

English as second language

Linguistics, Language



Insight Text Guide Ruth Thomas The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif Najaf Mazari & Robert Hillman © Insight Publications 2010 Copyright Insight Publications 2009 First published in 2009 by Insight Publications Pty Ltd ABN 57 005 102 983 219 Glenhuntly Road Elsternwick VIC 3185 Australia Tel: +61 3 9523 0044 Fax: +61 3 9523 2044 Email:.au www.insightpublications.com.au Copying for educational purposes The Australian Copyright Act 1968 (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act. For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact: Copyright Agency Limited Level 19, 157 Liverpool Street Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: +61 2 9394 7600 Fax: +61 2 9394 7601 Email:.au Copying for other purposes Except as permitted under the Act (for example, any fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review) no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All inquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above. National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry: Thomas, Ruth, 1980– Najaf Mazari and Robert Hillman's The rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif : insight text guide / Ruth Thomas. 1st ed. 9781921411038 (pbk.) Insight text guide. Bibliography.

For secondary school age. Mazari, Najaf, 1971– Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif. 325. 2109581 Printed in Australia by Hyde Park Press © Insight Publications 2010 contents Character map Overview About the author Synopsis Character

summaries iv 1 1 2 3 Background & context Genre, structure & language Chapter-by-chapter analysis Characters & relationships Themes, ideas & values Different interpretations Questions & answers Sample answer References & reading 6 11 16 32 40 51 57 65 68 © Insight Publications 2010

iv CHARACTER MAP Hakima Najaf's wife, whom he marries when both are 27; stays in Pakistan before joining Najaf in Australia. other of husband and wife admires Maria Najaf and Hakima's daughter; a baby when she is taken to Pakistan; travels to Australia with Hakima to be reunited with her father. Gorg Ali Mazari Najaf's eldest brother; killed by a sniper during a battle between the Russians and the mujahedin. brothers father of Abdul Ali Mazari Becomes head of the family after Gorg Ali is killed. respects Najaf Mazari Afghani rugmaker who ? ees con? ict in his homeland and arrives in Australia as a refugee. helps Robin Closest friend in Australia. helps brothers frustrated by Colin Rug dealer; a close friend in Australia.

Rosal Ali Mazari Younger, irresponsible brother; killed in a rocket explosion. brothers © Insight Publications 2010 1 OVERVIEW About the authors Najaf Mazari was born in 1971 in the small village of Shar Shar in northern Afghanistan. At 12 years of age, after his family had moved to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, Najaf became an apprentice rugmaker – an occupation that suited his propensity for both creativity and hard work. Seeing through his apprenticeship and aspiring to make beautiful rugs gave the young Najaf some respite from the horror of the incessant con? ct around him. In 2001, Najaf ? ed Afghanistan. The Taliban had occupied the north of the country and were carrying out genocide against men in Mazar-e-Sharif. Najaf was captured, tortured and narrowly escaped death before his family paid a

people smuggler to convey him out of the country. Najaf reluctantly left his family and his beloved homeland, and embarked on a dangerous journey to Australia. He was detained in the Woomera Detention Centre while his application for refugee status was processed. He then settled in Melbourne, where he opened a rug shop.

In 2006, Najaf's wife and daughter were given permission by the Australian government to join him in Australia. He was granted Australian citizenship in 2007. *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* is Najaf's memoir of living with conflict and of enduring its far-reaching consequences. Melbourne-based fiction writer and biographer Robert Hillman helps Najaf tell his story. Hillman's collaboration with Najaf on *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* continues his literary preoccupation with the hardships and triumphs of ordinary people caught up in war and political unrest.

