

1. Does the description of a young person's life and possibilities circa 1991 resonate with you? Is that life possible now?
2. On their first "date," Jack and Mim talk about *l'heure bleue*. In what ways does that evocative phrase permeate the novel?
3. Do you think Mim lacks empathy in her years in NYC? How does she compare with Kyra in this regard?
4. What do all those liverwurst sandwiches come to symbolize in Mim's nature? Why does Kyra cry about the liverwurst? Why was Mim pleased that she cried?
5. Was Kyra and Mim's relationship responsible for Carl's suicide? Kyra writes that she thinks she married Roy out of penance for Carl's death, because she didn't believe in such a thing as a happy marriage; in what other ways does Carl's life and death influence both Kyra and Mim's futures?
6. Mim wonders if Kyra has been running from something in her life, and realizes she really knows little about her: "What has she been seeking for so long, at such a distance? What has she found here, or in any of these places, that she couldn't find at home?" What would you answer?
7. In her letters, Kyra contrasts her life with Mim's: "[You've] made a whole life for yourself, while I've been telling myself some fantasy." Is Kyra in fact—as Mim suspects Kyra's supervisor in Jajalabad thinks—just "one more meddling American, good intentions that just cause trouble"?
8. Mim often expresses her belief that she is not brave. Is she brave, or simply foolish, to do what she does to find Kyra? Knowing the story of how Mim comes to adopt Sean, do you think she is more like Kyra than she seems?
9. The two sides of Asim's face, one marred by injury and the other unmarked, might reflect facets of Asim's complexity; Mim never quite knows when he's teasing or if he is consciously "performing" for Westerners. What are the possible ways of interpreting his reply when, in response to Mim's telling him he saved her life, he tells her, "It is my job"?
10. Both Asim and Rafiq have been grievously affected by the wars in their homeland yet are gracious to Mim and Roy and risk much in the search for Kyra. Do you think their actions go beyond the Pashtunwali hospitality code? Beyond Roy's payments?
11. Do you think the U.S. policy against negotiating with kidnappers or paying ransom for kidnapped Americans is a good policy? What other possibilities are there?
12. How do you interpret the spectral final image of the book?