

Discussion Questions for Ruth Tenzer Feldman's *Seven Stitches*

The Zarfati Family

While the disappearance of Meryem's mother (Jessa) is central in the story, how does the death of Aron Zarfati influence the lives and perspectives of Meryem, her grandmother (Ly-Tien), and her great-aunt (An-Chau)?

How does Meryem approach the Vietnamese heritage of Ly-Tien and An-Chau? In what ways does this differ from her approach to her Turkish heritage and to her family's African American background?

What roles do Rose play in the household?

What constitutes family in terms of biological connection, living arrangements, and social support?

Meryem's Motives

What impact did the last conversation with Jessa have on Meryem's response to Jessa's disappearance? Suppose Meryem had said "good-bye" and the dialogue between the two had ended well. What difference might that have made and Meryem's subsequent actions?

Suppose Ignatius had never come to live in Meryem's house. What difference might that have made of Meryem's support of the credit-tenant program?

What role does Bandon play in shaping Meryem's motives and actions? Suppose he was sexually attracted to Meryem. How would that have shaped the relationship?

If you could change one aspect of Meryem's personality, what would it be? How would that have changed the outcome of the story?

Post-quake Life in 2059

We are told that Portland fared better after the 2058 earthquake than it would have if the quake struck 20 or 30 years earlier. To what extent do you think that is so, for Portland in particular and for Oregon in general? Why?

Meryem is more concerned about water than electrical power. Is this merely a post-quake phenomenon or indicative of life in the coming decades?

How would you go about improving the availability and affordability of housing in Portland, or elsewhere in the United States now? What resources would you expect there might be that would be helpful 40 years from now?

Which aspects of 2059 Portland seem plausible to you? Which seem far-fetched? Why?

The Hashtag Era is long over by 2059, with social media replaced by both access for some to a wealth of information on individuals and tighter controls on privacy in general. What do you think will happen to social media over the next 40 years, given that we are now facing an age of fake news and the alleged manipulation of Facebook by Russia as a way to destabilize American society?

Life in 16th Century Istanbul

Izabel is petrified that she will be given total freedom, without the protection of owner. Does this seem justified during her time and place? What difference would it have been if Izabel lived in today's Istanbul? Or today's Portland?

Esther Handali reflects the mixed feelings that the Jew who had lived in Istanbul for centuries had with regard to Sephardic community of Jews who arrived during the Inquisition. What echoes to we find in present-day America? Or present-day Israel?

Why might Izabel think that Meryem would be responsible for the earthquake in the cemetery?

The sultan was responsible for the welfare of his people in that he ensured that meat was relatively affordable, that household fires were extinguished at night, and that poor (men at least) would have three-day's food and lodging. On the other hand, his rule was virtually absolute. How do we best structure society? What lessons can we draw from the Ottoman empire at its height in the 16th century?

The Writer's Craft

How much history should an author put in historical fiction? Would the story have been better without so many facts?

What are the pitfalls in crafting a story about the relatively near future?

Does the time travel mechanism work? What other mechanism might you have used?

The book's prologue describes Serakh's encounter with Izabel in 16th Century Istanbul. Is this an effective way to start *Seven Stitches*? Why? Why not? Is it important to understand Serakh's perspective before she encounters Meryem?