



PLAYING ATARI WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN

Jennifer Roy

Eleven-year-old Ali's simple life of comics, football and video games is turned upside down when Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait. The U.S. and their allies launch Operation Desert Storm to force him out. As a result, Ali and his family are compelled to endure bombings, food shortages and constant fear. *Playing Atari with Saddam Hussein* is a story about how war changed one boy's destiny forever and brought him face to face at the UN trial, with the man who caused him so much hardship, Saddam Hussein. Jennifer Roy explores the themes of war, survival and justice in this heartrending novel. The questions below are designed to enhance your discussion of *Playing Atari with Saddam Hussein*.

Questions for Discussion

1. 'My attitude is, why spend time memorizing dates and doing maths problems when the world is crumbling around us?' Is Ali right? What might be the benefit of continuing school during wartime?
2. On their way home from the market, Ali and his family see a little girl asking for help, but ignore her. Do you think they should have helped her? Why or why not?
3. 'This is a new kind of war... Thanks to modern technology, this war has become a group event.' How do you think technology has changed the way we see war? Do you think it makes us pay more attention, or less?
4. Ali uses his imagination to help him stay calm during the war. Is there anything you do when you feel scared?
5. Shireen is often pulled away from her brothers' activities because she is a girl. Is that fair? How would you divide up the chores?
6. Ali's brother Ahmed changes during the war from a fun prankster to being 'whiny and needy'. How does Ali change? Would it be possible for him to change back?
7. When Ali's mother burns his comic books, Ali lashes out in an 'explosion of anger'. Is he really just angry about his comic books? What other factors might make him mad?

8. Ali talks about Saddam Hussein's Iraq versus a 'true' Iraq. What might a 'true' Iraq look like? To what extent do you agree with Ali?
9. 'In the comics, the good guys always win. In real life? It's not always so obvious who the good guys are.' Many people – including Ali's father – are conscripted into Saddam Hussein's army. Does this make them the 'bad guys'? If America is dropping the bombs, does this make them the heroes or the villains, or something in between?
10. Omar and Umar often use their power to bully or intimidate Ali. What kind of impact might the war have had on them? Would it be worse or better than Ali's experience? To what extent do you think this accounts for their behaviour?