

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time

Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin
Penguin Books, 2007

Guiding Questions:

Read the following before you begin the book and refer to it occasionally as you are reading. The questions, names and terms are meant to help you identify important people and places to know and issues to think about.. It's a good idea to mark page numbers beside names and stories or to flag them in your book as you read.

Create a "book club" with your friends over a glass of iced tea (!) this summer or on-line to share your information and ideas about the book Ask a teacher, staff member or parent to join your group. Comment about the parts of the book you liked or about Greg, his encounters with new friends in Pakistan and Afghanistan or his adventures.

We encourage parents to read the book also and join us in the summer and next fall in discussions. Visit the St. Francis website for more information.

Education and Culture

1. What is the role of women in rural Pakistani and Afghan culture?
 - a. Why do you think this role is a part of their culture?
 - b. Do you think this role is changing? In what ways? Who decides what the role should be? Consider changes urged by the governments of these countries, by Westerners such as Mortenson, by the warlords and village leaders that Mortenson meets, and by the Taliban. Mark some pages in the book that address these issues).
2. What are the roles of women in the US culture? Why do you think these roles exist in the US? Are they changing? Are your education goals and opportunities different from those of your mother when she was your age? Or your grandmother? If there are differences, what caused them?
3. How is the opportunity to be educated so important to the roles that men and women play in society?
4. Mortenson and others believe that if women have an education at least through 5th grade, they will be able to bring positive changes to the lives of everyone in their community. Find 2 places in the book that address this belief (mark the page numbers).
5. If a person can't read or doesn't have access to a free press, her only source of information is from a political leader, through local and national laws, billboards, controlled radio or TV, trucks with loudspeakers that drive through neighborhoods. How will that affect how someone might think and act over a life-time?

6. Mortenson learned many lessons from the Pakistani and Afghan people who helped him. Mark several sections (pages) in the book that describe what lessons Mortenson learned.
7. What important role did the sharing of tea play in the social and economic life of the people of this area of Pakistan?
8. Compare Baltistan, American and Spanish (or French, Italian, early Roman) hospitality customs.
9. Think about cultural knowledge and sensitivity as you read the book: foods, relationships of men and women and parents and children, use of drugs in a society (tobacco, hashish, cocaine, alcohol, caffeine, opium/heroin); clothing, greetings, buying and selling goods.
10. Compare statistics on literacy, poverty, life expectancy, types of government; girls vs. boys educational opportunities, mortality rates from malnutrition; transportation, access to technology, and medical care in several nations, including Tanzania, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the US and 2 or 4 of the following: Iraq, Iran, Israel, Mexico or your country of origin. Look on-line at government or United Nations sites for information. The CIA site also has information.

Personal Stories and Personal Integrity

1. In what ways was Greg Mortenson a very responsible young man before his near death in the Himalayas?
In what ways was he self-centered and making poor decisions in the early years?
2. How did Mortenson's parents influence him?
How did Tara's parents influence her life?
How did Jahan, Tahira and Twaha's parents influence them? Give specific examples.
How do you think you will influence your own children some day?
3. Greg Mortenson and Tara Bishop married after knowing each other for only six days.
Where did they meet?
How did Tara's background fit with Greg's?
What did the clothing that Mortenson wore to the meeting say about his life-style?
What was the importance of the keynote speaker?
What other very significant event happen to Mortenson at this meeting?
4. Why do you think that Mortenson was not overly bothered by his own poverty (lack of good car, places to live, clothing; exposure to tobacco smoke, poor food, danger)? Give examples from the beginning of the book, in Pakistan and Afghanistan and later, after he was able to start the Central Asia Institute.

5. What skills and personal characteristics enabled Mortenson to accomplish so much in his work; what skills did he lack that impeded his work?
6. Why did Haji Ali give 12 rams to Mehdi (1/2 of the wealth of Korphe?) What does this incident tell us about people's integrity (or lack of)?
7. Who were the 15 Bangladeshi girls on the plane with M as he flew from Dacca to Calcutta? Try to find out more about child slavery today in the world.

