

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“In the Country of Men”

Text guide by: Peter Cram

Copyright © TSSM 2013

TSSM

ACN 099 422 670

ABN 54 099 422 670

A: Level 14, 474 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000

T: 1300 134 518

F: 03 97084354

W: tssm.com.au

E: info@tssm.com.au

SAMPLE

Contents

BACKGROUND NOTES	5
HISTORICAL ISSUES	6
Notes in reference to the novel	6
General notes	7
GENRE	9
TITLE	9
AUDIENCE	9
PURPOSE	9
STRUCTURE	10
PLOT	10
CHRONOLOGY	10
Continuity	10
SETTING [THE WORLD OF THE NOVEL]	10
Geographic locations:	11
Historical context:	11
Economic context:	11
Political context:	11
Social status of the characters:	11
Significance of the setting:	11
COMPLICATION	11
RISING ACTION	12
CLIMAX	12
FALLING ACTION	12
RESOLUTION [Denouement]	12
STYLE	13
ORIENTATION [Point Of View, Voice]	13
Characteristics	13
First person	13
Impartiality	13
EXPRESSION	14
TONE	14
PLOT SUMMARY	15
CHARACTER PROFILES	17
Aspects of characterization	17
Protagonists and Antagonists	17
Author's attitude	17
Character as symbol or representation	18

Character Profiles	19
Major Characters	19
Suleiman (Habibi, Slooma).....	19
Minor Characters	20
Suleiman’s father	20
Suleiman’s mother	21
Moosa	22
THEMES AND ISSUES	23
Betrayal.....	23
Oppression.....	24
Love and commitment	24
Parent-child relationships	24
Dictatorship	24
READINGS	26
Dominant Reading	26
Resistant Reading	26
Alternative Reading	26
IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS	27
SAMPLE ESSAY TOPICS	29
FINAL EXAMINATION TIPS	30
FURTHER READING	30

SAMPLE

BACKGROUND NOTES

Hisham Matar, a poet, novelist and essayist, was born in New York in 1970. His father was employed with the Libyan delegation to the United Nations. His family returned to Tripoli in Libya when he was three years old. When he was nine, Qaddafi's Revolutionary Party accused his father of being a reactionary (opposed to the 'revolution'). The family fled to Cairo in Egypt where he spent the rest of his youth.

Matar went to London where he studied for a degree in architecture. In 1990, his father was kidnapped in Cairo by Egyptians and was handed over to the Libyans. He has never been seen again. This influenced Matar's writing and his activities in human rights issues. In 1996, his family received two hand-written letters from his father, saying that he was a prisoner in Libya, but they have heard nothing since.

He claims that *In the Country of Men* is not autobiographical, but does touch on common themes and circumstances. He has written essays about his father's disappearance and the affect it had on his life.

Matar was originally interested in writing poetry. However, he found that his poems began to include narrative elements and he decided to attempt a novel.

He lives in London with his wife. He has never returned to Libya.

In the Country of Men was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and was also shortlisted for the Guardian First Book award 2006.

It won many other awards:

2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize Best First Book award for Europe and South Asia
2007 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize
Italian Premio Vallombrosa Gregor von Rezzori
Italian Premio Internazionale Flaiano (Sezione Letteratura)
the inaugural Arab American Book Award.

In the Country of Men has been translated into 22 languages.

HISTORICAL ISSUES

Notes in reference to the novel

Libya is one of the Maghreb countries, located on the north coast of Africa with a coastline on the Mediterranean Sea. It is between Tunisia and Algeria to the west, Egypt to the east, and Sudan, Chad, and Niger to the south. The head of state is Muammar Qaddafi, who took over as dictator in 1969. Tripoli is the capital city, with a population of over 2 million people today. The Dinar is the currency unit. Most Libyans are Sunni Moslems. Most of the population are either Berber or Arab, and a very small minority are from Italy, Greece, Pakistan, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, India, and Tunisia. However, Moosa and his father, Judge Yaseen are actually Egyptians who live in Tripoli until the end of the story.

Libya has a rich history. Both the Greek and Roman empires controlled parts of Libya at various times. The Roman Emperor Septimius Severus was born in Libya (his statue is mentioned early in the story). The city of Tripoli was once a base for Barbary pirates (from Berber, the people), who raided ships that passed on the Mediterranean. Italy occupied Libya from 1911 and created the colony of Libya in 1934. The United Nations declared Libya to be independent in 1951. Oil reserves were discovered in 1958, considerably boosting the national economy. In 1969, Muammar Gaddafi, a military officer, deposed King Idris I in a bloodless coup and headed a pro-Arabic Muslim regime.

In describing the setting, Matar writes of Tripoli's dry heat on the occasion of Suleiman's episode of heat stroke while eating mulberries in the backyard one afternoon. He writes of Islamic leaders and spiritual advisors, and of the people being called to daily prayers from the loudspeakers in the mosques' minarets. His mother drinks alcohol when his father is away, which is often; however, she is also reluctant to leave the home by herself as alcohol is supposedly forbidden in Islamic countries.

An important part of the setting is the constant intrusion of the practices of the Gaddafi's regime, which attempts to remove all forms of dissent. Telephones are not only tapped, the anonymous tapper even interrupts phone conversations between callers. Regime henchmen patrol the streets to monitor activities. They intimidate by invading homes seeking evidence of disloyalty. Citizens spy on each other. Any kind of activity which may be interpreted as seditious is carried out behind closed doors and drawn curtains.

The novel moves to Egypt towards the end. Egypt represents a false sense of freedom. Suleiman is sent to Egypt so he will not be forced to join Gaddafi's army. When his parents arrive in Egypt, the family believes themselves safe. However, there are those in Egypt who support Gaddafi. Suleiman's father is taken again and is handed over to Gaddafi's regime.