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*For Book Clubs: WHEN THE APRICOTS BLOOM*

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Please find below suggested discussion starters that your group could use when reading *When the Apricots Bloom*. I'm based in Melbourne, Australia, and if we can find a compatible time, I'd be very happy to join your discussion via Skype, Zoom, or other platforms.

1. *When the Apricots Bloom* takes place in Baghdad, during the rule of the dictator Saddam Hussein, at a time when Western sanctions kept Iraq virtually cut off from the rest of the world. What did you learn about life for ordinary Iraqis, like Huda, that surprised you?
2. If you were in Huda's situation, how would you have responded to the orders from the secret police? Should Huda have felt guilty about any of her actions? What about the money she pockets when Ally buys a lemon tree, or her threats later to the nurseryman?
3. Compared to Huda, how does Rania handle pressure from the regime? To what extent does her family's status protect her, or is that just an illusion? Rania is also an artist—a respected role in Iraqi society. How does this compare to prevailing attitudes toward artists in your own culture?
4. Ally is desperate to find a connection with her mother. Given the restrictions she's under, do you think her subterfuge is justified, or is her search for clues to her mother's past irresponsible? What would you have done differently? Were you surprised by her mother's history?
5. Huda's husband, Abdul Amir, plays a key role in the book. To what extent does he influence Huda's decisions? At the end of the novel, how do you feel about his character? How did your perception of him alter over time?
6. The starting point for *When the Apricots Bloom* was inspired by the author's own experiences, when she was befriended by a woman working as an informant for Saddam Hussein's secret police. Did her portrayal of life in Baghdad seem realistic to you? How believable was the relationship between the three women?
7. The novel alternates between Huda's, Rania's, and Ally's points of view. How are their worldviews and attitudes reflected in their narrative styles? Do you prefer one to the other? How would the novel have differed if it had been told from only one perspective?
8. In the acknowledgments, the author references the debate over "our own voices." To what extent do you agree or disagree with her statements? Do you think it was appropriate for her to write from the point of view of an Iraqi woman?
9. How did you feel about the way *When the Apricots Bloom* ended? Did this epilogue strengthen the book, or would it have had more impact if it ended with the previous chapter?