Community Agreements

1. Respect others’ pronouns.

2. Respect others’ rights to hold opinions and beliefs that differ from your own. When you disagree, challenge the idea, not the person.

3. Be courteous. Don’t interrupt or engage in private conversations while others are speaking.

4. Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have much to say, try to hold back a bit. If you are hesitant to speak, look for opportunities to contribute.

5. Remember that we are working toward a common goal: discussing challenging issues facing our society and community, through literature.

6. If a fellow book club member chooses to share something personal, please be aware that they are sharing private information that should stay within the discussion circle.
Introduction/Get to know Darius

Please have read through page 71 (through “There are Four Lights”)

Questions/Discussion Topics

- Do you have any emergent or pressing questions?
- What do we know about the author, Adib Khorram?
- What do you know about Info about US/Iranian geopolitics?
- What do we know about health/depression (campus student counseling is a great resource)
- We know this book is about depression. What clues or thoughts do we hear about in the first few chapters? Do you have any questions?
- So.much.tea! What role do you think the tea plays in Darius’ life? How -- or does it -- tie to Darius’ identity as a fractional Persian?
- What do you think of Darius’ father’s reaction to Darius being bullied? What effect might this have on Darius?
- What do you think about the relationships Darius has with his family (mom, sister, father -- and the unknown family members he is setting out to meet?)
- Darius’ entry into Iran is harsh, ending in an interrogation. Can you reflect on this, and why this scene might have been included?
Darius the Great is Not Okay by Adib Khorram (2018)

Code-Switching, Mental Health & (Inter)Cultural Contexts

Please have read through page 159 (through “The Kolinahr Discipline”)

Questions/Discussion Topics

- Do you have any emergent or pressing questions?
- This section specifically brings up depression: memories being impacted by medication, Darius taking his medicine in front of his Babou, and depression and Darius’ ability to play soccer as a child, anxiety as co-morbidity, and a few other examples. “You have to think positive, Baba”. “All he could see was that I wasn’t trying hard enough”. “You know, in Iran, boys don’t worry about these things so much”
  - Do you have any questions about Darius, his symptoms, or anxiety?
  - What role do you think these questions play in the development of the novel?
  - Are there differences in the way that mental health/illness is treated in Iran vs. in the US?
  - Are there contexts where you have experienced a varying lens on mental illness?
Darius mentions many of what he perceived to be failures to live up to his Persian identity: he fails at taarof, he fails at thinking positive, he fails at tea-making/knowledge by bringing his grandparents fancy tea. What resonates with you about this idea of identity failure? Is an identity or heritage something that you can fail at?

○ Darius really feels the weight of identity when they are at Persepolis and his grandfather “introduces” him to Darius the Great and assures him that his parents chose his name well. Do you have any experience with generational expectations that you feel you did not have the ability to meet?

○ Even the Persians in Persia seem to grapple with identity, as in the bias against Baha’is. What is it to be Persian? American?

○ Darius reflects on the traits he should have inherited as a Persian, but didn’t: liking figs, pomegranate syrup, eyebrow, etc. and makes several comparisons of his Persian-ness to Lelah’s. What do you think of these quantifiers and qualities?

We’ve previously read about bullying in America, and this session we read about bullying in Iran.

○ What are your reactions to these events?

○ Do the cultural contexts in which they happen change the way Darius reacts to them? Why or why not?

Darius makes many passive comments about his father’s disappointment in him as a son. What is your response/interpretation of this?

○ What do you think about Lelah joining in / replacing Darius in their nightly routine of watching Star Trek?
Mental Health & Relationships

Please have read through page 239 (“Yesterday’s Enterprise”)

**Before we start:** Today’s topic is mental health and relationships and we do have discussion questions regarding suicidal ideation. If you need to remove yourself from the conversation or take a break, please do. These aren’t easy conversations and they can be very upsetting. And we want to remind everyone that the UW Tacoma campus offers student counseling services if you would like additional resources.

**Questions/Discussion Topics**

- As we witness Babou’s declining mental capacity, his family--Stephen Kellner included--support him.
  - Name some of the ways they support him.
  - Yet Darius doesn’t receive the same kind of support for his mental health issue. How do you understand this?
- Do you see spaces where we support the elderly in mental decline?
  - What are your own experiences with elder care in your own communities?
- When Stephen Kellner refuses to wait for Darius to start Star Trek because Laleh “gets impatient,” Darius wonders if anyone in his family would be sad if he died, and then asks “that’s normal, right?”
  - What was your reaction to this?
o Is this suicidal ideation, or “just normal teenage angst”? What is the difference, where is the line? (ask Cassie to talk?)

o This scene happens right after Darius and Sohrab's rooftop chat. How does this experience contrast with his thoughts and feelings on the roof?

- What was your reaction to Darius and Stephen's confrontation over Star Trek, with the very indicative title of “Allegiance”?

- We learn about Sohrab's father's imprisonment: does this affect--and if so how--Darius' own relationship with his father?

- What do you make of Darius' efforts to understand his family through Sohrab's experiences with them? If you feel comfortable sharing, how have you built relationships with family that you do not know well?

- At the Towers of Silence Darius listens to his grandfather discuss all the generations of their family that had lived and died there, and how he may be the last. Darius says that in that moment, he understood his grandfather perfectly and that his grandfather was as sad as he is. What did you think of that?
  o Do you have any thoughts on multigenerational depression?

- What questions do you have for Adib Khorram, the author?
Let’s Talk about It: Speaking about Mental Health

Please have read the entire book.

Before we start: Today's topic is mental health and relationships and we do have discussion questions regarding suicidal ideation. If you need to remove yourself from the conversation or take a break, please do. These aren’t easy conversations and they can be very upsetting. And we want to remind everyone that the UW Tacoma campus offers student counseling services if you would like additional resources.

Questions/Discussion Topics

● When Darius brings the soccer cleats to Sohrab, he finds out Sohrab’s father has been killed in prison. As Sohrab confronts his raw grief, he lashes out at Darius: “You do nothing but complain. You’ve never had anything to be sad about in your life.”
  ○ What was your reaction to this scene? Can you relate to that type of raw grief?
  ○ Did Sohrab mean what he said?
  ○ Up until this point, Sohrab has been incredibly emotionally intelligent, in talking Darius through his own emotions, in navigating family dynamics, and coaching Lelah. How does this outburst reconcile with everything we’ve seen up until this point?
- Darius finally was able to confront Stephen Kellner about his feelings of never being enough. What was your reaction to this important scene?
  - What role, if any, do you think his fight with Sohrab played in his ability to speak to his father?
  - Understanding Stephen Kellner's past helped break down walls (“There were no walls between us”); is their relationship changed after this scene? If so, how? how

- How do you think the trip to Yazd changed Darius’ sense of self? Did it change his understanding of depression?

- What are your reactions to Adib Khorram’s afterword in which he frames his own battles with depression? Did you see any of his struggles reflected in the novel? If so, how?

- When Darius gets back to Portland, his PE class is playing soccer. What was your reaction to this section?
  - What did you think about how Chip talked to him after soccer?
  - Did that change how you perceived Chip from the early chapters?