

ASO READER'S NOTES

TITLE:	Moon at Nine
AUTHOR:	Deborah Ellis
PUBLISHER:	Allen & Unwin
PRICE:	NZ \$21.99
ISBN:	9781743319413
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AUDIENCE:	14-17
READER:	Carolyn Walsh, Allen & Unwin

SYNOPSIS

Moon at Nine is a riveting novel, based on real-life events in post-Shah Iran. The time is 1988 and Iran is a deeply conservative society, where life is tightly controlled. The narrator, fifteen-year-old Farrin, attends a school for gifted girls but has always kept to herself for fear that 'outsiders' might discover her mother's pro-Shah activities.

But when Farrin meets Sadira, a strong, talented, brave young woman, they become friends and gradually fall in love – something that is forbidden in their culture and punishable by death.

Despite their efforts to keep their love secret they are discovered, arrested and sent to the notorious Evin Prison, where they are separated. Farrin is thrown into a cell, forced to confess and sentenced to be hanged. But as she awaits her fate she discovers that her family has bribed the right people to get her out and sent their chauffeur to drive her across the border to Afghanistan. Told that the same has been organised for Sadira, Farrin gratefully agrees to the escape plan but soon discovers that she has been tricked. Sadira has indeed been hanged and Farrin's parents – furious with her for bringing disgrace upon them – have agreed to a marriage between their daughter and the chauffeur, thereby sentencing her to a grim future in an Afghani refugee camp.

The novel ends with Farrin writing of her plans to escape, followed by Deborah Ellis' confirmation that the real-life Farrin escaped to Canada.

AUTHOR STYLE

Deborah Ellis, herself gay, handles with huge tact and insight the struggles that confront the LGBT community in Iran. Yes, *Moon at Nine* is a book about same-sex attraction but it is

most certainly not a book about sex. It is about two people who genuinely love each other in the face of tremendous obstacles, and it is also about friendship, family, and the existence of hope even in the most repressive of societies.

Ellis writes simply and directly in the third person past tense, with frequent dialogue drawing out characters, and detail-rich scenes giving a strong sense of the beauty and richness of Iranian culture as well as the harsh realities of life under Ayatollah Khomeini. Although fiction, the book is very much grounded in fact, making this story all the more powerful and thought-provoking.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

At the beginning of the summer of 2013, I met a woman who told me about her early years in Iran – a story that eventually became this book. She wanted to share her experience, but she needed to keep her identity secret to protect the members of her family who are still in Iran. Some of the details have been changed, but his story is essentially hers...

‘Iran is not the only nation that still imposes a death sentence on lesbians and gays. Others, as of the end of 2013, are Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, the Republic of Sudan, Yemen, and parts of Nigeria and Somalia. In more than seventy countries spread over Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean, being gay or lesbian is a criminal act. Some countries impose fines. Others sentence lesbians and gays to hard labour or time in prison. In Barbados and Sierra Leone, gays and lesbians can be sentenced to life in prison. In Dominica, they are forced into psychiatric ‘treatment,’ and in the Malaysia, they can be whipped...

‘As a proud, gay woman, I am honoured to have been entrusted with the story of Farrin and Sadira, and I hope that the real-life Farrin will be able to spend the rest of her life with whatever peace and happiness she is able to find.’

Deborah Ellis, 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Ellis has achieved international acclaim with her courageous and dramatic books that give Western readers a glimpse into the plight of children in developing countries. She has won the Governor General's Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the University of California's Middle East Book Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award and the Vicky Metcalf Award. A long-time feminist and anti-war activist, she is best known for *The Parvana Trilogy*, which has been published around the world in

seventeen languages, with more than a million dollars in royalties donated to Street Kids International and to Women for Women, an organization that supports health and education projects in Afghanistan. In 2006, Deb was named to the Order of Ontario.

EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

Themes include: being gay in a repressive society, family dynamics, Iranian history and culture, acceptance, courage.

Suggestions for discussion and classroom activities:

- Before reading the book, discuss what the class knows about Iran. What would they expect the typical day of an Iranian teenager to be like? What challenges might they face? Have students write a reflection about how their perceptions have changed after finishing the book.
- In groups, have students complete a webquest on Iran, focusing on such topics as geographical features, social organisation, politics, religion, and recent history.
- Why do you think the author opens the novel with the Demon Hunters of the Desert story? Does this ‘story-within-a-story’ set a mood for the events that are about to unfold? After reading the story discuss who you think the ‘demons’ are?
- Farrin dislikes her parents but, at the same time, shares some traits with them. What might these traits be and what events in the story illustrate this? Read to the end of Part One and discuss whether Farrin is a ‘likeable’ character.
- Read Chapter Three and describe the events from Ahmad’s point-of-view. How do you think he sees Farrin in light of how she treats him?
- Read the extract on page 96, beginning ‘We can’t waste time,’ said Farrin...’ until the end of the chapter. In what way is this scene a turning point in the story? What was Farrin’s attitude before this point and how does she change after it?
- Farrin’s grandfather believes that there is a lot more to life than safety and comfort, p 110. How does this attitude differ from Farrin’s parents? Who do you think is the happier?
- How does the extract from Hafez, p 118, relate to what later happens to Farrin and Sadira?

- In what way does Principal Kobra's visit to Farrin's cell change your opinion of the older woman?
- Prepare a mock-trial for Farrin and Sadira, with students taking the role of prosecutor or defence. Present both sides of the case as fully as you can, using information from the story.
- Compare and contrast Farrin and Sadira's experience in 1988 Iran with the experience of teenage gay people in Australia today.
- Write a letter or email to Deborah Ellis telling her what you have learnt from reading *Moon at Nine*.

Moon at Nine. by Hadley Jungst. Loading Hadley's other lessons. Moon at Nine. 15. Premium resource. This tile is part of a premium resource. In order to access and share it with your students, you must purchase it first in our marketplace. Get resource. Moon at Nine takes place in 1980's Iran and concentrates on the love between two schoolgirls- Farrin and Sadira. The war between Iran and Iraq has come to an end, but the people of Iran are not free, and Farrin and Sadira face devastating consequences if they are discovered by the Revolutionary Guard. Honestly, I expected Moon at Nine to be a dramatic and politically-charged version of the formulaic YA lesbian romance that I'm so familiar with. And to a degree it is. Deborah Ellis. Home. Moon at nine, p.1. Moon at Nine, page 1. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15. Also by Deborah ELLIS. Parvana. Parvana's Journey. Parvana's Promise. Shauzia.