

Shadow (Morpurgo Novel) Study Guide

Shadow (Morpurgo Novel) by Michael Morpurgo

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide refers to the 2014 First Square Fish Edition of *Shadow* by Michael Morpurgo.

Shadow is a young adult novel by Michael Morpurgo in which Matt and his Grandpa seek to have Afghan asylum seekers Aman Khan and his mother, known as Mum, freed from the British detention facility at Yarl's Wood. The plot relies on Aman's account of escaping Afghanistan with a stray dog that he named Shadow. When the novel begins, Matt has gone to visit Grandpa, who lives near the Yarl's Wood detention facility. There, Aman and Mum, who have been in England for six years as asylum seekers, are being held until they will be returned to their native Afghanistan. Their return will be based on improved conditions in that country. Aman is Matt's best friend. At Matt's request, Grandpa agrees to go to Yarl's Wood on visiting day to see about Aman and Mum.

Grandpa is angered that children are among those being kept in the detention facility, for it is surrounded by barbed wire and resembles a prison. Grandpa meets with Aman and Mum. He agrees to help their case however he can. But to do this, Grandpa will need better information. Aman then reveals the story of how he came to England, beginning with his home in Bamiyan Valley. The novel steps back in time. There, the evil ruling Taliban murder people, burn crops, and destroy towns of all those they do not like. Among them are Aman's Hazara people. They take to living in the caves in fear of the Taliban. When the Americans come to fight the Taliban, things get better, but the Taliban still roam around. They kill Aman's father for helping the Americans. During this time, a stray brown-and-white spaniel dog comes upon Aman. Aman and the dog become quick friends, even though such things are frowned upon because the Afghans consider dogs unclean.

When the Taliban later kill Aman's grandmother for protesting a raid on their cave, Aman and Mum have had enough. Relying on contact information and financial help from Uncle Mir, who has lived in England for years, Aman and Mum decide to flee to England. They must travel by foot, bus, and truck across Afghanistan. All the while, they are followed by the dog. Even when corrupt Afghan police steal everything from Aman and Mum, the dog remains with them. After Mum calls the dog a shadow friend to them, Aman decides to name the dog Shadow.

At a crossroads near a British bomb patrol, Shadow points out a bomb. Sergeant Brodie and his fellow British soldiers are thrilled because Shadow has helped to save their lives. Shadow is actually a military bomb-sniffing dog named Polly, who ran away during a fight over a year before. Brodie and his men bring Aman and Mum to the safety of their base before the next step of the journey to England. Unfortunately, Shadow (Polly) must return to the soldiers. Aman is sad as he continues on with Mum.

At long last, Aman and Mum arrive in England where Uncle Mir meets them and takes them to the police station to claim asylum. Six years pass to the present time in the novel. At Matt's urging, Grandpa—a journalist—writes an article about Aman's situation.



Matt and his entire family also stage a protest outside of Yarl's Wood, which is attended by hundreds –including Sergeant Brodie, his daughter Jess, and Polly. Brodie, who arrives late, explains he has been to see a government minister about Aman's case, and has ensured that Aman and Mum will be allowed to stay in England. Everyone is thrilled. Brodie then explains to Aman that he and Jess have renamed Polly, Shadow.



When the Stars Begin to Fall – Bamiyan

Summary

When the Stars Begin to Fall: Matt – Matt's Grandma has been dead for three years. Fourteen year-old Matt's Grandpa lovingly tends to the tree she and the rest of the family planted before her death. Grandpa wants to make sure that the tree does not die of thirst during a drought. For that reason, he will not leave to visit. So, Matt goes to visit him.

After dinner and watering the tree, Matt and Grandpa sit outside under the stars with Grandpa's dog, Dog, a brown-and-white spaniel. Grandpa hums a song Grandma used to love with the line, "When the stars begin to fall." However, he cannot remember the rest. He also notes the stars seem so close they could be touched. Matt explains that his best friend, Aman Khan, had said the same thing on a field trip in Devon. Aman had also said that the stars were the same in his native Afghanistan. Matt explains that Aman and his family, who originally came to England as asylum seekers, are being kept in a prison-like place called Yarl's Wood until they are sent back to Afghanistan. Matt says that he and others have written letters to the prime minister and others on behalf of Aman, but they have received no response. Grandpa says Yarl's Wood is nearby and, perhaps, Matt could visit. Matt explains he has already tried and failed.

