

Discussion Questions for Maureen Freely's *Enlightenment*

- 1) By the end of the book, the story of the “trunk murder” has been told or not told by many different sources. Did you become frustrated with any of the storytellers for lying or misleading, or with any of the characters for not figuring out the truth? Do you think there was a trunk murder? If you do, who do you think perpetrated it? Were there multiple parties to blame? Who do you think was the victim, or victims?
- 2) In many ways, Freely depicts M and Jeannie as parallel characters—both lived in Istanbul as teenagers during a time of political and social turmoil, both loved Sinan, both are journalists, and by the end of the novel, both have disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Why do you think Freely chose to use two very similar characters to narrate the novel? Do you trust one woman’s account more than the other? In what ways did their similar experiences in Istanbul and beyond affect each woman in different ways?
- 3) Should the reader direct blame for the events of 1971 and their devastating effects on the lives of Jeannie, Sinan, and the others? If so, to whom? Is Dutch Harding the novel’s villain, or is it someone else (if anyone)?
- 4) In her afterword, Suna refers to numerous inaccuracies and misrepresentations found in M’s narrative. Did you believe her, or is she merely attempting to deflect and discredit M’s claims against her and her friends? If you believe Suna, do her accusations impact your reading of M’s narrative, and in what way?
- 5) Discuss the nature of Jeannie’s marriage to Sinan—do you think that true love is possible between two people who hide so much from each other? Jeannie almost willfully refuses to believe the worst about her husband, despite evidence—do you think she is being naïve and letting her love cloud her judgment, or do you think her love for Sinan is what makes her loyal to an innocent man others are willing to betray? How is love portrayed in other relationships in the novel?
- 6) Why do you think William Wakefield interferes in his daughter’s life? Is it out of national duty or parental concern? Or is there some other reason?
- 7) Dutch Harding and Jeannie find themselves competing for Sinan’s devotion. How does Sinan split his attention between the two? What broader ideological or political forces do the two represent to him? What does the way he divides his loyalty between them say about his politics and about him as a person?
- 8) At the end of the novel, has “enlightenment” been reached by any of the characters? In what ways? Why do you think author chose this title for the book?
- 9) What is M’s attitude toward Turkey and Turkish politics? How do her feelings differ from Jeannie’s, both when she first arrives in Istanbul as a teenager and when she returns years later? Do you think the author shares the characters’ opinions?

- 10) How does the past inform the present throughout the novel? Have any of the characters learned from their pasts? In what ways are the novel's characters haunted by the past?
- 11) What does it mean to be Turkish in the novel? What does it mean to be American? How and why do the values of East and West clash throughout the novel? Do any of the American characters ever fully receive insider status in Turkey, or are they always outsiders in Istanbul society?
- 12) What do you think M's attitude toward Sinan is at the time of her writing? Do you think she genuinely despairs at his plight? Or, given the way he ultimately betrayed her, does she somehow relish his predicament? How is M's reaction to Sinan's purported involvement in the "trunk murder" tempered by her former affection for him? Does she ever condemn him outright? Does she ever even really believe that he did it? How does this influence M's testimony later on?
- 13) When Jeannie and Suna are reunited in 2000, Jeannie notes that over time, the focus of their debates has switched from cultural imperialism to childcare. What might this say about how the characters have changed? What might this say about how the world has changed?
- 14) Do you think M is being a responsible journalist by telling this story? Apart from her extensive use of Jeannie's diaries, what events (if any) in M's personal narrative could she not possibly have seen or heard firsthand? Did you ever find her language and use of sources misleading? What does this in turn reveal about the limits of responsible journalism?