The role of religion in our lives:

1. Building schools for girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan was supported by many in those countries and opposed by others. Since those for and against were Muslims, explain why there were differences in their religious beliefs about what was right? Is that true within other religions? Give examples.
2. Quote on p. 239: "In times of war, you often hear leaders—Christian, Jewish, and Muslim—saying, 'God is on our side.' But that isn't true. In war, God is on the side of refugees, widows, and orphans." Comment.
3. Why did Mortenson, a Christian, want to learn how to pray in the manner of a Sunni Muslim and later as a Shiite Muslim? Explain why you approve or disapprove of this?
4. Why did Mortenson pay his respects to Mother Teresa who had just died in Calcutta? Why did he respect her?
5. What role does faith and prayer play in people's lives?
6. What is the value of ritual in religious faith? Give examples of Muslim and Christian or other rituals.
7. Give examples of how several individuals acted upon their religious beliefs.
8. Give examples of several individuals who did not act in accordance with their religious beliefs.
9. What two fatwas were declared against Mortenson, by whom and how were they reversed?

War and Violence

1. Compare civil disobedience (Thoreau and Ghandi) with violent opposition (bombs, assassinations, beheadings, beatings, destruction of schools)?

2. Describe Mortenson's experience in Waziristan (current Taliban stronghold) (Chapter 13) and his experience in Badakshan and the Wakhan Corridor (Chapter 23)?
3. Why is it so difficult for the US to combat terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan? What are the dangers to the US? Mortenson was torn between supporting the US invasion of Afghanistan and the Taliban area and trying to convince the US Gov't that aid and education was the answer. What does that say about difficult decisions today in the US government's efforts to combat terrorism?
4. Follow the events in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the news during the summer.
5. How does M. eventually get to Faizabad, the largest city in the Badkshan Province of northeastern Afghanistan and from there to the remote villages of the Kirghiz horsemen?

Language and Geography

1. Find cognates that show the linkage of Southeast Asian words with those of the romance languages. What are the historical roots of English and the romance language and the Urdu, Pashtu and Arabic languages?
2. Locate and mark or write down 5 passages of 2-5 sentences each in which the author Relin uses such descriptive language that you can "feel" or "see" the emotions or images that the author is trying to convey to you and note the page numbers. (Find these examples in various chapters throughout the book)
3. Make or find a time-line that shows the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan, India.
4. Make or find a time-line that shows the political upheaval in the area 1996-2009.
5. William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" is quoted p. 276. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,/the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/The ceremony of innocence is drowned;/The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity." When, where and why did the world famous mountaineer Jon Krakauer (Out of Thin Air) use that quote to introduce M at a fund-raiser?
6. How have mountaineers impacted the mountains and towns in the Himalayan ranges and the people of those areas?
7. How does the altitude and terrain impact the lives of the people who live there?
8. Why do people climb mountains?
9. Each chapter begins with the quotation. Think about the quote as you read the chapter.

Government

1. Describe the recent spread of Wahhabi madrassas in Pakistan and other Islamic countries. Why are many Americans concerned that the gas we use in our cars and the importation of foods and other materials from far away (“eat local movement”) support these extremist “schools?”
2. How was the Kargil Conflict with India involved in Musharraf coming to power in Pakistan? Why did Musharraf fall from favor?
3. Find articles by Ahmed Rashid (expert journalist on area) to supplement Three Cups of Tea.
4. What was the connection between the assassination of Ahmed Shah Massoud by the Taliban and the attack on the Twin Towers in the “village called New York?”
5. Describe the meeting of M with the Kirghiz nomads from Afghanistan.
6. How did McCown, Baig, Syed Abbas and the Pakistan military react to Mortenson after 9-11 occurred? P. 254
7. Check out the speech by Syed Abbas on p. 257. Be prepared to discuss it.
8. Compare the cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Do we have cities or areas within our cities that serve a similar purpose?
9. Who is Mullah Omar and what is his connection with al Qaida? p. 264
10. Describe M’s interrogation by the American Intelligence Officers in Pakistan and his subsequent actions.
11. Why are there refugees from Afghanistan?
12. What happened to schools after Kabul was attacked by the Northern Alliance and American forces to drive out the Taliban? (e.g. Shahabudeen High School)
13. Explain how Afghans studying medicine here impeded by the Taliban? (destroyed books with illustrations, etc)
14. What is the purpose of Taliban rules and what is the impact on society? (forbid music, art, TV, movies, burned all books except the Koran, forbid kite flying (a national sport), forbid education for girls, forbid female doctors and nurses from practicing medicine, forbid women from receiving medical care from a male health care professional; women could not leave their home unless fully covered by a burkha and accompanied by a male relative)

