

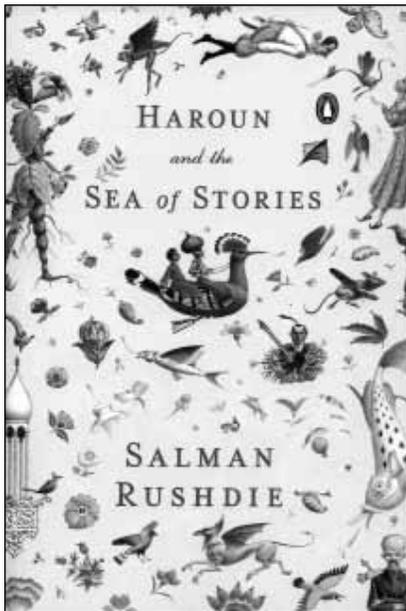


Vermont Reads

Haroun and the Sea of Stories



A Statewide One-Book Community Reading Program



Vermont communities are invited to participate in the statewide read of Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. This funny and touching story of a father and son is, at its heart, a reflection on the importance of stories, imagination, and creativity.

In *Haroun*, Rushdie has created his own fantastic folktale, modern yet steeped in the narrative traditions of world cultures. The story features storyteller Rashid Khalifa and his young son, Haroun. A great upheaval in their family causes Rashid to lose his voice, his stories, and possibly, the family's livelihood. Haroun's challenge — complete with water genies and talking fish — is to unclog the Sea of Stories and restore his father's storytelling abilities.

An Invitation to Vermont Communities

Vermont Reads brings communities together around stories, ideas, and activities that are important to the life of towns of all sizes. In 2014, 115 communities took part in Vermont Reads *Wonder*.

Read and Explore — Discover with others the power of reading, and of reflecting on the importance of stories and imagination. Libraries, schools, and other nonprofit organizations may apply; collaboration among town organizations and businesses is strongly encouraged.

- **RECEIVE FREE** copies of *Haroun* and programming support for your community.
- **HOST** readings, discussions, and community event nights in your schools, libraries, and local businesses.
- **LISTEN** to Vermont Public Radio's Vermont Reads feature.

Apply — Applications due December 5, 2014 (winter/spring participation) or June 5, 2015 (summer/fall participation). Visit vermontreads.org or call 802.262.1355.

Vermont Humanities Council
11 Loomis Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602
802.262.2626 • info@vermonthumanities.org
www.vermonthumanities.org



With support
from the Jack &
Dorothy Byrne
Foundation



Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* Information and Application



Welcome to Vermont Reads

The Vermont Humanities Council is pleased to bring Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* to Vermont communities in 2015, the thirteenth year of VHC's statewide, one-book community reading program.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories is the tale of a twelve-year-old boy on a quest to revive the "Sea of Stories" in order to restore his father's storytelling ability and the balance of imagination and freedom of speech to the entire land. With tongue-twisting and comical language, this book makes for a great read and a great read aloud. Children and adults alike will enjoy identifying the many subtle cultural references, including the Beatles, *Arabian Nights*, *Star Wars*, the films of Satyajit Ray, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

VHC provides community collaborators with multiple free copies of the Vermont Reads book. Community programs typically involve libraries, schools, nonprofit organizations, and businesses.

Vermont Reads began in 2003 with *Witness* by Karen Hesse. Since then, this highly successful one-book statewide community reading program has engaged tens of thousands of students and adults in reading the same book and participating in activities related to the book. Nearly 200 towns have taken part in Vermont Reads since the beginning of the program.

Make sure your town—its schools and library, centers of worship, businesses, nonprofits, book groups, and other organizations—takes part in 2015. Someone simply has to take the lead and fill out a short form. Please read through the Vermont Reads packet before completing the application. For more information, contact Max Matthews, VHC's Vermont Reads program assistant, at 802.262.1355 or mmatthews@vermonthumanities.org.

Vermont Reads Supporters

The Vermont Humanities Council is grateful to the major partners who support Vermont Reads. Since 2007, Vermont Reads has been generously underwritten by **Renewable NRG Systems** of Hinesburg, Vermont. VHC is also grateful for the generous support of the **Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation**. VHC's media partner is **Vermont Public Radio**. Each year VPR presents several days of Vermont Reads programming.

