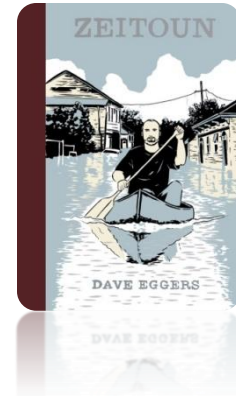


Title: Zeitoun
Author: Dave Eggers
Grade Level: 8th Grade



SUMMARY

In August of 2005 Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. This is a true story that tells about the experiences of a Muslim family, the Zeitouns, before, during, and after the storm. It is told from the perspective of Abdulrahman, the father, and Kathy, the mother, and brings to life the struggles that they encountered as a result of their religious beliefs. It is a story of hope and renewal that will both inspire and challenge your family as you talk about the actions of this family as well as of our government and its citizens-- both good and bad, in times of tragedy.

QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING

VOCABULARY

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

There are two kinds of vocabulary words in this book: some words are Arabic and meanings are usually given within the context of the story, and others are simply "new" words that you need to know to understand the story better.

You might talk about these words:

- lampara (pg. 3)
- wuduu (pg. 28)
- qur'an (pg. 37)
- abaya (pg. 40)
- hijab az (pg.46)
- bycatch (pg. 263)
- punitive (pg. 236)
- infrastructures (pg. 308)
- mandatory evacuation (pg. 53)

KEY IDEAS and THEMES

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. Abdulrahman Zeitoun (Zay-toon) was born in Syria, and although many of his family members still live there, it remains a very close family. Kathy is an American from a large family and still in touch with her siblings and mother. How are their families alike? How are they different? What events in the story show the differences and/or similarities? (Page 192)

2. Every family has its own traditions and habits. Within a family each individual has a place or a role that is important. Many things affect how a family member acts from culture to birth order to individual personalities. Why does Zeitoun behave the way he does in his marriage and family? Talk about his own father, his brother Mohammed (pages 110-116), his personality and values (page 8). How might the story be different if Zeitoun had made different choices (pages 236, 262)?
3. Kathy and Zeitoun come from very different backgrounds and religions. Kathy converted to Islam as an adult. What led Kathy to change religions? (page 61) How did her family feel about her conversion? (page 67) What events in this book show how their religion influenced their actions and the actions of the government officials toward them?
4. A symbol in literature can have many layers of meaning. It is a word or object (literal meaning) that stands for another idea. The canoe in this story can be considered a symbol. It has real significance to Zeitoun, especially. Find examples in the story that show how significant the canoe is to him and what it symbolizes.
5. When Zeitoun and his companions were arrested what was the evidence that the authorities used against them? (pages 212-217) Why would the government suspect them over someone else? (page 213, 308-309) On pages 262 and 263 we hear Zeitoun's thoughts about the US. According to him how has the US changed? What caused the change?
6. What is Zeitoun's attitude about life today? Give some examples of how Katrina and what happened to her family affected Kathy?

EXTRA ACTIVITIES

1. The religion of Islam is important in this book. Compare Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. If possible, go to a place of worship for all three religions.
2. At the end of the book is a listing of foundations and projects to help the rebuilding of New Orleans. Check them out. Become involved as a family in one of them.
3. Do a little research (internet, travel agency, friends) and find out the history of New Orleans. Why is it such a popular tourist destination? What is it like now?