

Naguib Mahfouz—*Midaq Alley*

Characters:

- Kirsha, a café owner with an eye for young boys
- Uncle Kamil, good-hearted, bachelor sweets-seller
- Abbas, the barber who wants to get married
- Salim Alwan, the wealthy businessman
- Dr. Booshy, the dentist
- Sanker, the waiter at Kirsha's café
- Sheikh Darwish, the old poet and former English teacher
- Radwan Husseiny, a landlord who failed his al-Azhar exams, yet is revered for his high degree of education
- Hussein Kirsha, son of café owner who works for the British
- Saniya Afify, widowed landlady who desires to remarry
- Um Hamida, the neighborhood matchmaker and bath attendant
- Hamida, a beautiful young woman who dreams of a better life
- Husniya, the husband-beating bakeress
- Jaada, Husniya's husband
- Zaita, the cripple maker
- Ibrahim Farhat, a politician
- Ibrahim Faraj, a pimp

Questions:

1. What role does the café play in the neighborhood? Who goes there? Why? When?
2. What role does religion play in the lives of the main characters? What form does religiosity take?
3. How do disagreements in the ally get resolved?
4. Stereotypical Western descriptions of Middle Eastern women portray them as weak and submissive. How do Mahfouz's female characters conform to or contrast with such stereotypes.
5. What is the significance of marriage? Who does one marry? What must be done before a marriage can take place? How much say do the prospective bride and groom have in choosing a mate?
6. What role do the British play in the novel?
7. How do the characters view the government? What significance does the government have in their daily lives?
8. The issue of class looms large in the novel. What defines class? What classes are represented in the novel?
9. How is sexuality handled in the novel? Were you surprised by the frankness with which Mahfouz discussed certain aspects of sexuality?
10. Describe manifestations of modernization in the novel—do these changes have a positive, negative, or neutral impact on the characters?