



1. The wooden spice box is a motif. It appears and reappears at formative and pivotal moments in the characters' lives. It contains Mariam's hidden letters, but why else is it important?
2. Gabriel could be described as a bitter old man, resentful of his fate and outwardly rude to Jennifer, Harry's parents, and several others. But he has many redeeming qualities, including an inadvertent wit. What evidence does the book provide that Gabriel is actually a romantic at heart and has a softer side?
3. Food. There's plenty of it in the novel, including references to aubergines, paprika, garlic, baked lamb, and many other traditional Armenian dishes and delicacies. Why do you think food is frequently referred to in the book? Why are mealtimes cherished by the characters? How important is food as a cultural identifier? Discuss your own culinary heritage and food traditions and their significance (if any) in your life.
4. At the start of the novel, Gabriel tells Mariam a folktale about a man who was taken by the Grim Reaper on the day of his wedding. Later, in the wilds, following their expulsion from Eastern Turkey, he relates the story of the Seven Stars. What purpose do Armenian folktales serve within the framework of the novel? How do they connect the characters to their past and foreshadow events?
5. There was a thriving asbestos mine in the Troodos mountains of Cyprus where thousands of Armenian refugees worked, including Gabriel. He had a love-hate relationship with the mine. In the novel, how is the mine portrayed as both a positive and negative force in Gabriel's life and for the mining community as a whole?

*Discussion
Questions*

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6. Gabriel is a stickler for tradition, dead set against his granddaughter marrying a non-Armenian. Why is he (and his friend Partogh) so opposed to intermarriage? Discuss the reasons. Is there any justification for his stubbornness?
7. Why did Mariam's mother dress her as a boy when the family were marched from their homes, and why did this unwittingly lead to their separation?
8. Katerina and Ara come from different worlds, England and Cyprus, but they are intrinsically linked by their ancestral past. How does Katerina's growing awareness of her family history help her to grow as a person? To what extent do you feel people are shaped by their past and even their ancestral history?
9. The pocket watch is final proof for Gabriel that Katerina is his great-niece. Why is the watch so important to the family? Discuss its physical and metaphorical significance.
10. Many Armenians fled their homes in 1915 clutching only family pictures. Why was photography a fitting profession for Gabriel, and what role do photographs play in the novel?
11. "The café was popular with Turks and Armenians, many of whom were close friends. We were used to living together, comfortable companions in spite of our history." What made the Turks and Armenians of Cyprus comfortable companions? Why was Gabriel particularly fond of his Turkish neighbor Begum?