he pursued his quest for "Truth"? What has he found?
 - After the death of the national hero Sa'd Zaghlul what has become of Kamal's political hopes? How does he reconcile philosophical skepticism with fervent political yearnings?
 - Having lost the love of his life, Aida, and having discovered sex and alcohol, how does Kamal reconcile sexual desire with philosophical objectivity?
 - Kamal still occasionally sees two remaining friends from his youth—Fuad, the son of Ahmad's assistant in the store; and Isma'il, who now works outside of Cairo. How does each serve as a foil to highlight Kamal's views about his own career and the possibility of marriage?
 - Why is Kamal devastated upon learning that the Shaddad family has lost all its fortune, and that the father of Husayn, Aida, and Budur has committed suicide?
 - Does Kamal's meeting with the translator Riyad Qaldas in the offices of the Al-Fikr Magazine suggest a path forward for him?
3. This third novel in the trilogy juxtaposes the arrangements of marriage and sexuality as practiced in Ahmad's generation to the potential for new arrangements of marriage and sexuality in the third generation of the family.
 - How have the lives of the aging Zubayda and Jalila diverged from each other, and from the life of Zubayda's niece, Zanuba? What might a feminist critique of their available choices look like?
 - What choices are available to Na'ima and Karima?
 - How do you view Abd al-Muni'm's insistence, at eighteen, that his father find a wife for him because "I am not willing to do what [other young men] do"? Does his refusal to

share in the sexual hypocrisy of men like his grandfather represent progress in gender relations or does it suggest continued (and perhaps more extreme) control of women?

- How do you view the younger Ahmad's shock and fascination upon discovering that his article will be summarized by a female editor at The New Man?
 - How do you view Ridwan's relationship with Hilmi Izzat and his introduction to the young men who surround Abd al-Rahim Pasha Isa?
4. As the three male cousins choose career paths, each finds a mentor. Toward what do these mentors seem to be leading their protégés?
- the Shayk whose preaching Abd al-Muni'm attends in the coffee house
 - the editor of The New Man where Ahmad wants to publish articles
 - the senior statesman to whom Hilmi Izzat introduces Ridwan
- What do these career paths suggest about the future of Egypt?
5. The political landscape has changed since the death of Sa'd Zaghlul: Egypt's strategic location has kept it under the thumb of Great Britain despite its nominal independence, radical nationalists and those who compromise with the British are at odds, street violence has erupted, and the world-wide depression has weakened the economy.
- How are these political and social divisions reflected in Ahmad senior's family?