About the Book (from a summary by James Fenton, 1998)

In a make-believe world, based loosely on Bombay and Kashmir, the story of *Haroun* is a tale of a fight between the free imagination and the powers that oppose it. Haroun's father, Rashid, the Shah of Blah, is a professional and gifted storyteller, a popular figure much in demand at public events. Feeling neglected, his wife is persuaded to leave him and run away with a neighbor. After this, Rashid loses confidence in his powers of storytelling, haunted by his son's question: "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" . . . As Rashid despairs, Haroun determines to rescue his father's talent—a project which takes him into an exotic world of water genies, mechanical birds, fantastical creatures, Guppees and Chupwalas. He learns that the Ocean of the Sea of Stories, the source of all stories, is being polluted by the enemy of all stories, the sinister Khattam-Shud. . . .

Salman Rushdie's children's book . . . has an effervescent style which is full of rhymes and wordplay . . . conjuring up a fantasy world in which, nonetheless, one never entirely loses sight of harsh political reality and the great issues of freedom of speech and imagination.

"What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" —Haroun

About Salman Rushdie

Born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, Salman Rushdie is the acclaimed author of eleven novels: *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* (Booker Prize, 1981; "Best of the Booker" award, 2008, for the best novel to have won the prize in its first 40 years), *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, *Fury*, *Shalimar the Clown*, *The Enchantress of Florence*,

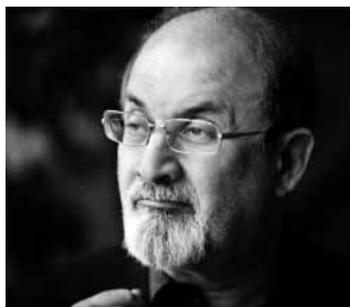


Photo by Syre Moskowitz

and *Luka and the Fire of Life*. He has written one book of stories, *East, West*, as well as four works of nonfiction: *Imaginary Homelands*, *The Jaguar Smile*, *Step Across This Line*, and, most recently, *Joseph Anton*, an autobiographical

memoir. His stage adaptation of *Midnight's Children* was performed in London and New York by the Royal Shakespeare Company. In 2004 an opera based upon *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* premiered at New York City Opera.

A Fellow of the British Royal Society of Literature and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Salman Rushdie has received, among other awards, the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel (twice), the European Union's Aristeion Prize for Literature, Author of the Year Prizes in both Britain and Germany, the Budapest Grand Prize for Literature, the Premio Grinzane Cavour in Italy, and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature, as well as the Freedom of the City in Mexico City, Strasbourg, and El Paso, and the Edgerton Prize of the American Civil Liberties Union. He holds the rank of Commandeur in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France's highest artistic honor. In June 2007, he was knighted for services to literature. His books have been translated into more than forty languages.

Participating Communities Receive

- Up to 75 copies of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* with a Vermont Reads 2015 seal on the cover. (The number of books awarded depends on the project's size and scope, and creativity.) To purchase additional books at a discount, contact VHC (subject to availability).
- Program ideas, discussion guides, recommended books for all ages, and links to web resources (all found here and at vtreads.org)
- Vermont Reads stickers and bookmarks
- Poster templates for promoting events
- Publicity assistance through the VHC media calendar, press releases, and website

- Contact names (upon request) of prior Vermont Reads project directors who are happy to share tips for making your project successful.

To Qualify

To qualify, the community must have:

- An organization willing to be the primary sponsor/coordinator — libraries, schools, historical societies, and social service organizations are possibilities.
- 1-2 representatives of that organization willing to act as project director(s).
- At least two other organizations to join the project team and help develop and carry out the program plan. Involve as many partners as possible; the more partners, the better. In addition to schools and libraries, potential local partners might include bookstores; museums and historical societies; church groups; local businesses; service organizations; afterschool/summer programs; teen centers; and senior centers/assisted living facilities. Adult education centers and correctional facilities are also welcome to participate; contact Jan Steinbauer, VHC's Director of Literacy Programs, at jsteinbauer@vermonthumanities.org. Strong applications ideally will include at least one local school and the public and school libraries. Organizations must develop strong collaborations, plan creative and diverse humanities-based activities that support community-wide reading and discussion of the book and the themes it contains, and undertake vigorous publicity in the months leading up to the activities.

A Note on Dispensing Books: Communities should make a concerted effort to distribute and reuse the books awarded by VHC. Have readers sign their names on the inside cover, comment on the book, date their entry, and pass the book on.