And They Keep Kids In There?: Matt – Matt asks if Grandpa will call Yarl's Wood to find out if Aman is still there. Grandpa is hesitant because he barely knows Aman, so Matt does not push the issue. The next morning, Matt accompanies Grandpa and Dog on their daily walk. On the walk, Grandpa explains he believes Yarl's Wood is the place Grandma visited to befriend and cheer up asylum seekers before her death. He explains Grandma always told him he should do the same, though he never had the courage to do so. Matt explains that Aman said there was barbed wire and six locked doors between him and freedom.

Grandpa decides he will go to Yarl's Wood to see about Aman. Grandpa finds out that visiting hours are on Wednesdays and that he must write to request formal permission to visit. Grandpa does so. Matt writes to Aman to let him know Grandpa will be visiting. Matt tells Grandpa to bring along Monopoly, but to expect to lose against Aman. Grandpa says he wishes Matt could come inside. When they arrive at Yarl's Wood and see the place surrounded by barbed wire, Grandpa is angered to think that kids are being kept inside.

We Want You Back: Grandpa – Grandpa heads into Yarl's Wood while Matt walks Dog. Grandpa heads toward the detention center building. As Grandpa walks, he reflects on how happy he and Dog are to have Matt around. Grandpa must be checked by security, and the Monopoly game must be taken away because it is against the rules. None of the guards are smiling. Grandpa is then allowed to see Aman and his mother, Mum. They do not look happy to see Grandpa. Actually, they do not look happy in general. A



table must remain between them. Aman finds it strange that the guards will not let him and his mother out of the building, while the guards will not let Matt inside the building.

Grandpa does his best to speak with Mum, but she does not speak much English. Aman also explains that she has panic attacks, including one that morning. He explains she was jailed back in Afghanistan and was beaten by the police. She is fearful it will happen again. She hates being locked up. The Monopoly game is then returned to Grandpa. It causes Aman's face to light up. He says he never loses. He and Grandpa find the "Go to Jail" spot to be funny given their current situation. A guard cautions them to keep it down, to which Grandpa questions why people are allowed to cry in Yarl's Wood, but not laugh.

Shadow: Grandpa – Grandpa quickly loses in Monopoly to Aman. Aman says he is good in business like his father, who was a farmer back in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, where they had many sheep and apple trees. Grandpa explains he grows James Grieve apples and will do his best to bring some next time. Grandpa prepares to show Aman a family photo, but a guard comes over and shouts that everything has to be passed through security. The guard examines it, and hands it back. Aman sees Dog, which causes him to speak the name "Shadow." Aman then flees the room in tears. A guard tells Grandpa that they are all temperamental. Grandpa is angered by this, knowing Aman is not happy about being locked up, but Grandpa does not say this.

Aman returns with a photo of his own friends from Manchester, all of whom are on the soccer team on which Aman plays with Matt. Aman says he wants to go back to Manchester, which he considers home. Aman also reveals Mum had a dream about Grandpa, Aman's father, Shadow, the soldiers, and the cave in Bamiyan. Aman explains Shadow was their dog, who was also known as Polly. Aman hopes Grandpa will be able to help them. Aman then says he wishes to tell their story. Grandpa says he will listen.

Bamiyan: Aman – The novel now steps back in time. Aman explains that the valley of Bamiyan was once beautiful and peaceful and full of different people who did not hate each other. He explains his own family is from the Hazara. Aman explains that the Russians invaded and brought war and his grandfather fought against the Russians with the Mujahadin resistance. Furthermore, after the Russians left, the Taliban came to power and made things worse. They persecuted many people, including the Hazara. Aman explains they destroyed everything and killed anyone they wished. His family hid in caves with a hundred others. Now in the present, the Americans arrive, driving most of the Taliban away and making things better than before. Aman's father works for the Americans as an interpreter. But still, some Taliban remain and take away Aman's father for helping the Americans. He is never seen again. With food in short supply, Aman takes to stealing from the local market. Eventually, he is caught.

Analysis

When Michael Morpurgo's novel *Shadow* begins, the reader is immediately made aware of the importance of family. The idea that family can always be depended upon



becomes a running theme that will be found throughout the course of the novel. Matt, concerned for the welfare of Aman and Mum, is able to convince Grandpa to visit them at Yarl's Wood. Matt is too young to go himself, but he knows he can depend on his family to see about Aman. At the same time, the reader should note that Matt being with his grandfather is proof family can be depended upon. Grandpa is not able to visit Matt due to the drought, so Matt visits Grandpa. Grandpa can depend upon his grandson, Matt. Moreover, Grandpa and Matt enjoy the company of one another. Grandpa always feels hopeful and younger when Matt is around.

