



## ZAHRA'S PARADISE – READING GROUP GUIDE



### *Book Description:*

Set in the aftermath of Iran's fraudulent elections of 2009, *Zahra's Paradise* is the fictional story of the search for Mehdi, a young protestor who has vanished. What's keeping his memory from being obliterated is not the law. It is the grit and guts of his mother, who refuses to surrender her son to fate, and the tenacity of his brother, a blogger, who fuses tradition and technology to explore and explode the void in which Mehdi has vanished.

### *For Discussion:*

*Zahra's Paradise* is a graphic novel, a story told in words and pictures. How do you think this story would be told differently if it was a novel, with only words? How would it be different if it was a movie, with just pictures?

*Zahra's Paradise* is a story about the 2009 Iranian elections and their aftermath. What view of the elections and the new regime does this story propound? Do you think it paints an accurate picture?

*Zahra's Paradise* contains an extensive selection of back matter. Did any of it affect your reading of the book?

The author of this book is Iranian-American. How do you think that affected the way he told this story?

How do you think the blogger's quest for his brother would have worked differently if this story was set in the United States? How are our political and cultural systems different from Iran's?

Much of this story focuses on Iran's secret prisons. Why do countries have secret prisons? Is a secret prison ever a good idea?

The internet and the copy shop – two places where grassroots social media starts – are very useful to the blogger in this book. Do you feel that how they are depicted is an accurate reflection of how the world works today?

Contrast the way that people behave in *Zahra's Paradise* to your own personal ideas of peoples' lives in the Middle East. What's the same? What's different?

This book is in many ways a call to arms. What action might it inspire you to?

How well do you feel that the art grounds the situations in the book? Is it more powerful to see the images than it would be to just read the text?