



Shadow Spinner *Study Guide*

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For the novel by Susan Fletcher



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INTERACTIVE

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Synopsis

Shadow Spinner is a fresh and unique version of the story of the Arabian Nights and the 1001 Tales, but it focuses on the story teller and the people around her rather than retelling her stories, as most version do.

The Sultan's wife has betrayed him with a lover, and so the Sultan has killed the two of them. Unwilling to be alone, but believing that all women are betrayers, the Sultan marries a new girl each day and kills her before morning. No young woman in his kindom is safe.

Then Shahrazad, the daughter of the Sultan's own vizier, volunteers to be his wife. In the morning, facing death, she asks the Sultan if she can tell her younger sister one last story before she dies. The Sultan agrees, and listens as Shahrazad tells her story to Dunyazad. But as Shahrazad sees the sun rising, she breaks off her story at a particularly exciting spot, promising to finish it the next night if she still lives. The Sultan, entertained and intrigued, grants Shahrazad her life for one more day. And so begins a tense and uncertain pattern—each night Shahrazad tells a story, but if it does not please the Sultan, death awaits.

But after two and a half years, Shahrazad is running out of stories. . . .

So *Shadow Spinner* begins with Marjan, a crippled orphan storyteller who goes with her Auntie Chava to sell jewelry to the few women who remain in the Sultan's harem. When the children gather around her, she naturally begins to tell them a story, just as she imagines her hero Shahrazad does. One of the listeners is Dunyazad, and when she realizes this is a story she has never heard, Marjan is summoned before Shahrazad and taken into the harem.

Once in the harem, Marjan learns the Sultan's mother is just as dangerous as the Sultan himself, and she wants Shahrazad, and all who help her, to fail and die. When Shahrazad tells Marjan's story to the Sultan, they discover the story is a favorite of the Sultan's from his childhood and he looks forward to hearing the *full* story again—but Marjan knows only the small bit she has already told Shahrazad! They must find the blind beggar who first told the story to Marjan—but it is death to leave the harem! As they search for a way out of their deathtrap, they each learn the power of stories . . . when there is truth in the tale.

Chapters 3–4

Vocabulary:

Context and multiple definitions:

Some words have more than one meaning and we must use the context of the sentence to determine which meaning the author intends to use. This can be particularly important when the word is being used as a metaphor or to create a picture for the reader. For instance, the word *peppering* can mean “sprinkling or seasoning as with the spice pepper,” “showering with shot or missiles,” “or hitting with rapid repeated blows.” However, in the sentence, “Uncle Eli came, hobbling toward us in the twilight, *peppering* us with questions. . .” none of the definitions above literally fits the context of the sentence. But by using the context of the sentence we can determine that the author is using the definition “showering with shot or missiles” to create a picture of Uncle Eli asking a lot questions very quickly.

In the exercises below, all of the definitions listed are true for the underlined words. Choose the *closest* correct meaning for the underlined word after looking at the context within the sentence.

1. _____ “Eli came hobbling toward us..”
 - a. fettering
 - b. hampering, impeding
 - c. moving along unsteadily or with difficulty

2. _____ “sent it clattering across the tiles..”
 - a. making a rattling sound
 - b. talking noisily or rapidly
 - c. moving or going with a clatter, to cause a clattering noise

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15. *Author techniques:* Remember, a *metaphor* is a figure of speech that creates a picture by saying something is something else (for example, “he became a lion when angry”). *Similes* are a figure of speech in which words such as *like* or *as* are used to more clearly indicate that a comparison is being made to something else (for example, “he fought like a lion”). *Anthropomorphism* [an-thro-po-mor-fism] is a technique by which an author gives human or animal characteristics to inanimate objects (for example, “the trees stretched their limbs in the warm, early morning sun”). After each of the following sentences from the book, fill in which technique the author used in that sentence.

- a. “I wanted to ask so many things I couldn’t squeeze them all into a single question; they spilled into a stream of questions that started small and flowed out to cover the rest of my life.”

Author technique: _____

- b. “I closed my nostrils from the inside—breathed through my mouth—but the revulsion crawled down my throat.”

Author technique: _____

- c. “. . . my mind was moving slowly, like wading through a pool of deep water.”

Author technique: _____

- d. “I felt as if I were blindfolded, groping my way through a maze of hidden traps.”