When Aman begins to tell the story of his own past, the idea that family can be depended upon remains prevalent. Forced to live in a cave because of the cruelty and barbarity of the Taliban, Aman and his family scrape by to survive. When Aman's father is taken away and killed by the Taliban, Aman, Mum, and grandmother can only depend upon each other.

Aman's friendship with Shadow also becomes something similar to that of family. Morpurgo argues throughout the novel that the bond between people and dogs is unique. The kindness that Aman shows the dog, who will become known as Shadow, is repaid tenfold by the dog. The dog's loyalty and trust of Aman are very clear in the way she follows him around and watches over him. The moment when a photograph of Dog causes Aman to cry is significant.

Aman's friendship with Matt is important. Morpurgo uses the friendship between Matt and Aman to argue that friendship is immensely important in difficult times. Matt befriended Aman not long after Aman arrived in England. Now, in the present time, Aman is relying on his friendship with Aman –and now Grandpa –to find a way to avoid being sent back to Afghanistan. Matt himself takes his friendship with Aman very seriously. He knows that Aman has few people upon whom he can depend. Matt values his friendship with Aman so much that he is willing to do whatever he can to help Aman and Mum out of their current situation.

In general, it is easy to see that human kindness matters. The importance of human kindness will be a running theme throughout the novel. Before Grandma died, she exhibited simple human kindness by visiting and comforting those at Yarl's Wood awaiting deportation. Her example of human kindness comes to rub off on Matt and Grandpa –but especially Grandpa, for he had never before considered visiting someone in Yarl's Wood. The simple human kindness that Grandpa shows to Aman gets Aman to open up quickly about his past for two reasons. First, Aman is desperate to have himself and Mum freed. Also, he comes to like Grandpa and to value Grandpa's kindness. This is in stark contrast to the cold setting of Yarl's Wood, with its barbed-wire fences and the tables that force visitors and residents to remain apart from one another.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Grandpa feel reluctant to visit Yarl's Wood at first? What changes his mind? Why?



Discussion Question 2

When Grandpa agrees to visit Aman, what does Matt hope will happen? What happens? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What is Afghanistan like when Aman and his family live there? What changes when the Americans arrive? What remains the same? What happens to Aman's father as a result?

Vocabulary

asylum seeker, stargazing, coincidence, befriender, institutional, vacantly, infectious, ruefully, temperamental, surly, surreptitiously, infidel



Dirty Dog! Dirty Foreign Dog! – Counting the Stars

Summary

You Must Come to England: Aman – The dog quickly learns the routine and technique of only entering the cave when Mum and Grandmother are asleep. Weeks go by. The dog always shadows Aman wherever he goes. One morning, Aman awakens to hear his Grandmother urging Mum to leave for England, where Uncle Mir has lived for many years. Mum wants to wait for Grandmother's bad legs to get better, but Grandmother says it will be too long. She says God will look after her as God will look after Mum and Aman in England. Mir sends money to Mum and Aman to help them in their travels, as well as contact information for friend who will help them on their journey. Grandmother gives them her prized jewelry to sell as needed. On the phone in the market with Mir, Mir says he will be happy to have Aman and Mum with him and his wife, Mina. Mir says he will also be happy to take Aman to see a Manchester United soccer game. In the market, a Taliban stall keeper attempts to cheat Mum in a sale, and then he tells Mum she had better leave the valley. Mum is torn between wanting to protect her own mother and wanting to protect Aman.

Walk Tall, Aman: Aman – The next morning, Mum goes down to the stream to fetch water. The police arrive with the stall keeper, saying they are there to search the cave. The dog barks and growls at them in defense of Aman and his family, but the dog is chased away. Grandma is pushed to the ground. The family's belongings are smashed apart, and the stall keeper and police leave. Aman discovers Grandmother bleeding from the head. She dies that evening. The next day, Aman, Mum, and the dog leave Bamiyan. They travel by donkey, traveling as light as they can, bringing along only what is needed, such as cookware and blankets. Aman looks forward to moving to England. The dog follows along. At a checkpoint near Kabul, the dog is chased away while Aman and Mum are pushed up against a wall by the police, who demand to see their ID. Without proper ID, Aman and Mum are searched. Their food, water, money, and jewelry are all taken away and divided up among the policemen. The officer in charge drops a couple of coins into Aman's hand. Mum tells him to walk tall and not let the police see him cry. The dog follows. An hour later, Mum cries. She says they at least have one friend in the world in the dog, having changed her mind about the dog. Mum calls the dog Aman's shadow, and she says they should watch after her. Aman decides to call her Shadow. Shadow gives Aman and his Mum renewed hope.

