

Pumpkinflowers

Timeline of the Israeli-Lebanese Conflict

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Discussion Questions



*Discussion Guide Created in Partnership
with the Jewish Book Council*

TIMELINE OF THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE CONFLICT

- 1968 The PLO begins an ongoing practice of conducting raids on northern Israel from Lebanon.
- 1970 The PLO relocates its base to Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan. From headquarters in Beirut, they turn southern Lebanon into “Fatahland,” recruiting new members from the over three hundred thousand Palestinians living in PLO-run camps in the area.
- 1975 The Lebanese Civil War, a conflict that runs until 1990, begins between warring Lebanese factions of Christians, Muslims, Druze, and others. Israel backs the Christian group of Maronites starting in 1976.
- 1978 In response to the Coastal Road Massacre, an attack by a Fatah cell from Lebanon that killed thirty-eight civilians along the road from Haifa to Tel Aviv, Israel launches Operation Litani, a military incursion into Lebanon aimed at driving back the PLO and curbing the attacks on Israel’s northern communities. The operation succeeds in pushing the PLO north of the Litani River and leaves Israel occupying southern Lebanon with aid from

the South Lebanese Army, a Lebanese Christian militia. Israel pulls out of Lebanon later in the year, leaving the SLA to fight on its behalf.

- 1982 The first Lebanon War, or Operation Peace in the Galilee, begins on June 6, 1982. Israel invades Lebanon and lays siege to Beirut after repeated attacks by the PLO, including the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador to the UK. They successfully drive the PLO out of Lebanon and try to install a pro-Israeli Christian government under Bachir Gemayel. The United States brokers a peace deal in August. Shortly after his election, Gemayel is assassinated, Israel reoccupies West Beirut, and Israeli-allied Lebanese Christian militias perpetrate the Sabra and Shatila massacres, in which hundreds of Palestinians and Lebanese Shiite Muslims were killed at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.
- 1983–1985 Israel remains in the south of Lebanon. In the vacuum left by the departure of the PLO, Hezbollah is started by clerics with support from Iran to fight the Israeli occupation and continues to grow in strength and popularity as more independent militias continue to join together.
- 1985 Israel withdraws from all but a twelve-mile security zone along the Lebanese-Israeli border to protect northern Israel from rockets and other attacks. Hezbollah issues an open letter calling for violent uprisings against Israeli forces in the security zone.

- 1985–2000 Israel remains in the security zone until 2000. These years see continued attacks by guerilla Hezbollah groups and responses by the IDF, ongoing incidents and operations that result in casualties on both sides.
- 1993 Yitzchak Rabin and Yasser Arafat sign the Oslo Accords, working toward a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- 1994 The Pumpkin Incident puts the Pumpkin outpost in the news. This attack on the Pumpkin is staged in order to be filmed as propaganda and widely disseminated, resulting in the image of a win for Hezbollah and a humiliation for Israel. This is possibly the first such instance of video being used as a tool of war.
- 1995 Yitzchak Rabin is assassinated.
- 1997 Two Israeli helicopters collide over Israel while transporting soldiers into Lebanon, killing seventy-three soldiers.
- 1997 The Four Mothers movement forms to protest Israel's involvement in Lebanon. Considered possibly the most successful protest movement in Israel, the Four Mothers are able to sway Israeli public opinion toward a pullout.
- 2000 Ehud Barak is elected prime minister and, in May, fulfills his campaign promise to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Note: the questions below contain spoilers!

1. How has reading this book affected your view of Israel? Of the IDF? Has it changed your thoughts on Israel's present day situation or on other ongoing conflicts in the Middle East?
2. The title of the book refers to Israeli army jargon that gave pretty names to harsh elements of a military world, names that "seem intended to bestow beauty on ugliness and allow soldiers distance from the things they might have to describe" (page 24). Why do you think the author chose this as the title? How did it affect you as a reader both before you read the book and after?
3. Readiness with Dawn is the beginning of a soldier's day, both a ritual and, as Friedman writes, a state of mind. What is Readiness with Dawn and why do you think the book opens with it? Does it play a larger role in the book as a whole? What does Readiness with Dawn mean for the author and for the reader?

4. The author is an *oleh* (immigrant), having made aliyah from Canada just a year or two before his army service. How does his Canadian background impact the story, his own experience, and his telling of it?

5. The first part of the book is told through the eyes of Avi, a soldier who was killed in the helicopter crash. Why do you think the author chose Avi as his narrator? Avi's fate is not revealed until the end of part 1 when the actual crash occurs, a narrative technique that is employed for each of the soldiers that we meet throughout the book. Why do you think Friedman chose to write the book in that way? What is the effect of that technique?

6. What is the significance of the Pumpkin Incident described in chapter 9 (page 30)? Why did this incident—one in which nothing actually happened militarily and that had fewer casualties than other incidents—generate so much attention? What impact did it have going forward?

7. The women of the Four Mothers movement, among them Bruria and Orna, took on the generals of the IDF and Israeli society as a whole. In what ways were they like their matriarchal namesakes from the Bible? How did the culture of the army define their struggle? How does the structure of the book impact your understanding of the Four Mothers?

8. What is the role of the kibbutz movement in this book? What is its relationship to the Four Mothers movement? What is the link between the decline of the kibbutz and the conflict in Lebanon, and how does this affect the soldiers?

9. The chapter that details an incident in which the author narrowly escapes a roadside bomb begins with the words, “The Pumpkin finally introduced itself to me on the night Natalie was going to get undressed” (page 128), describing a popular Israeli television show. Why do you think this detail is included? How did the frequent mix of mundaneness and violence interplay for you as a reader?

10. Unlike other wars in Israel’s history, this period of the security zone in Lebanon is an unnamed war, one that barely registers in the collective Israeli memory. Why does it matter that this war remains unnamed? What does that mean for the soldiers who fought at the outposts in South Lebanon? What is the impact of being able to stand in safety at the site of a battle (page 179), and does the author’s trip back to the hill in Lebanon carry any of the same weight?

11. Ilya, a soldier from Avi’s platoon, says that one of his most lasting memories is of doing dishes (page 29), and Friedman’s platoon leader tells an interviewer that he returned to his base after losing his entire platoon in the helicopter crash by taking a bus (page 112). Do you think these are displays of the lack of ideology that the author describes among his fellow soldiers (page 125) or something else? Why do you think the Lebanon conflict bred an attitude of “feigned indifference” (page 180) among the soldiers?

12. Friedman writes that “the fulcrum of Israel’s recent history can be found in those months in the spring, summer, and early fall of that year” (page 177). Why does he feel that short period was so influential? Do you agree with his statement?

13. On his trip back to Lebanon, the author writes, “When I went back to the Pumpkin in the fall of 2002 I thought it was a conclusion . . . But I sensed then, and know now, that I was wrong . . . The outpost was the beginning. Its end was still the beginning . . . The present day might still be the beginning” (page 222). What does he mean by this?

14. What effect did the author’s trip back to Lebanon have on the narrative of the book? Did it alter your reading in any way? If the book had ended on page 190, before the return trip, would that have changed how you view the book or what you see as the focus of the book?

15. Which sentences, paragraphs, moments, or events stayed with you after you finished reading *Pumpkinflowers*? Why did those instances or thoughts stand out for you?

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