Program Implementation Dates: Events may be scheduled anytime in 2015. VHC suggests planning some activities over a concentrated period of weeks or months.

Application Deadline: December 5, 2014 and June 5, 2015 for priority consideration. Applications will be accepted beyond the deadlines if books are available.

We will respond to your application within two weeks of the deadline. Award notifications will contain an estimated ship date for your books based upon your event schedule.

To submit application or for more information, contact: Max Matthews, Vermont Humanities Council, 11 Loomis Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602, or email mmatthews@vermonthumanities.org.



Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAM COORDINATION TIPS



Planning Your Vermont Reads Events

This year's Vermont Reads book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, presents opportunities for numerous extension activities ranging from staged readings to book discussions and art exhibitions. The list of activities that promote shared reading and discussion is bounded only by the imaginations of you and your collaborators. If you develop a new idea, please let us know so that we can share it with other communities!

Important Resource: The **Vermont Folklife Center**, located in Middlebury, is focused on preserving and sharing the cultural heritage of Vermont. They are a tremendous clearinghouse for the "stories" of Vermont as well as the traditions of storytelling. Visit vermontfolklifecenter.org for information on their traveling exhibits, workshops on oral history and community storytelling, and extensive online archives, which could be integrated into your Vermont Reads projects. You can also contact them directly to discuss programming possibilities: 802.388.4964 or info@vermontfolklifecenter.org.

Program Ideas (See Resources List for website links and other publications related to the activities below)

Lead a Book Discussion Group – Ideally, a discussion group should be facilitated by a person comfortable leading conversations in which everyone feels encouraged to participate. Facilitators might be teachers, librarians, town VIPs, or others who are skilled and enthusiastic about leading a discussion. Facilitators should prepare questions in advance, using the VHC discussion guide as a resource. (Note: VHC does not fund discussion facilitators; facilitators should be volunteers, or project coordinators must make their own honorarium arrangements with facilitators.)

Listen to the VPR Broadcast – Gather a group around the radio—or around a computer—to listen to VPR's Vermont Reads program after it is made available on the web. Vermont Public Radio is VHC's media partner for Vermont Reads. Use the program as a lead-in to a discussion. Broadcast dates and times will be publicized when they are available.

Vermont Humanities

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Community Story Events – Invite members of your community to tell their own stories. You might use the very popular model of public storytelling—true stories, rehearsed and performed (made popular by the “Moth” public radio program). Or you might choose to have people share their own “fairytales,” classic fairytales, or favorite family stories. See The Moth’s tips for story tellers page (see Web Resources) for ideas that might be shared with performers.

Alternatively, a community event might focus on the collecting of stories and interviewing, rather than on the performance of stories. The Story Corps project (see Web Resources) has a do-it-yourself guide to conducting interviews. Consult with the Vermont Folklife Center—they can conduct workshops for oral history gathering or facilitate community “story circles” workshops.

Staged Reading – *Haroun* is full of great dialogue and wordplay—perfect for a staged reading. Staged readings are just that: reading from a script in front of an audience, whether that means sitting/standing on an actual stage or simply in front of the group. Although readers should have an opportunity to study their characters’ background, personality, motivation, and “voice,” they needn’t memorize the text. No backdrop or set are required, nor do readers use props or dress in costume (though you might choose to have everyone dress in similarly neutral clothing or invite readers to wear something fun that signifies who they are—like a bus driver’s hat). Readers should be instructed to speak clearly so that their voices carry, and to look straight ahead as opposed to at each other (or directly at audience members). Discussion leaders should facilitate an audience-cast discussion after the reading. Cast members may choose to remain in character for part of the discussion.

Host a Movie Night or Series – There are a host of popular movies that reflect the themes of *Haroun: Princess Bride*, *Shrek*, *Aladdin*, *Alice in Wonderland*. *Haroun* contains many references to *Star Wars* and *Alice in Wonderland*; you might identify the references along the way or have a discussion at end of the movie.

Writing Project/Contest – Writing contests are a popular means for younger readers and writers in particular to approach the written word. Entries can be assembled in

print or on the web, and winning selections can be read at a special event. If you choose to run a contest, we suggest offering prizes in different age or grade categories. (And be sure to let us know about the contest so we can help advertise it.)