Somehow, Somehow: Aman – Aman and his Mum are given a lift into Kabul in the back of a melon truck. They eat some of the melons. Neither Aman nor Mum has ever been to Kabul. As Aman and Mum walk through Kabul, Aman notices everyone looking at them because of Shadow following them. Mir's contact welcomes Aman and his Mum, but he is not friendly when he learns they no longer have any money. He does, however, become very interested in Shadow, who keeps her distance from him, not



trusting him. The man offers to buy Shadow and arrange passage for Aman and his Mum, but Aman refuses because the man only wants to use Shadow in a dog fight. The man then locks them in a room overnight and tells them to sell him Shadow, or else.

Counting the Stars: Aman – Aman, Shadow, and Mum sneak out through a window. Shadow leads the way. They travel beyond the city. A Hazara truck driver offers to take them as far as Kandahar. The driver explains the soldiers often use dogs like Shadow to sniff out bombs, and that the soldiers themselves are often only boys themselves. The driver even gives Aman and his Mum a little money to help them out. In Kandahar, they board a bus. The bus breaks down, so they must continue on their foot. At night, Aman notices all the stars in the sky. They walk for days. At last, they come upon a crossroads where Shadow stops and stands still, head down a the road. A group of soldiers scanning the road for bombs approaches. Aman realizes that Shadow has found a bomb.

Analysis

Morpurgo continues to argue for the importance of being able to depend on family in this section of the novel. When Aman is caught stealing food, it is Mum who courageously steps in on his behalf –and is punished because of it. Aman from hereon in will feel an especial loyalty toward his Mum, and will become her most loyal defender and protector. Here again, family can be depended upon. Uncle Mir provides the money and contacts for Aman and his Mum to escape from Afghanistan, once again underscoring the importance of being able to depend on family. Aman and his Mum come to rely on one another heavily as they begin the journey to England, with each doing their best to remain brave and strong for the other. Mum does all she can to encourage Aman, who in turn does all he can to encourage his Mum. Considering that Aman is so young, this is a courageous thing in and of itself to be brave for someone else.

Aman's friendship with Shadow also becomes something similar to that of family. Shadow follows Aman and his Mum everywhere, including when they leave the cave to journey toward England. Morpurgo argues through this (and through Aman's reaction to Dog in the photograph) that the bond between dogs and people is unique. There is a kind of family loyalty between people and dogs, and the loyalty of dogs is something that can be severely tested. When everything else goes wrong –even when the food is stolen –Shadow remains with Aman and his Mum. Both Aman and Mum come to take comfort in Shadow, drawing from her resilience and loyalty their own resilience and hope for a better future. The reader should note as well the difference between the way Aman and his Mum treat the dog, and the way others treat the dog. For example, the one many in Kabul wants Shadow only to put her in a dog fight to be killed. Aman and Mum consider Shadow to be family. Afghan society, in general, considers dogs unclean and unfit to be any kind of personable company.

There are other important themes that Morpurgo lays out in his novel which will soon gain enormous traction. The idea that people must fight for their freedom and never give



in is signified by the choice Aman and his Mum make to find their way out of Afghanistan, leaving the evil of the Taliban for the freedom of England. Aman and his Mum encounter horrible obstacles –including being robbed by the local Afghan police who are supposed to protect them, and enduring the death of yet another family member in Aman’s grandmother –but still, they do not give up. They know their only chance for freedom is to fight for it, to make it through tough times.

As they journey, Aman and Mum are reminded of the importance of human kindness. The kindness that they receive comes in various ways. The human kindness of family can be seen in combination with family dependability when Mir arranges contacts for Aman and Mum to travel to England, while Aman’s grandmother is willing to give up her prized jewelry to ensure Aman and Mum will have enough money to make it through to England. Along the way, Aman and Mum, despite the challenges they face, also face small measures of human kindness which ultimately add up in the long run. Aman and his Mum catch a ride in the back of a melon truck with a friendly driver. Later, they encounter an even friendlier driver of the same tribe who takes them all the way to Kandahar. These kindnesses ensure that Aman and his Mum can continue their journey.

