2012 Common Reading Program Discussion Guide
The Dressmaker of Khair Khana by Gayle Lemmon

INTRODUCTION
Using this discussion guide, you’ll find themes and questions related to the 2012 Common Reading book selection. The guide is organized thematically and some questions may be repeated as they fit with multiple themes. The hope is that this guide will be useful as you incorporate this book into your classes. All first-year students have a copy of The Dressmaker of Khair Khana and they are expected to read it prior to the start of their college career. Thank you for your partnership in promoting campus-wide conversations about this inspirational story and globally significant topic.

This guide can always be updated. If you develop additional questions, please send them to New Student and Family Programs (newstudentinfo@dso.ufl.edu) and we will update the guide.

a) Introductory Questions
   i) Who can summarize the book for us?
   ii) Why do you think this book was chosen as the CRP selection?
   iii) How is this book applicable to first-year students?

b) Big Picture Questions
   i) How does this book relate to your life? To American life in general?
   ii) What did you know about Afghanistan prior to reading Dressmaker? Did your understanding change after the reading the book?
   iii) What did you know about the Taliban prior to reading the book? Did you know Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were not the same? What did you learn that surprised you?
   iv) Does the book challenge your views on anything? If so, how?

c) Change and Transition
   i) What changes did the Sidiqi family experience?
   ii) The men in the Sidiqi family left the women and children when the Taliban came into power. What decisions would you make if you were the Sidiqis?
   iii) The citizens of Kabul were faced with a new reality. What kind of choices did they face? What kind of choices will you be facing in your transition to your new reality as a college student?
   iv) The Sidiqi Family kept as many parts of their past as they were able to and stayed in Kabul in order to maintain their community ties. You all left your previous community to join a new one here at UF. How will you remain a part of your old community while actively participating in your new community?
   v) The book takes the reader into a world that is very different from what we are used to. How do you feel that this example of a diverse culture relates to your journey to a new college campus?
   vi) The women formed their own community out of the need for social contact, as well as survival. What steps will you take to make connections here at UF? Which of the almost 1,000 student organizations will you consider joining? (resource: www.ideal.ufl.edu)
   vii) Within a year, Kamila was able to transform a living room operation into a large business. What are some goals that you may like to accomplish throughout your first year at UF? How will you reach your goals?
d) **Entrepreneurship**
   i) Kamila saw a need and opportunity in Kabul. Investing in this project meant she had to take risks. What kind of risks did she take? How are you investing in your own future? What types of investments are you going to make?
   ii) Kamila could not meet increased orders on her own. She had to work with others in her community. How are you going to network with others in your field?
   iii) Kamila implements a business model through her sewing. What practices made it successful from an entrepreneurial perspective, but also a communal perspective?
   iv) To produce the dresses, they had to plan ahead (access to materials, electricity to run the machines, staffing under curfew, etc.). How will you need to plan ahead in order to succeed? What kind of obstacles could you encounter? How will you overcome them? What resources does the university provide to help you succeed?
   v) As seen in the book, by supporting the entrepreneurial efforts of Kamila, there were many other positive benefits and side effects. What are some examples from the book of how economic and communal growth, health and educational initiatives, and quality of life can be improved through both foreign and domestic support?

e) **Family Structure and Community**
   i) What similarities do you see between the Sidiqi family and your own? What are the differences you see between your own and the Sidiqis?
   ii) The Sidiqi household became crowded with the addition of the sister’s business and the family and the school? How did the Sidiqi family react to their new living arrangements? How will your new living arrangements affect your routine?
   iii) Do you think Malika ever felt resentment towards Kamila for having to return home to her siblings when she had a family of her own? What does that say about the role of family in Afghani culture?
   iv) Has your family ever encountered a drastic change in circumstances and how did your family adapt to their new realities?
   v) How is the UF community similar or different from your home community? From the Khair Khana community?
   vi) Kamila is seen as a role model to many in her life. How did she manage to empower a community of people who had fallen to oppression during the Taliban regime?
   vii) Discuss Kamila’s motivation for starting her own dressmaking business. What were some of the reasons she felt that doing so would improve her family’s situation? The community’s? How can you strive to improve UF’s community?

f) **Education**
   i) How do you feel the education of the city changed prior to the Taliban entering the city, during their takeover and after their departure?
   ii) Would Kamila have been able to accomplish what she did without her father and the value he placed on education? Does that impact your view of your own educational opportunities?
   iii) How does your decision to attend The University of Florida relate to the importance Mr. Sidiqi placed on the education of his children? Respond to the quote “It is much better to earn a living with a pen than with power.” Is it possible to define the value of education?
iv) Due to the Taliban, many women in Kabul were separated from their opportunity to attend school. How would you feel if your chance at furthering your education was stalled, like the women in Khair Khana?