Exploring Fairy Tales and Twisting Your Own – Like the “plentimaw fish” in the book, who gobble up old stories and spit out new ones, Rushdie has woven many elements of familiar stories, including fairy tales, into *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. On many occasions he makes fun of the typical fairy tale plots (in one hilarious example, on page 73, Haroun encounters “Princess Rescue Story Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41(r)xi”). There is a tradition of making “fractured fairy tales”; the 1987 movie *The Princess Bride* and Jon Scieszka’s children’s books, including *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, are popular examples.

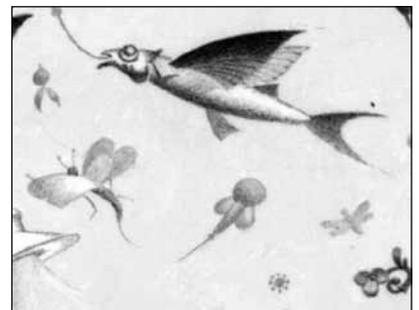
Invite a language arts teacher or writer to explain the common elements of fairy tales and share some classics. Have participants create their own original fairy tales. The tales created might be shared through the writing contest idea or a storytelling event (both described above). For a list of the common elements of fairy tales, visit: www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson42/RWT027-4.pdf

Tie in Vermont Reads to your library’s story times for children by incorporating classic and “fractured” fairytales. For a booklist of other fractured fairy tales visit: www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson853/FracturedFairyTalesBooklist.pdf

Celebrate Banned Books Week – An important theme in *Haroun* is the struggle between freedom of speech and censorship. (Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* is probably one of the most famously

censored books in modern times.) Banned Books Week is an annual celebration of the freedom to read, observed since 1982 in the last week of

September (in 2015, it will be September 27–October 3). Each year librarians, booksellers, teachers and countless others take this opportunity to highlight the importance of intellectual freedom and remind us not to take this precious democratic freedom for granted. Visit bannedbooksweek.org for more information on how to get involved.





Arts Projects – The locations, compelling characters, and the very atmosphere of the novel also lend themselves particularly to visual expression. Host an arts event with ample art supplies and space for children and adults to recreate characters and scenes from the book (drawing, painting, found object sculpture, puppet making, paper mache, collage). Recruit art educators to help participants.

A few ideas: make paper silhouettes of Mudra the Shadow Warrior where the dark and light side don't match (he is described best on pages 123-130); create Mali, the “floating gardener,” from green plastic bottles, twine and natural

materials (as described on pages 81-82); recreate the triangular, iridescent, and many-mouthed “plentimaw” fishes (described on page 84) or the blue-whiskered, onion-capped genie, Iff, as magazine collages (read his description on pages 54-55). Have students select favorite scenes to illustrate or recreate in dioramas. Arrange for exhibit space at your local library, school, museum or local business (bank, restaurant) to show off participants’ work.

VHC Speakers Bureau – Host one of VHC’s Speakers Bureau programs that relate to *Haroun*:

Tim Brookes: Disappearing Alphabets and the Future of the Written Word

William Hosley: More than Books: Libraries, Community, and Historic Preservation

Nancy Brown: Myths of the Vikings

Bryan Alexander: Digital Storytelling and Human Lives

Note that you must apply separately to host VHC-subsidized Speakers Bureau programs. See our website for details.

Panel discussions or guest speakers – While *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a fun and whimsical book, it is also particularly rich in complex topics. Among the topics *Haroun* raises are issues related to:

- Freedom of speech and censorship
- How the suppression of stories and speech has been used to oppress
- Figures of speech and wordplay

- Sources of artists’ inspiration
- The traditions of storytelling and the role of stories in human culture
- The power and necessity of stories

Convene a panel of informed and interested community members — writers, teachers, filmmakers, librarians, lawyers, artists — to bring their perspectives to these and other issues related to the book.

Other Ideas

Engage Your Local Bookstore. Many bookstores have either formal or informal events organized around the written word. Talk to your local bookseller to see how you might work together to create readings and other events that reach broadly into the community.

After-School Programs. Many Vermont Reads activities would work well as after-school programs. Contact your local middle and high school teachers and after school coordinators to get Vermont Reads on the agenda.

Displays: Libraries, Bookstores, Schools. Ask both your community public library and your school library, as well as local bookstores, to feature prominent displays of *Haroun* and other books which about fairytales and stories.

Culminating Celebrations. Many communities conclude their Vermont Reads activities with a festive and fun event, such as a dinner or a themed potluck put on by several collaborating organizations. These final events are also useful for showcasing student work done as part of the Vermont Reads project, recognizing contest winners, or for hosting a panel discussion or presentation.