Author technique: _____

Dig Deeper:

16. In a general sense, *perspective* is the personal evaluation of the significance of something, generally based on a person’s own experiences or circumstances. The night after Marjan returns from the harem, she worries about the story of Julnar that Shahrazad was going to tell the Sultan: “It was a boring tale! I could

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see that now, though I had not before. It would never save her!” Why does Marjan have this perspective about her story? What does she say about the story the next morning after she learns that Shahrazad lives? What event changed her perspective?

17. In the “Lessons for Life and Storytelling” at the beginning of Chapter 3, Marjan says, “Sometimes, when you wish for a thing and then it comes true, you discover that maybe you didn’t think through your wish all the way to the end.” What did Marjan wish for at in the middle of Chapter 3 that came true? How did her perspective change when she realized her wish was about to come true? How did her perspective change again when she was taken into the harem?
18. What does Auntie Chava say about the tongue in Chapter 4? How does this compare with what the Bible says about the tongue in Psalm 34:13, Proverbs 10:19, and Proverbs 21:23?
19. When speaking of her words, Marjan says, “The trouble was, I couldn’t resist letting them out. They made a turmoil in my mouth until I did.” What does Marjan mean by this? Explain Marjan’s meaning. Where is her true turmoil? See Psalm 39:1–3. Compare and contrast this with Marjan’s situation.

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20. In Chapter 3, Auntie Chava says that she wants only a few things—what are they? How does this compare with what the Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:6–11?

Optional Activities:

1. Continue examining each “Lessons for Life and Storytelling” section throughout the book for foreshadowing.
2. In Chapter 3 we see Marjan’s opinions about several things change radically as she gains a different perspective of them. Read Matthew 6:31–34; 7:12. Discuss how these two passages relate to our perspective on how we should treat other people and worrying about the future.
3. Begin keeping track of things Marjan has strong ideas about, and then keep track of how her perspective changes later after she has more information.

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22. Marjan says that hate and hurt are a terrible vicious circle that will never stop until someone forgives. The Bible teaches us that hate blinds us, bitterness is from the devil, mercy and peace-loving are from God, and killing, fighting, and hate are from wrong and selfish motives.

Chapters 21–23

Vocabulary:

1. *cross out*—jovial, *replacement*—sarcasm
2. *cross out*—impenetrable, *replacement*—vulnerable
3. *cross out*—distraught, *replacement*—jubilant
4. *cross out*—obvious, *replacement*—subtle
5. *cross out*—determinedly, *replacement*—profusely
6. *cross out*—pleading, *replacement*—prostrate
7. *cross out*—brilliance, *replacement*—effrontery
8. *cross out*—propellant, *replacement*—dilemma
9. *cross out*—navigating, *replacement*—calculating
10. *cross out*—completed, *replacement*—intricate
11. *cross out*—surmised, *replacement*—conspired
12. *cross out*—auditorium, *replacement*—clamor

Questions:

1. Marjan takes the coins she received from Ayaz and hides them in the lentil jar for Farah to find. Marjan is leaving so she will no longer endanger the family. She does not want to wait until Farah's husband asks her to leave.
2. She remembers what Shahrazad said about framing dangerous truths inside of tales within tales.
3. Marjan tells them she is Shahrazad's slave who escaped from the harem and she has a story to tell the Sultan.
4. The throne room is huge with windows of colored glass, cloth-of-gold hangings, carved ceilings taller than full-grown trees. The Sultan is wearing black silk robes edged in sable, an enormous ruby in his turban, and a diamond studded dagger at his waist.
5. Marjan tells him that there is truth *in* her tale.
6. He wants to hear the story from Shahrazad.
7. He orders them all locked up in the dungeon. He says they have all conspired to deceive him, which is true.

Thinking About the Story:

8. Marjan dreams of Badar Basim with his bird's foot and how Jauharah massaged his foot to ease his pain. The dream may have several interpretations. Certainly, the fact that Badar Basim and Princess Jauharah were old and Badar Basim still has a bird's foot imply that some pain or injuries are permanent; and the fact that Princess Jauharah massages the foot and eases the pain demonstrates that one may help ease the pain of a permanent injury but not take it away. Whether Badar Basim represents the Sultan, and Princess Jauharah represents Shahrazad; or Badar Basim is Shahrazad and Princess Jauharah is the Sultan; or Badar Basim is Marjan with her injured foot; all may be valid interpretations by the student.
9. Marjan realizes that her mother had loved and cherished her and fought hard for her. She had been brave and protected Marjan the only way she could think of.