v) The women of Khair Khana were introduced to the new changes of the Taliban, specifically the banning of women from all employment and opportunity. How does Kamila’s tenacity and determination inspire you to grow in your own profession?

vi) Does Kamila’s passion about teaching and helping others relate to you? How so?

vii) In the first few weeks following the occupation of the Taliban in Kabul, the women of the city begin to gather together to exchange books. How do books help bring people together and facilitate relationships? Think of modern day examples.

g) Gender

i) Compare and contrast the gender roles in Kabul pre-Taliban to during the Taliban rule.

ii) How do the residents learn of the new rules? Were there explicit rules and how did intimidation play a role?

iii) How did the Taliban’s presence change the roles in the family? What about Kamila’s role?

iv) Kamila states that “money is power for women” (p. 225). In societies that traditionally limit women’s roles, how does a woman’s access to resources change her role in the family? Provide examples from Dressmaker or from your life.

v) Does gender play a role in economic success? If yes, how so?

vi) Many aid programs are aimed or limited to women. Can you think of some reasons why?

vii) As the book states, Muslim women were required to travel with a mahram (male relative). Imagine how your life would change if you could not go outside without an escort or you couldn’t interact with members of the opposite gender. How would this suppression of basic communication affect you? Would you be more or less likely to succeed? If less, how would you overcome this?

viii) The Taliban were portrayed as brutal and strict men. Contrastingly, Kamila’s brothers were portrayed as self-sacrificing and supportive of women. How do these two very different portrayals of Afghani men shape (or reshape) your opinion of Middle Eastern men? Explain.

h) Religion

i) What role does faith play in Kamila’s journey throughout the book? Does it follow mainstream stereotypes?

ii) Religion plays a large role in the foundation of this conflict. Why do you think that religion can have a powerful impact on such a large area?

iii) The Taliban created the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice. How do you feel an office like that would be responded to at UF? In America?

iv) It is a wide misconception that the relationship between Islam and women prevented them from having any sort of rights. Does Kamila provide any examples that the Taliban, not religion, is the oppressor of women’s rights?

v) Religion can be seen in all aspects of this book, from the chadri that women have to wear to the prayers they do throughout the day. Do you think that Kamila and her sisters experienced any religious turmoil when they started the business? Explain.
j) **Values and Goals**
   i) Throughout the book a few moral values, such as commitment and loyalty, are shown. What values do you have and how will you continue to live by these values during your time at UF?
   
   ii) Despite the hardships that Kamila faced, she never left her property or family. Everything she did was to help the community, her family, and herself. These factors could also be considered as her motivation. During your time here at UF you may be challenged in many ways. What will be your motivation that helps you reach your goals?
   
   iii) Kamila makes a point to pursue her passion despite the risks it took to do so. Do you think you would be willing to make the same decisions she did to pursue your passion?
   
   iv) Malika was one of the most significant mentors to Kamila. How would you describe the relationship of a mentor/mentee? What is the significance of finding a mentor in reaching your goals?
   
   v) When Malika gave Kamila a list of orders to follow in order to stay safe, Kamila promised to abide by them. However, when she was on the bus without a mahram she was confronted by a Taliban soldier and was threatened to be thrown in jail. Would you have kept the promise to Malika or risk everything in order to help others?

j) **Other**
   i) During the Taliban rule, *Titanic* was an underground phenomenon, giving rise to new hairstyles, bootleg copies of the film, and more. Why do you think people were willing to risk punishment for this movie, when they avoided any other kind of confrontation?
   
   ii) In every large organization you have the people who are working in the face of restrictions and the people who are setting the rules from above based on what they believe to be true. How does this affect those in the middle, i.e. Kamila running a business or the Taliban family on the street who bought dresses from Kamila?
   
   iii) Can you think of an instance where the rules made by those in charge did not reflect the reality of the situation? What effect did this have on behavior, morale, participation, and/or outcome?
   
   iv) Was the reality in Khair Khana consistent with Taliban ideology of how the town functioned? What ideologies permeate college, more specifically UF, and how do you think they will affect your UF career?
   
   v) Often in society we are bombarded by injustices on a daily basis and have both an instinctive and rational reaction. One example in the book is Malika witnessing a woman being beaten in the doctor’s office. What types of visible injustices are present in society, and what is the general response to them by society as a whole?

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