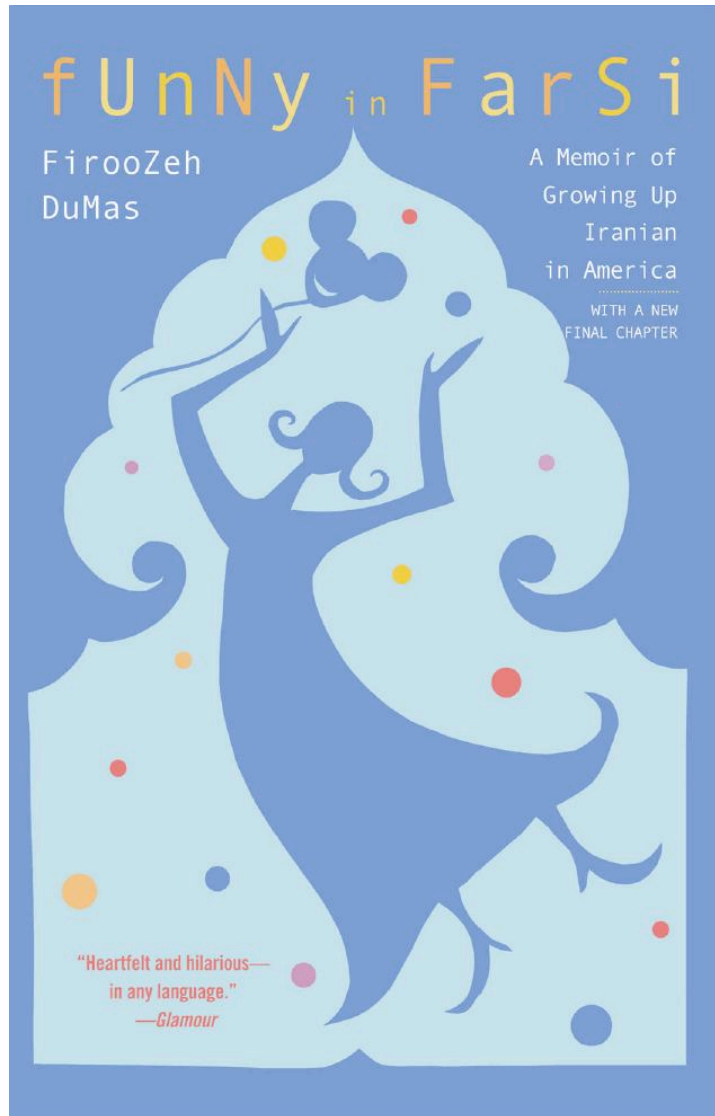


Funny in Farsi
A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America
By Firoozeh Dumas



Discussion Guide for Teachers and Book Clubs

Funny in Farsi contains 27 chapters, each addressing various themes for discussion. To begin a general discussion of the book, I suggest asking, "What chapter stands out for you and why?"

For those who prefer a chapter-by-chapter guide, I have prepared the following questions, followed by a set of general questions.

Leffingwell Elementary School

1. How do you react to someone who does not speak English? Do you make assumptions about their intelligence?
2. When Firoozeh's mother could not find Iran on the map, who do think was more embarrassed, Firoozeh or her mother?
3. Do you think geography matters? Why?

Hot Dogs and Wild Geese

1. In some cultures, it is considered very rude not to try new foods. Do you try new foods? Is there a polite way to refuse?
2. What foods in this culture might seem strange to a foreigner?

In the Gutter

1. What role does television play in shaping our hopes and dreams?
2. Have you ever quit something because you thought you were not good enough?

Save Me, Mickey

1. Have you ever been lost?
2. Have you ever been mistaken for someone from another country?
3. Have you ever assumed you know where someone is from based on his or her appearance?

Swoosh, Swoosh

1. Why did Nematollah feel compelled to try every American food item?
2. What do you think of the culture of weight loss in this country?
3. Why did Nematollah believe the ads on TV?

With a Little Help From My Friends

1. Do you have a world map in your house?
2. By studying geography from first grade, Iranian students learn that the world matters. Do you think the rest of the world matters?
3. Do you believe that kindness is never forgotten? If yes, give an example from your life.
4. How would this book be different if Firoozeh had only known America after the Iranian Revolution?

Bernice

1. When you see negative events in the news about another country, what assumptions, if any, do you make about the people of that country?
2. Imagine coming to America and only watching the news. What would you think of American society? Would you feel safe?

A Dozen Key Chains

1. Share your worst camp experience.
2. Do you think Firoozeh would have made friends if she had bathed?

You Can Call Me Al

1. Find Abadan on a map. Find the Caspian Sea. Trace the drive through Tehran, the capital of Iran. If you drive that distance from your hometown, where do you end up?
2. How do you define "vacation"?