Audience

Know Your Audience – Be sure you know your audience before determining the activity or activities you plan to undertake. You may be interested in hosting programs for adults, young adults, middle-school students, or a combination of these. You may choose to appeal to a diverse group or focus on a specific type of reader. (The Council encourages open, general public programming whenever possible.)

Involve Your Audience – Involve your audience in planning your programs — in the choice of activities, the planning details, and the on-site coordination of them. This will help everyone feel invested in the event.

Book Access – Ideally, participants will come to the program—of whatever type—having read some or all of the book. However, with the possible exception of book discussion programs, this should not be a stringent requirement for participation. In particular, read-a-thons and staged readings may be the first exposure that participants have to the book, so make sure you have copies on hand to give away or sell. Publicize where participants can get a copy of the book. Please make every effort to accommodate beginning readers or those needing a reading partner. Places to contact for assistance include adult basic education centers, libraries, and schools. In addition, the audio CD version of *Haroun* is available for borrowing from VHC.

Notes On Organizing Programs

Location, Location, Location – Program location possibilities are as endless as types of activities. Consider transportation needs when deciding on a location and arrange for busing or car pools whenever possible if the need arises. For some, getting to an out-of-the-way site presents a challenge, so consider central locations with easy access (including access for those with mobility issues). Traditional sites such as libraries, schools, senior centers, town halls, and civic buildings are excellent, but we encourage you to think non-traditionally as well in order to increase your audience. Try these locations: cafés, coffee shops, and restaurants; retirement communities; city parks and other public-use areas; town pools, beaches and lakefronts; organizations such as the YMCA/YWCA and Boys-and-Girls Club; church function rooms; bookstores; and local businesses.

Funding – Think outside the box in this category, too. Doing so not only increases your potential audience, but two or more organizations also have more resources than one, and those resources only increase when more organizations join the mix. Appeal to local bookstores to discount the book for individual purchases or for a bulk order for the entire group. Invite local businesses to support the program by donating funds outright, or use of space in their facility.

Publicity – Any community sponsoring a Vermont Reads *Haroun* project should take advantage of the Council’s free publicity, including notices on our website and in our media calendar.

Submit the Vermont Reads publicity form at least one month before the event date. Include a title and description of the activity, plus date(s), time(s), location(s), and contact information.

VHC also provides Vermont Reads poster templates, as well as digital versions on our website, and graphical elements (Vermont Reads seal, VHC logo, book cover) that can be used to custom design a flyer. Hang posters and notices everywhere you can think of: libraries, schools, colleges, bookstores, churches, general stores and co-ops, restaurants, cafés and coffee shops, laundromats, town halls, community bulletin boards, and other gathering sites.

Contact your local papers, radio stations, cable access channels, and newsletters, to find out how far in advance they require calendar information, and send out a press release about your activity before the deadline. Make use of the social media tools used in your community, such as Front Porch Forum and local organizations’ Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. And don’t forget: word-of-mouth is still one of the best ways to draw participants.

Food and Beverages – Making food available—and advertising it—almost always increases attendance. Relate food and beverage items to the books for added flair. Have participants join in the preparation of the refreshments. Local grocery stores, co-ops, restaurants, cafés, coffee shops, and other food-service businesses are often happy to donate food items in return for recognition.





Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

WEB RESOURCES



Vermont Folklife Center – Focused on preserving and sharing the cultural heritage of Vermont. A clearinghouse for the “stories” of Vermont as well as the traditions of storytelling. Visit their website for information on their traveling exhibits, workshops on oral history and community storytelling, and extensive online archives, which could be integrated into your Vermont Reads projects. www.vermontfolklifecenter.org

Inspiration for the Book

In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the country of Alifbay and the sad city that’s forgotten its name are loosely based on the Kashmir Valley and the city of Srinagar. Online research for images from that region of the world will help to “illustrate” the story.

Wikipedia entry on Srinagar: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srinagar

Wikipedia entry on Kashmir: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir

Articles on *Haroun* and Salman Rushdie

“*Luka and the Fire of Life* author Salman Rushdie embraces two critics: his sons,” article by Salil Tripathi, *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2010.