15. What are three reasons that American aid was not reaching the people in Afghanistan?
16. A CA Congressman challenged Mortenson: “Building schools for kids is just fine and dandy, but our primary need as a nation now is security. Without security, what does all this matter?” How did Mortenson answer this question? How would you answer it?
17. Why did Mortenson turn down a military offer of \$2.2 million to build 100 schools?
18. Page 297 “The enemy is ignorance” Explain why M. believes this and give 3 examples from the book to support his belief.

Philanthropy

1. Why was Mortenson reluctant to spend money on staff and facilities in the US? How did that reluctance create problems for him and for the CAI?
2. Give 2 or 3 examples of the problems that Mortenson encountered as he searched for a major donor. (e.g. typewritten “cold” letters, older lady in Atlanta, wealthy contractor in Banff)
3. How did Mortenson attempt to educate himself on fund-raising and development?
4. If you became aware of an important need in your community or elsewhere in the world, list at least 5 skills and 5 personal character traits that would help you address that need.
5. What lessons did M learn from the BARRA (Bangladesh Rural Reconstruction Association)? P. 234
6. Why, in 2000, was M so tired, fearful and angry?
7. What skills and character traits would a spouse need who was married to a dedicated hands-on philanthropist like M? How might his work affect his children?
8. Can one person make a difference? Explain several ways in which one person can make a difference and project how you might do so while in high school and in the future.
9. Why did the women in the village after 9-11 give eggs to M?

Important people or things to know:

(Suggestion: write a few words to identify the following and their importance, including the page #s for those who appear only a few times in the book). Work with a friend.)

Greg Mortenson	Osama bin Laden
Dempsey and Jerene Mortenson	Julia Bergman
Tara Bishop	Central Asia Institute
Amira Eliana Mortenson	Krista Mortenson
Barry and Lila Bishop	Taliban
Mouzafer Ali	Urdu
Haji Ali	Mullah Omar
Sakina (Haji's wife)	Kathy Gannon
Jean Hoerni	Representative Mary Bono
Jahan	Supreme Council of Ayatollahs in Iran
Sir Edmund Hillary	Red velvet box
George McCowan	Mohammed Aslam Khan
Jennifer Wilson	Shakeela Khan
Changzi	Saudi sheikhs
Faisal Baig	Parade Magazine
Hussein	
Tahira	
Ghulam Parvi	
Suleman Minhas	

Areas to know and find on a map:

Waziristan	Gasherbrum 1 and 2
Pakistan	K2 (Karakorum 2)
India	Khyber Pass
Kashmir	Hindi Kush
China	Badakshan and the Wakhan Corridor
Afghanistan	Baltoro
Baltistan	Tanzania
Karakoram Range	Waziristan
Braldu River	

Cities/Villages

Peshawar	Kargil	Askole
Rawalpindi	Skardu	Korphe
Islamabad	Jalalabad	Kabul

Important Terms:

yak	Silk Road	cornice
Gorah	nurmadhar	colossi
ibex	kafir	caravan
altitude sickness	gulch	cairn

fatwa
Madrassas
Kalashnikovs
Wahhabism
Khan
infidel
Pashto

rancid
Sahib
Allah Akbhar
Salaam Alaaikum
Inshallah
rupee
angrezi

hazzan
muezzin
Shahada
yak
theocracy
jihad (2 meanings)

Food and Clothing

Paiju Cha
Mar
Burkha
Shalwar kamiz
Apricot and cherry trees

General essay questions:

Follow Fahira and Johan's lives as they develop throughout the book.

What happens to a society when wealth and power concentrates in the hands of a relatively few people and most live lives of privation?

To what "inner mountain" had Mortenson committed himself?

Write a thoughtful and balanced analysis illustrating the difficulties that the governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States face in trying to bring peace to this area of Southwest Asia? Support your essay with specific examples. Include places and names of those involved.

Freedom of the press: give examples of how it can influence personal and governmental decisions and what happens when it is restricted.