Of Mosquitoes and Men

1. Do you like to travel to exotic locations or do you prefer the familiar?
2. Why do you think some people seek adventure when they travel while others seek only comfort?

The "F" Word

1. How do you react to someone with a difficult name?
2. Do you know an immigrant who changed his name to an American name?
3. On Ellis Island, many immigrants were given new anglicized versions of their last names. Discuss the pros and cons.

Waterloo

1. Has anxiety ever prevented you from learning something?
2. Do you think anyone at any age can learn anything or is there a time limit on certain skills?

America, Land of the Free

1. Do you automatically try all free samples?
2. We all know the expression "nothing is free." Is that true?

The Ham Amendment

1. Firoozeh's father believes that there are good and bad people in every religion. Do you agree?
2. How is religion used to divide people? How does it unite?

Treasure Island

1. Education changed Kazem's life. Do you think education can transform everyone?
2. Meeting Albert Einstein was the most exciting event in Kazem's life. If you could meet anyone, whom would you pick?

It's All Relatives

1. Family plays a huge role in the Iranian culture. What role does it play in the American culture?
2. In America, the role of family has changed over the years. Discuss the pros and cons.

Me and Bob Hope

1. What is it like to live in America and not celebrate Christmas?
2. Some non-Christians celebrate Christmas so their children do not feel left out. How do you feel about this?
3. Even though Christmas is a religious holiday, many believe that it has become a shopping extravaganza. What do you think?

I Ran and I Ran and I Ran

1. How did this chapter make you feel?
2. Were you surprised by the events?
3. Firoozeh wrote this story because nobody was seriously hurt. Do you think she would have written this if anyone had been seriously injured?

I-Raynians Need Not Apply

1. Even though America is the land of immigrants, immigrants do not necessarily feel welcome. During the 19th century, Irish immigrants were faced with signs in shop windows stating "N.I.N.A." meaning No Irish Need Apply. How do we treat immigrants now?
2. Who was the immigrant in your family?
3. Some people feel we should limit immigration. Do you agree?

Girls Just Wanna Have Funds

1. Firoozeh held a string of odd jobs to earn money. Have you ever had an odd job?
2. Firoozeh's Aunt Sedigeh did not have the educational opportunity that Firoozeh had. Do you think that educational opportunities for the next generation are improving in America?
3. Do you think that anyone who wants an education in America can obtain one?

Joyeuse Noelle

1. Firoozeh's summer in Paris turned out very differently than what she had imagined. Have your expectations of an event ever clashed with reality?
2. Noelle was very excited that Firoozeh was from California. What stereotypes might foreigners have of Californians? What has shaped their ideas?

The Wedding

1. Have you ever attended a wedding of people from different religions? If so, what was it like?
2. Some people believe that people should only marry within their own religion. Do you agree?
3. Firoozeh says that her mother became a "pioneer" by accepting Francois. Did you expect Firoozeh's mother to react that way?
4. Every culture has marriage traditions. What are yours?

I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet

1. Firoozeh described her china as having "bad karma." What do you think she meant by that?
2. Do you agree with what Firoozeh did with the china?

A Nose By Any Other Name

1. Firoozeh says Iranians are obsessed by noses. What is the obsession in America?
2. How do different cultures define beauty?
3. The librarian had learned to accept herself as she was. How different would we be if we accepted ourselves as we are? What would happen to the beauty or diet industry?

Judges Paid Off

1. What do you think of beauty pageants?
2. Firoozeh said she thought the beauty pageant should be replaced with a spelling bee. Do you think it would be any easier to lose in a spelling bee?

If I Were a Rich Man

1. Why do you think Firoozeh's father refuses to apologize for his mistakes?
2. What is the American dream? Has it changed over the years? Is it achievable?
3. How we define wealth in America?

Afterword: Kazem and Nazireh Jazayeri (available only in paperback)

1. Firoozeh still keeps in touch with her second grade teacher, Mrs. Sandberg. Why do think this is?
2. Firoozeh says that everybody has a story to tell and everybody's story counts. Do you agree?

General questions:

1. The theme of Funny in Farsi is "shared humanity." What does that mean to you?
2. How would our communities, both locally and globally, be different if we saw our commonalities before our differences?
3. Most Americans' perception of the Middle East is limited to what is shown on the evening news. Since only bad news is news, how does this effect the perception of Middle Eastern immigrants in this county?
4. Immigrants often do not try to be a part of American society, preferring instead to spend time with their own compatriots. What can be done to encourage assimilation?
5. Should immigrants speak their native language at home?
6. Firoozeh's book is funny without being mean. Discuss the humor found in television.