

# BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

**Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the  
discussion companion for  
Mohsin Hamid's novel**

## **THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST**

Published by Anchor Canada, a division of Random House of Canada Limited, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-385-66345-8

Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has been prepared and written by Adina Herbert and Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker, and writer. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

### **Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for The Reluctant Fundamentalist**

**ISBN 10: 1-897082-54-1**

**ISBN 13: 978-1897082546**

This guide reflects the perspective of the Bookclub-in-a-Box team and is the sole property of Bookclub-in-a-Box.

**© 2008 BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX (1ST EDITION)**

**© 2011 BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX (2ND EDITION)**

Unauthorized reproduction of this book or its contents for republication in whole or in part is strictly prohibited.

# BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

## Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

<b>READERS AND LEADERS GUIDE</b> . . . . .	2	Transformations	. . . . .	39
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>		<b>WRITING STYLE AND STRUCTURE</b>		
Novel Quickline	. . . . .	First Person Narrative	. . . . .	45
Keys to the Novel	. . . . .	Understatement	. . . . .	47
Author Information	. . . . .	Tension and Foreshadowing		48
<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>		<b>SYMBOLS, IMAGES, METAPHORS</b>		
Pakistan	. . . . .	Hunting Imagery	. . . . .	51
Pakistan and America	. . . . .	The Five Senses	. . . . .	53
September 11, 2001	. . . . .	Changez's Beard	. . . . .	55
<b>CHARACTERIZATION</b>		Popular References	. . . . .	56
Changez	. . . . .	<b>LAST THOUGHTS</b>		
Erica	. . . . .	The Novel's Relevance	. . . . .	59
The American Tourist	. . . . .	What Happens Next?	. . . . .	60
Jim	. . . . .	Suggested Beginnings	. . . . .	61
Juan-Bautista	. . . . .	<b>FROM THE NOVEL (QUOTES)</b>	. . . . .	65
<b>FOCUS POINTS AND THEMES</b>		<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	. . . . .	73
Racial Profiling	. . . . .			
Fundamentalism	. . . . .			
Cross Cultural Misunderstanding	. . . . .			
Erica and America	. . . . .			
Janissaries	. . . . .			
Two Worlds	. . . . .			

# BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

## Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

### **You Choose What to Use.**

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

## How to Begin

**Relax and look forward to enjoying your book club.**

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind-the-scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more "hands on" support, feel free to contact us.

## What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

**INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.**

## **Do We Need to Agree?**

**THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.**

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences. You can contact us via our website ([www.bookclubinabox.com](http://www.bookclubinabox.com)), by email ([info@bookclubinabox.com](mailto:info@bookclubinabox.com)), or by phone (1-866-578-5571). We would love to hear from you.

## **Discussion Starters**

There are as many ways to begin a bookclub discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

- Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)
- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote (not necessarily from the novel).
- Discuss the historical information of the novel (not applicable to all novels).
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

**Above All, Enjoy Yourselves**

# **INTRODUCTION**

**Novel Quickline**

**Keys to the Novel**

**Author Information**

# INTRODUCTION

## Novel Quickline

*You seem worried. Do not be; this burly fellow is merely our waiter, and there is no need to reach under your jacket, I assume to grasp your wallet, as we will pay him later, when we are done. (p.5)*

A certain haze and suspicion hangs over the scene as we open on Old Anarkali, a neighborhood in Lahore, Pakistan, where our protagonist Changez meets an American tourist. We know that tension lurks under the surface of their acquaintance. We are never told what exactly; we are only left to surmise that something odd is happening. We are first transported, through Changez's one-sided conversation with his guest, back in time to New York City where our narrator attended university and worked for a prestigious valuation firm.

---

notes

Through his narratives, we learn how he was once enamored with the city and fell in love with a wealthy but troubled American woman named Erica. But along with stories of grandeur, excitement, and success, another plot-line lurks. Changez reveals to his companion, and to us, his troubles as a Pakistani in America, especially after September 11, 2001. We listen as Changez describes his transformation from a loving, moderate American young man, to a disillusioned Muslim who feels the weight of racial intolerance and American military aggression. Hamid builds the tension slowly throughout the novel, hinting that Changez is not telling us the whole story of his involvement in extremist activities. We also never hear the direct voice of the American, though it becomes clear to us that he may not be a tourist, and has perhaps been sent purposefully to seek out Changez. We never discover what happens and are left at the climax to forge our own imaginary conclusions.

## Keys to the Novel

### One Voice Narration

- Hamid gives us Changez, a Pakistani man with a story to tell, and he allows Changez to tell his tale without interruption or alternative perspectives. We hear only his side, though we suspect that others might see things differently, namely the American who is dining with him.
- Hamid chose this form of narration to give Changez, a Pakistani male, the chance to speak, instead of reiterating the American narrative we hear so often in the media. He feels this technique is more personal for the reader, requiring us to imagine how others would respond to Changez's comments and recollections, and how the American would respond to his story.



**Thanks for previewing this  
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in  
print or PDF format, just visit:**

**[www.bookclubinabox.com/discussion-guides](http://www.bookclubinabox.com/discussion-guides)**