

PICTURE IN THE SAND

Discussion Questions

1. *Picture in the Sand* is a historical novel that covers a large span of time, an epic subject matter, and a number of famous real-life characters. What did you think of the author's choice to tell it from the perspective of Ali and his grandson? Why do you think that choice was made? And what did you think of the conceit of telling the story through emails between the grandfather and the grandson?
2. Did *Picture in the Sand* remind you of any other novels you've read? What comparisons come to mind? How would you categorize the book?
3. Did you learn anything about history from this novel? Did the story make you interested in finding out more about that period? Did the author's note at the end, separating historical fact from fiction, change the way you felt about the book?
4. Did reading this novel make you reflect on recent issues involving the Middle East?
5. Who did you feel the most sympathy for in this story? Who did you identify with? Did your feelings about the characters change over the course of the novel?
6. What interested you most about the story? Was it the historical angle, the behind-the-camera Hollywood angle, or the relationship between the grandfather and the grandson?
7. There's a lot of discussion these days about whether authors should be writing from the point of view of characters from ethnic and gender groups they aren't part of themselves. *Picture in the Sand* is a novel by a Jewish author that puts a number of Muslim and Coptic characters in lead roles. How do you feel about that in general? How much did you think about it while you were reading this novel?
8. The story of Moses is central to the movie *The Ten Commandments*, and the movie is central to this novel. Moses himself is revered as a prophet in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He's been spoken of and written about by figures as diverse as Sigmund Freud and Martin Luther King, Jr., and referenced by the likes of Cecil B. DeMille and Bruce Springsteen. Why do you think his story has such staying power?
9. Cecil B. DeMille's movie *The Ten Commandments* is a key part of *Picture in the Sand*. Have you seen it? What did you think of it? And what do you think of religious movies in general?
10. Ali, the story's protagonist, is caught between his love of Western culture and his allegiance to his origins and his family. Discuss the choices he is forced to make during the story. Did he pay too high a price for his actions?
11. How much do current events influence your reading of historical novels like this one?

