

BORDERLINE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Discussion Topics

- 1) The title *Borderline* has many meanings in the novel. There is the literal border between the United States and Canada; the personal border between Sami and his father; the cultural border between Sami's community and the rest of his neighbours.
 - a) Discuss the various lines and boundaries we all make between ourselves and others, both as individuals and as communities.
 - b) What are some tactics we can use to resolve the conflicts these lines create, between ourselves as individuals, and between religious, racial, economic and other divides?
- 2) Sami's Dad is seen differently by Sami, his mom, the FBI and others. All of us are seen differently by different people.
 - a) Are we treated differently by others based on our actions or the way in which our actions are *perceived*. What perceptions do you think people have because we belong to a particular group? (For teachers: This discussion may include race, ethnicity, religion etcetera, but it may also include weight, academic performance, social group, etcetera.) How can we test if our assumption about our treatment is accurate?
 - b) Just as we're seen in a variety of ways, why we see *others* differently than other people see them?
 - c) Is it possible to imagine something from someone else's point of view? How can we use empathy to understand others?
- 3) In *Borderline*, people make assumptions based on prejudice, but also because of misinformation. How can we recognize our personal prejudices? How can we avoid jumping to conclusions?
- 4) In *Borderline*, some characters are loyal to Sami and his family while others cut them off.
 - a) If you lived near Sami's family, how would you react to news that Sami's father had been taken by the police? Do you stay friends with people when they've been accused of something?

- b) In our legal system, people are innocent before being proven guilty. But in real life, are people based on proven facts or on gossip? At some point, everyone has been unjustly accused of something? How does that make a person feel? How does a person get the strength to stand tall in the face of injustice?
- 5) Sami takes enormous risks to find the truth about his father. The result could have been disastrous. But if they hadn't been taken, Sami's father and others would have been convicted of crimes they didn't commit. What should we do when faced a problem with an unknown outcome?

Activities

- 1) Memory plays a role in *Borderline*, but it plays tricks. Eyewitnesses to events are often wrong about what they think they remember.

Exercise: Have a student come into the classroom and do five specific things (i.e. move a book, tie a shoelace, etcetera). Have the class write down, in order, what the student did. Collect the papers. Next class, ask everyone to write down what they remember the student did. Hand back their original record. Compare what actually happened to what students *first* remembered happening. Then compare the first memory to what they remembered now.

- 2) Personal bias and confirmation bias lead to much of the misunderstandings in *Borderline*: Here is a quick, fun way to show students how they themselves are fooled by confirmation bias:

http://www.devpsy.org/teaching/method/confirmation_bias.html

Here is a second lesson plan, from Facing History and Ourselves, designed for mature, engaged students.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/facing-ferguson-news-literacy-digital-age/confirmation-and-other-biases>

(This link is to the third of a five lesson series on bias. The full set of lessons use Ferguson as their focus. However, the lesson at the link can be used independently. I personally think all five are excellent resources to teach personal, confirmation and media bias and to encourage self-reflection and independent fact-based thinking. The specific focus can easily be changed at any major current event.)