Hillman's 2007 biography, *My Life as a Traitor*, tells the story of Zarha Ghahramani, a young Iranian woman who was imprisoned, tortured and persecuted after participating in student protests at Tehran University. Hillman, who met Zarha while he was working as a journalist in Iran, supported her through her settlement as a refugee in Australia. His articles about refugees have been published in a number of newspapers and magazines, including *The New York Times* and *The Australian*. *My Life as a Traitor* has been published in the United States and the United Kingdom and was nominated for the 2008 Insight Publications 2010 2 Prime Minister's Literary Award. Like *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif*, *Mazar-e-Sharif My Life as a Traitor* contains thoughtful meditations on Zarha's culture, which ensures that the book provides something more than a grim and shocking

portrayal of war and suffering. Hillman's autobiography, *The Boy in the Green Suit* (2003), a memoir about his own journey through the Middle East as a teenager, won the 2005 National Biography Prize. The text was praised for its artfulness, evocation of restlessness, humour and optimism. His fiction has also been widely praised.

It includes *A Life of Days* (1988), *The Hour of Disguise* (1990), *Writing Sparrow Hill* (1996) and *The Deepest Part of the Lake* (2001). An experienced teacher and university lecturer, Hillman also writes educational texts for secondary-school audiences. Synopsis Najaf's life begins in the small village of Shar Shar in northern Afghanistan, a place of hilly pastures, sunshine, snow, and bright green grass in spring. Najaf works as a shepherd boy, responsible for protecting the family's flock from wolves. Going to school comes second to his shepherding duties.

When Najaf is eight his father dies and the family (now headed by Najaf's much-loved eldest brother, Gorg Ali) moves north to the city of Mazar-e-Sharif. Gorg Ali arranges an apprenticeship for Najaf when he turns 12 and is no longer, within Afghani culture, a boy; he is a young man ready to learn a trade. Najaf is first apprenticed to a blacksmith, but finds the work tedious and deeply unsatisfying. He secretly abandons his job to begin an apprenticeship under a master rugmaker. He quickly comes to love rugmaking and his passion for it offers a sanctuary from the war that rages around him.

His work, however, does not shield him from the reality of conflict. War inflicts terrible personal costs on young Najaf. Gorg Ali is gunned down in a battle between Russian and mujahedin soldiers in Shar Shar. Najaf's younger

brother, Rosal Ali, is killed when a mortar shell explodes over the family home in the middle of the night. Najaf is injured in the attack and his apprenticeship jeopardised because the wound to his leg takes many months to heal. Najaf is just 13 when he endures these terrible experiences. © Insight Publications 2010 3

Although he is a civilian and remains staunchly opposed to violence throughout his life, conflict continues to impact upon Najaf during adulthood. In 1998, the Taliban invade Mazar-e-Sharif. The Taliban massacre men and boys of Najaf's Hazara clan and then capture and torture any survivors they find. Now married with a baby daughter, Najaf is kidnapped and whipped with cables. However, to his and his family's disbelief, he is released. Knowing he will not be so lucky a second time, Najaf escapes Afghanistan, putting his life in the hands of a people smuggler.

The dangerous journey takes him through Afghanistan to Pakistan, then on to Indonesia and towards Australia on a condemnable boat. The boat eventually becomes stranded on Ashmore Reef, north of Australia. Najaf, along with other asylum seekers on board, is rescued by the Australian navy and conveyed to Woomera Detention Centre. Here, Najaf endures the ordeal of waiting, his fate resting with officials who will decide whether he has valid reason to stay in Australia. After months of detainment, Najaf is granted refugee status. He begins a life in Melbourne and, through hard work and hope, establishes a rug-selling business.

More good news comes when Najaf is granted Permanent Residency Status, which not only means he can stay in Australia for good, but also that his wife, Hakima, and daughter, Maria, can move to Australia and join him in

Melbourne. Overwhelmed by happiness and appreciation of the seemingly impossible things that have happened, Najaf thanks God for his good fortune and promises to remember and honour those Afghans who were not able to survive the country's violent conflicts. Character summaries Najaf Mazari The central character and narrator. The narrator is in his mid 30s when he tells his story.