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/11/AR2010111107856.html

A three-minute video excerpt of a *TimesTalks* interview with Salman Rushdie, in which he discusses writing *Haroun* and writing for children:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=RC8ieyaf53g

“On Censorship,” by Salman Rushdie. *New Yorker*, May 11, 2012: www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/on-censorship

Alison Lurie’s review of *Haroun*, *New York Times*, November 11, 1990: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/04/18/specials/rushdie-haroun.html>

Folktales, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling

Myth, Folk Tales, and Fairy Tales. This online resource from Scholastic Books has interactive tutorials with authors, lesson plans, books lists, stories from around the world and other online activities, including a “Make your own Fractured Fairy Tale” exercise with author Jon Scieszka. teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/index.htm

The Storytelling Animal. In this TEDx talk, Jonathan Gottschall (author of *The Storytelling Animal*, see Further Reading) talks about the power of stories. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhdOXdedLpY (Adult content)

Tabled Fables. The “Tabled Fables” podcast series examines the history and meaning behind fairy tales. www.prx.org/series/32825-tabled-fables

Freedom of Speech and Censorship

CENSORED: Wielding the Red Pen. Online exhibit about the history of censorship in the United States, from University of Virginia Library’s Special Collections department. explore.lib.virginia.edu/exhibits/show/censored

National Coalition Against Censorship. The National Coalition Against Censorship’s mission is to promote freedom of thought, inquiry and expression and oppose censorship in all its forms. www.ncac.org

Banned Books Week. Banned Books Week is an annual event celebrating the freedom to read. Held during the last week of September, it is sponsored by the American Library Association, the American Booksellers Association and others. www.bannedbooksweek.org

Author Website

www.salman-rushdie.com



Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

FURTHER READING



Other works by Salman Rushdie

Joseph Anton. Published in 2012, this memoir recounts the more than nine years of hiding that Rushdie and his family experienced, after the controversy of *The Satanic Verses*. It was during this period that Rushdie wrote *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. (Adult content)

Luka and the Fire of Life. In this sequel to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Haroun's younger brother, Luka, embarks on a quest to steal the Fire of Life. Written for his second son, this novel employs the structure of video games in envisioning a magical world. Like *Haroun*, this book is filled with clever wordplay and fantastical creatures.

Midnight's Children. Considered by many to be Rushdie's masterpiece, this novel is about India's transition from British colonialism to independence and the partition of British India. Winner of the Booker Prize in 1981 and the subsequent "Booker of Bookers" best all-time prize recognition. (Adult content)

Nonfiction about stories and storytelling

Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale by Marina Warner (to be published in December 2014). A short examination of fairy tales, their origins, and what they mean to us today.

The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human by Jonathan Gottschall. Drawing on neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary biology, Gottschall examines the world of stories and how they shape our thinking and our lives.

Classic Story Collections

The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales edited by Maria Tatar. Twenty-five classic tales, presented by Maria Tatar, a leading authority in the field of folklore and children's literature.

The Arabian Nights or One Thousand and One Nights. (Many editions and translations exist; Richard Burton's translations are among the most popular). This classic collection of West and South Asian stories includes "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," "Alibaba and the Forty Thieves," and stories of Sinbad the Sailor.

Best Loved Folktales by Joanna Coles. A collection of over 200 folk and fairy tales from all over the world.

Favorite Folktales from Around the World (Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library) by Jane Yolen. Over 150 folktales from around the world.

Fiction for all ages

We recommend the following novels as complements to *Haroun* for children and adults alike, whether reading alone or aloud. They were chosen for their complementary themes or plotlines: child protagonists on quests to save their families or communities; elements of classic stories and fairy tales; clever wordplay and rich language; and themes of importance of stories and freedom of expression.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll. Weary of her storybook, one "without pictures or conversations," young and imaginative Alice follows a rabbit underground and comes face-to-face with some of the strangest adventures and most fantastic characters in all of literature.

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster. Milo is a very bored boy who is transported to the "Lands Beyond" thanks to the magical tollbooth. He jumps to the island of Conclusions. But brothers King Azaz of Dictionopolis and the Mathemagician of Digitopolis war over words and numbers. Milo's mission is to rescue the Princesses of Rhyme and Reason.

Egg and Spoon by Gregory Maguire. Maguire, the author of *Wicked*, wrote this take on the traditional "Prince and the Pauper" story and the Russian folktale of "Baba Yaga." Two young girls—one very poor and one very rich—switch identities in Czarist Russia.



Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

FURTHER READING CONTINUED



Ella Minnow Pea by Mark Dunn. Ella Minnow Pea is about a girl's fight for freedom of speech, and like *Haroun*, the book itself is full of delightful word play. Ella finds herself acting to save her friends, family, and fellow citizens from the encroaching totalitarianism of her island's government, which has banned the use of certain letters of the alphabet as they fall from a memorial statue. As the letters drop from the statue they also disappear from the novel.

Inkheart by Cornelia Funke. Meggie's father, Mo, has a rare gift (which is often also a curse): when he reads a book aloud, the characters appear in real life. When reading aloud a book called *Inkheart*, Mo unleashes an evil villain and several other characters, and also traps his wife in the book. Meggie, an avid reader, fights to defeat the villain and rescue her mother from the book.

West of the Moon by Margi Preus. This novel weaves original fiction with myth and folktale to tell the story of Astri, a young Norwegian girl desperate to join her father in America.

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin. The 2010 Newberry Honor book is a fantasy-adventure story featuring Minli, a Chinese girl, who embarks on a mystical adventure to improve her family's fortune. Like *Haroun*, Minli has a father who is a gifted storyteller.



Vermont Reads *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What was the funniest part of this book? What was the most memorable part?
2. What is the purpose of Haroun's quest?
3. What kind of child is Haroun? How would you describe him?
4. Rushdie wrote this book for his son Zafar, who was 11 when the book was finished. Could you have guessed that this book was written by a father for his son? What are some of the clues?
5. Soraya, Haroun's mother, is central to the plot of the book, although she is absent for most of the story. What do you think of her and how she is portrayed in the book?
6. "What's the use of stories aren't even true?" is a pivotal line in this novel. What do you think are the uses of fictional stories?
7. Like the "plentimaw fish" in the book, who gobble up old stories and spit out new ones, Rushdie has woven many elements of familiar stories into the book. Can you identify the ways that Rushdie "reuses" old stories in this book?
8. How is storytelling important? How is it important to you? In what ways does it define culture and humankind?
9. Figures of speech, rhymes, and wordplay are frequent in this story and are a part of what makes it a fun read aloud. As Mr. Butt tells Haroun, "A figure of speech is a slippery thing; it can be twisted or it can be straight." Share some of your favorite lines from the book.
10. At the end of the book, Rushdie provides a glossary to show the many Hindustani words that were used to name the people and places in the book. How do these double-meaning names enhance the story?
11. There are many references in this novel to books, movies and music from popular culture. Which ones can you identify?
12. There is a great deal of discussion among the characters at the end of the book about what makes a happy ending "happy." But do you consider this book to have a happy ending? Does Haroun believe it? Is the story even over?
13. Identify the places in the books where Rushdie is making fun of bureaucracy and needless complication.
14. In what ways can stories be misused? Where does this happen in the book? Can you think of other instances outside of the book when this has happened?

15. In what sense is the novel allegorical or rich in symbolism? What social, cultural, and political issues of our times does the book comment on?
16. What is the role of the artist in society? What can the artist accomplish and what obstacles does the artist face? How are artists essential?
17. How does Rushdie show what he values most in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*?
18. Rushdie seems to suggest that for the most part, speech is good and silence is bad. Do you agree? Can you identify the instances in the book when this is not true?
19. How do you think Salman Rushdie's own life and his experiences with religion and control, censorship and freedom are reflected in this book?
20. How is the imagination a wellspring and source for stories and creativity? How does it work, in your experience?
21. Historically, what are some examples of censorship? What was the impact?

Additional Ideas for a Dynamic Discussion

- Use a facilitator, preferably someone who loves literature, has experience leading discussions, and has taken the time to read and research the book carefully. He or she should be prepared with a list of stimulating questions (the above list is a good start) and should try to include everyone in the conversation. He or she should also provide a brief biography of the author. Consult with VHC for trained discussion facilitators in your area.
- Make every attempt to seat people in a circle. If the group is too large for this configuration, ask people to speak loudly and clearly so that everyone can hear, or, as appropriate, ask them to stand and face the group when talking.
- Don't forget the introductions! Be creative—in addition to stating their names, people might briefly share their general impressions of the book, their reason for attending, or something about the book for discussion.
- Discussion facilitators should use a "closer" to end the discussion. One example is asking everyone (or, if the group is large, volunteers) to share a final thought about the book or the experience they've just had discussing it. Or ask volunteers to read their favorite sentence or paragraph from the book.
- Serve refreshments!

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