

Project Possibilities

1. Can one person make a difference? In this book, the answer is both yes and no. Explore Marina Nemat's experience of individual people making a difference and those same people (or others) being *unable* to make a difference. What factors seem to determine a person's ability to create change? Ultimately, how far does she decide one person's power can reach?

2. By the end of the book, Marina Nemat has discovered a few things she knows for sure.

I had to find some goodness in this pain or it was going to drown me (214)

God gives life and He is the only one who can take it away (237)

Life is precious, don't let go, live again (241)

Violence is pointless (245-246)

If the world had paid attention earlier...many innocent lives would have been saved. But the world had remained silent, partly because witnesses like me had been afraid to speak up (301).

Explore her path toward discovering any one of those beliefs. What ideas, experiences, or events in the book led her to that lesson? Then consider this question: Each of these ideas seems universally accepted. If so, why are they also so frequently violated?

3. Although this book is Marina Nemat's personal story, her experience should be important to anyone who cares about human rights, particularly freedom from torture and degrading treatment; freedom of opinion and the right to peaceful assembly and association. If you were asked to speak to a student group about the average citizen's responsibility to protect these rights, which aspects of Marina Nemat's story might you use to support your position? (Note: You'll have to decide what your position is. What do you personally believe is the average person's responsibility in this area?)
4. It is difficult to understand why Marina Nemat is kept in prison for so long or what outcome the government expects from her imprisonment. What seems to be the purpose of Evin prison—punishment, rehabilitation, or something else? What *should* be purpose of prisons?
5. Many stories of people who survived trauma emphasize that person's amazing resilience and ability to overcome the aftereffects of traumatic experiences. But not all survivor stories end this way and clearly not all survivors would say their stories have happy endings. Which message would you say Marina Nemat has chosen?
6. How does Nemat's story respond to the question of how one person can make a difference? What does her experience say about the possibilities and limitations on individual action?

7. What is the relationship between human suffering and individual development? Use specific examples from Prisoner of Tehran to develop your response.
8. Should we consider Nemat's story a call to action or a story of individual healing? Explain your response using specific examples from her memoir.
9. What individual strengths are evident in Marina's early life that become essential tools for her later survival? Discuss Marina's individual development over the course of the novel: where does she begin and where does she end?

A Paper Assignment (with or without research?) and a few activities/assignments to build this.

Personal: Consider the act of writing in your own life. What has it meant or accomplished? Where and how is writing presented in Nemat's memoir? OR write a "memoir" – Making the private public. . . .

Experiential: Visit, Volunteer at Canadian Centre for the Victims of Torture (or another organization that helps marginalized people) and reflect on your experience and how it connects to Nemat's book.

Research: What aspect of Nemat's story are you still wanting to understand more fully? Select an area to do more contextual research to support a deeper grasp of the issues and events that surround Nemat's experience.