Najaf is a young boy, teenager and young man in the story. He is less than eight years old when working as a shepherd boy in Shar Shar and about 12 when he begins his rugmaking apprenticeship. © Insight Publications 2010 4 Gorg Ali Najaf's much admired eldest brother. In keeping with Afghani tradition, Gorg Ali takes over as head of the family when Najaf's father dies. Gorg Ali is a gentle man who believes that fighting is senseless and futile. He works as a tinsmith and a beekeeper. Gorg Ali is killed by a stray bullet when he goes to tend the family beehives near Shar Shar. Abdul Ali Najaf's second-eldest brother.

When Gorg Ali dies, Abdul Ali becomes the head of the family and bears the financial burden that results from the mortar attack on the family's home. Abdul Ali is more hot-headed than Gorg Ali and subjects Najaf to several blows about the head when he discovers Najaf has secretly quit his job as a blacksmith. Abdul Ali is a butcher. Rosal Ali Najaf's younger brother. Rosal Ali is hopelessly irresponsible, mischievous and cheeky. He often provokes Najaf's anger. Najaf, as the older brother, lectures Rosal Ali. Rosal Ali is killed when the Mazari's home is destroyed in the mortar attack.

Najaf's mother An important member of the Mazari family. Najaf's mother has the final say on her son's marriage plans and rules the inside of the

house in partnership with the head of the family. In turn, Najaf is respectful to his mother and often acts protectively towards her. Najaf sees his mother (and the rest of his family) on a number of occasions after leaving Afghanistan, when he undertakes rug-buying trips to Pakistan. Hakima Najaf's wife. She is the same age as Najaf; they marry at the age of 27. Hakima stays in Pakistan between 2001, when Najaf leaves Afghanistan, and 2006, when she is granted permission by the Australian government to join Najaf in Australia. © Insight Publications 2010

5 Maria Najaf and Hakima's daughter. Maria is just a baby when Najaf sends her and Hakima to safety in Pakistan. She is reunited with her father five years later. Robin An Australian woman who becomes Najaf's closest friend in Australia. She helps Najaf learn English and holds a party to celebrate his achievements in his new home. Colin A Melbourne rug dealer who helps Najaf with his business. He drives Najaf to the airport to be reunited with Hakima and Maria. © Insight Publications 2010

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT Conflict in Afghanistan Najaf's homeland has a long history of violent and bitter armed conflict that spans centuries. This is partly due to the region's geography. As Najaf says, 'just look at the location of Afghanistan on a map of Asia and the Middle East, with neighbours and near-neighbours like Russia, Pakistan and Iran' (p. 34). The area has enormous geographical and strategic significance. Foreign powers, from the ancient Macedonians through to the colonial British and communist Russians, have striven to secure territory or allies there, with little regard for the desires of the local people.

Anger towards foreign invaders is evident in Najaf's observation that Afghanistan and Afghans were 'supposed to fit into the political strategies

of the powerful' (p. 35). Afghanis tried to fight off invaders, and also fought each other as various tribal and ethnic groups each attempted to stake out their own parcels of territory. In the period from 1973 to 2000, several separate conflicts took place in Afghanistan, including civil wars (armed conflict between opposing parties within one country) and international wars (armed conflict between two or more countries). This particularly turbulent period commenced when Mohammad Daoud Khan assumed power in a military coup. Daoud failed to deliver much-needed economic and social reform and was ultimately overthrown in a second coup in 1978. This uprising was led by the Marxist Nur Mohammad Taraki, who implemented a liberal and socialist agenda, replacing religious and traditional laws with secular, Marxist ones. Taraki was soon ousted by Hafizullah Amin, who was in turn replaced in yet another coup by Babrak Karmal.

Najaf recalls that, by the time he was 13, Afghanistan had been ruled by four presidents, all of whom represented the Communist Party (pp. 149–50). Karmal was supported by the Russian government, or controlled by it, as Najaf suggests (p. 11), and continued to implement Marxist reforms. While many people in the cities either approved of these changes or were ambivalent about them, many traditional and conservative Afghanis in villages and rural areas were bitterly opposed. Opposition groups, known as mujahedin ('holy Muslim warrior'), began to form. The © Insight Publications 2010