

E4 IB – Part I Summer Reading: *Women of Sand and Myrrh* by Hanan Al Shaykh

Part 1: Please read each of the women’s stories in their entirety; Suha’s section is completed as the final chapter. Skip the other three to finish this section THEN go back for the others. Tamer’s section should be read LAST. Read twice, first for comprehension then again for **annotations**.

Part II: As you read, annotate the following **motifs** to help you develop choices for your oral if this has not yet been completed, or as the source for the HL essay:

1. Nature imagery, including animals, gardens, the desert and water – **green ink/pencil**
2. Money and power – **yellow ink or pencil- record annotation in black**
3. Text where gender roles are defined – **pink ink/pencil – record in black**
4. Freedom vs confinement and restraint – *look at houses, walls, cages...* **underline in red and annotate in same**

You will have a reading comprehension test on the second rotation and a peer check of annotations. Groups will prepare interactive oral presentations on the **global/cultural issues** that Al Shaykh critiques.

Part III: Journal Entries

- Write a minimum of 350 words in each response to the prompts and/or questions below. Only respond to **FOUR**.
 - Each response must include textual evidence using MLA format. These quotations should be “snippets;” you are text blending not quoting long passages. Use only parts of the passages that are germane to your position. You must follow formal mechanics rules. Example: write in 3rd person, present tense, use proper punctuation for all quotations. Also you must be keenly aware of YOUR writing style for each entry: vary sentence beginnings, vary sentence lengths, use elevated register, etc.
 - All entries HAND WRITTEN into a composition book.
1. In Arab culture, spaces are gendered. Your annotations should help you see this. What are the **spaces** where the women experience a measure of freedom, voice, or empowerment? Why do you think that they feel it in these spaces?
 2. How does Al-Shaykh’s portrayal of men characterize Arab patriarchal society? Choose two or three of the male characters to explain your answer. Is American patriarchy different from Arab? Is so, how?
 3. Each woman tells her story in her own unique voice. Compare how the same events are experienced differently by the different women. What changes in perspective occur within the reader as each event is retold?
 4. What does the existence of the prostitute/good wife, whore/virgin dichotomy say about the status and condition of women in this society?
 5. How does Suzanne connect to the other women? Consider the “forbidden” behaviors she engages in. Where is her value? What is her value to her husband? To Maaz? What did you think of her decision to stay in the place that seems much like Saudi Arabia but is never identified as such?

6. According to literary critic Dalya Abudi, Arab women's literature abounds in works that depict mother-daughter relationships but intimate bonding between mothers and daughters is rare. Compare and contrast the relationship between Nur and her mother and Tamr and hers. Consider discussing how each woman seems to "adopt" another mother figure who may or may not be biologically related.
7. What is "freedom" to each of the women?
8. Moha Kahf's work, analyzing English translations of Arab women writers, shows how the roles that Arab women are allowed to play in English translation are limited to three: **victim, escapee, or pawn**. To what extent is this assertion true in *Women of Sand and Myrrh*? Does any character differ?

Part IV. After you have finished reading and annotating the novel, locate four excerpts, one for each narrator, that addresses one of these cultural/global issues. Please try to vary the issue for each woman.

1. **Culture, identity, community:** consider how Tamr's biological mother is an outsider despite shared religious identity; how Filipino and other non-Arabs are treated; how the desert is tied to identity.
2. **Beliefs, values and education:** because IB asks you to consider tensions that arise when there are conflicts of beliefs, values and ethics, you may want to consider Suha and Tamr again, or examine why someone like Suzanne, who differs, WANTS to stay. **Do** research Saudi Arabia's strict and unique practice of Islam: Wahhabism. Consider that Suha is a Shi'a Muslim.
3. **Politics, power and justice:** Consider what women are allowed and not allowed to do in each of the parallel stories. In a country that criminalizes homosexuality, examine Nur's mother's defense of her affair with Suha. Research the consequences for adultery in Saudi Arabia.
4. **Art, creativity and the imagination:** there are some interesting perspectives on art in the novel. Research Islam's perspective on the visual arts. What art is in the novel? Al Shaykh's first novel was widely banned in the Middle East; this one as well. What does that suggest about art and a woman's voice?
5. **Science, technology, and the environment:** this novel offers some interesting perspectives and imagery as Saudi Arabia embraces Western technology and encounters Western diseases. What links are there between technology and Western colonialism? You might find interesting comparisons to the next novel: *Handmaid's Tale*.