**Monk of Mokha**

**By Dave Eggars**

**About the Book**

Mokhtar Alkhanshali is twenty-four and working as a doorman when he discovers the astonishing history of coffee and Yemen’s central place in it. He leaves San Francisco and travels deep into his ancestral homeland to tour terraced farms high in the country’s rugged mountains and meet beleagured but determined farmers. But when war engulfs the country and Saudi bombs rain down, Mokhtar has to find a way out of Yemen without sacrificing his dreams or abandoning his people.

**About the Author**:

Dave Eggers grew up near Chicago and graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the founder of McSweeney's, an independent publishing house in San Francisco that produces books, a quarterly journal of new writing (McSweeney's Quarterly Concern), and a monthly magazine, The Believer. McSweeney's publishes Voice of Witness, a nonprofit book series that uses oral history to illuminate human rights crises around the world. In 2002, he co-founded 826 Valencia, a nonprofit youth writing and tutoring center in San Francisco's Mission District. Sister centers have since opened in seven other American cities under the umbrella of 826 National, and like-minded centers have opened in Dublin, London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Birmingham, Alabama, among other locations. Eggers's work has been nominated for the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, and has won the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, France's Prix Médicis, Germany's Albatross Prize, the National Magazine Award, and the American Book Award. Eggers lives in Northern California with his family. His novels include The Circle, A Hologram for the King, and Heroes of the Frontier.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* Educated by Tara Westover
* Pachinko by Min Jin Lee
* Less by Andrew Sean Greer
* There There by Tommy Orange
* Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

**Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss the Saul Bellow epigraph that opens The Monk of Mokha. How does this paragraph set the tone for Mokhtar’s story?

2. Mokhtar grows up in the Tenderloin, one of the most notoriously crime-ridden neighborhoods of San Francisco. Once he leaves the neighborhood, how do the lessons of the Tenderloin stick with him?

3. In Book 1, the reader is introduced to the scenario wherein Mokhtar loses the satchel containing thousands of dollars and his brand-new laptop. Describe Mokhtar’s reaction to his folly. What fears does this stoke? How does this incident motivate him?

4. San Francisco is an economically divided city, where stratification of wealth is readily apparent. At what point in Mokhtar’s life does he begin to understand this economic divide? How do his first jobs—at Banana Republic, at the Honda dealership, and later at the Infinity—provide him with a lens to understand wealth and power in the United States? How does his exposure to wealth change his worldview or shift his understanding of his own economic possibilities?

5. Discuss the role of family in Mokhtar’s personal and professional life. What expectations are laid upon him as the son of Yemeni immigrants? What values do Mokhtar’s parents instill in him? How does his family aid him in his journey to create his business?

6. Throughout The Monk of Mokha, the concept of code-switching is discussed, particularly in relation to Mokhtar’s status as both an American citizen and that of a Yemeni American. Discuss situations wherein he is deemed “not American enough” or “not Yemeni enough.” How is he forced to adapt his behavior based on his social setting? How does he contend with situations of injustice?

7. On page 75, Mokhtar is asked by Ghassan: “Are you a businessman or are you an activist? For now, at least, you have to pick one.” Does he? How does his interest in social justice affect his plans for business development? Discuss the mission of his business. How does his interest in honoring his Yemeni heritage add an extra pressure for him to succeed?

8. In The Monk of Mokha, coffee is described as a “recession-proof” commodity, yet the process for entering the trade is one that is very difficult for outsiders. Discuss the challenges that Mokhtar faced as he learned the trade. How does he gain the trust of those in the industry, from the pickers to the distributors? How does his business model interrupt the standard practices within the industry?

9. In the last few chapters of The Monk of Mokha, as Mokhtar tries to escape Yemen, the reader is drawn into a fast-paced, gripping narrative of his escape. What was the most disturbing aspect of his experience? When do you think Mokhtar was most frightened for his well-being? How did he rely on his street smarts to help him to safety?

10. Discuss the idea of the “American dream” and its cultural import in today’s world. How does Mokhtar’s story adhere to this narrative? How does his experience complicate the idea of what the American success story can look like? Consider the last chapters of the book. What was the defining moment of his success?