"Pride of Baghdad" Study Questions

1 While four lions actually did escape from the Baghdad Zoo in 2003 after an American bombing, this story has a much deeper meaning as well. How is metaphor and symbolism used throughout the novel?

The lions all four symbolize a certain characteristic in life. The young Ali stands for innocence, while his mother is very stubborn, his dad Zill is very relaxed but also a very strong leader and the old Safa possesses a lot of wisdom but appears to be bitter.

At last the lion-human statue in the last ‘picture’ is used as a metaphor for division of power. Lions are seen stronger than human; in the statue they destroy them. But in the end the lions end up destroyed by the humans. So in the end it seems that things always have a turning point.

2 Author Brian K. Vaughan worked closely with artist Niko Henrichon to combine text with compelling graphics. What role do these graphics play? How might they affect the meaning of the story or the impression that the reader gets? Do you think it is more affective with two medias than it would be with just text?

The graphics sketch a clear image of the situation. While reading you experience the story like the author and artist want you to experience the story/have meant the story.

On the other hand this set experience kind of thing can also work in a negative way, the reader’s fantasy doesn’t get the chance to flow freely. The story can no longer be interpreted in the way the reader wants or feels like. Sometimes a person can find comfort/happiness in a story, by interpreting things so that they fit into his/her current situation. They connect things to the real world. The graphics take away the free interpretation part.

3 Vaughan focuses this story around animals and narrates from the animals' perspective, not humans. How might this affect the interpretation or emotional reaction of the reader?

This perspective may affect the emotion reaction of the reader in two ways:

Most human seem to have a very protective and caring nature, especially towards animals. So telling the story around animals and looking at things in their perspective, affects readers to react even more emotionally. The final scene is the most affecting scene in my opinion. The animals are killed by human. The reader feels very sorry about this, but the fact that the ones who are killed are animals make him/her react more emotionally.

But this perspective can also create more distance between the reader and the characters in the book. The lions are ‘just animals’, and for some, animals are considered to be a lower class. While the group of people who might react very emotional on the things happening in the book, because they feel like they have to take care of those animals from a lower class, the group of people now feel like they have nothing to do with those animals. They do not really seem to bother that the lions are killed and they might even agree with the U.S. in their way of taking action.

4 Each lion offers a very different perspective throughout the novel. What are these different perspectives, and what roles do they play? What other perspectives and opinions do we see throughout the novel in addition to the four lions?
Ali is a very young lion, he is the innocent little guy, who looks like he is not yet able to take care of himself in harder times, so needs protection all the time. Despite this, he is a very curious cub and wants to look very much like his father Zill.

Zill is the alpha male. He is mild-mannered, he will show signs of aggression to prove he’s a competent fighter. He clearly is the strongest of the four, and so the leader.

Safa is an old lion who is blind and has one torn ear. She got this because she was raped when still living in the wild. She is like an old lady with a lot of life experience which she has gained through her harsh life in the wild. She is very happy with her life in the zoo and she is not willing to leave the zoo when she’s able to.

At last, Noor, she is Ali’s mother and Zill’s current mate. She longs for freedom for the zoo and tells that it’s better than the zoo. She has been taken out of the wild when she was about Ali’s age. The freedom thing is one of the many things Noor and Safa disagree on, they often have word fights

5 Throughout the novel, the lions are faced with the question of freedom versus comfort and safety. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each situation? How might this relate to citizens of Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries?

Comfort and safety, in the lion’s situation, can be found in the zoo. In the zoo they’re fed regularly, they are protected from other wild animals/enemies. They are taken care of by the human.

Freedom can be found in the wild, but also brings a lot of danger with it, at least, in Iraq. The lions no longer get feed now, they need to find food themselves, this is hard in this time of war. They are no longer under the protection of human. This gets fatal and they are killed by humans.

6 What are some scenes from the novel that stand out to you? How might they be especially pivotal or be particularly relevant to the conflict? What symbolism and metaphor is present in these scenes?

I find it noticeable how the black crow appears to return every time in the book. In the beginning of the book there’s this scene in which it announces the upcoming danger and war and after the four lions have been killed this crow returns in the book. I think the crow is a symbol for a messenger. Messengers bring the bad news, but in the end they always survive.

Also the scenes about the horizon stand out to me in particularly. The young Ali has never seen a horizon before. He is really curious and it seems amazing to him, seeing such a thing is sort of a goal in his life. In the end of the book he finally gets to see the horizon and he is filled with happiness and joy. The horizon must stand for beauty and perfection, because it finally makes the lions feel safe and joyful.