Discussion Question 1

What difficulties do Aman and his Mum encounter while traveling to Kabul? What is the worst for them? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Aman’s Mum finally have a change of heart about the dog? What is it exactly that changes her mind? What does this mean for the dog (especially regarding the dog’s name)?

Discussion Question 3

What small acts of human kindness do Aman and Mum receive during their journey? Why do these small acts of human kindness matter so much?

Vocabulary

tripe, quarrel, barrier, hopeless, skulking, treacherous, warily



Polly – God is Good

Summary

Polly: Aman – Aman begins running toward the soldiers, yelling at them to stop moving. The soldiers drop and take aim at Aman while one of the soldiers tells Aman to get back. The soldier approaches Shadow and calls out the name Polly, to which Shadow responds. Aman realizes the two must be old friends. The soldiers continue to tell Aman and his Mum to get back. They are told to take cover in a ditch. Eventually, a foreign soldier and an Afghan soldier approach. The Afghan soldier explains the bomb has been taken care of. The foreign soldier is British Sergeant Brodie, who warmly shakes the hands of Aman and his Mum, thanking them for alerting them to the bomb and telling them they were very brave. Brodie is very curious to know how Polly came to be in the care of Aman. He is stunned to learn of Aman's account, for Bamiyan is hundreds of miles away. Brodie and his squad then bring Aman, his Mum, and Shadow into a nearby village, where it is safer.

Quite a Hero: Aman – Aman and his Mum are welcomed into the village. A large audience gathers while Aman repeats the story of finding Shadow/Polly, as well as their own desire to move to England and see soccer games. The British soldiers are delighted with this. The soldiers then tell the story of Polly. Fourteen months before, Polly was out on patrol with a group of British troops, including Sergeant Brody who was Polly's handler. The patrol came under enemy fire, and Corporal Banford was killed. Polly disappeared during the firefight. It was believed she was killed since bomb dogs are always targeted by the Taliban because they save so many lives by finding bombs. Back in the present, Sergeant Brodie is amazed but not surprised at Polly's journey, believing she was looking for someone like Aman to care for her, as if she knew the way home. Aman, Brodie says, is quite the hero for saving Polly and bringing her back.

Silver, Like a Star: Aman - Sergeant Brodie gives Aman a piggyback ride all the way back to the British military base. Everyone is happy that Polly is safe and alive, and everyone makes a fuss over Aman saving Polly. Aman is very happy. Aman and his Mum are warmly welcomed at the base, where they call Uncle Mir and a blister on Aman's foot is tended to. Sergeant Brodie teaches Aman how to play Monopoly, and does a live video call with Aman and the Brodie family back in England. The soldiers hang out with Aman and play fetch with Polly. No matter how much Polly plays, she always comes back to Aman. Aman begins to wonder whether she is Polly or Shadow, and whether she will be coming along on the journey or staying with the soldiers. But Aman and Shadow both know she will be staying with the soldiers. Brodie confirms this, but says Aman can visit Polly back in England. When Aman and his Mum leave, the soldiers give them three cheers. Brodie gives Aman a regimental badge, saying he has earned it. He tells Aman that if Aman should ever need his help in England, he will have it. Brodie then says a heartbreaking goodbye to Shadow. Brodie and the soldiers thank Aman for everything, then see him and his Mum safely to a bus. The silver star-shaped badge makes Aman feel better.



The Whole Story, I Need the Whole Story: Grandpa – The novel returns to the present. Grandpa is amazed by the story that Aman tells. Aman is close to tears. Grandpa begins to wonder if there is something that actually can be done to help Aman and his Mum. Aman's Mum begs not to be sent back to Afghanistan, crying as she does so. She explains they have now been in England for six years, and that they consider England their home, now. Grandpa says he will do what he can to help, but must learn how Aman and his Mum came to be in England.

God is Good: Aman – Aman goes on. The novel now jumps back in time. It is six years before. When Aman and his Mum arrive the Iranian border, his Mum is very worried. When they make it through the border without a problem, Aman's Mum says that God is good. In Tehran, the next contact arranged by Mir. They are ferried between different trucks and containers in the night, and sometime later, are stopped by who they believe are the police.

Analysis

The relationship between people and dogs becomes central to the novel in this section. It is through encountering the British bomb patrol being led by Sergeant Brodie that Aman comes to learn the background of Shadow, formerly known as Polly, and how important she is to the war effort against the Taliban. Dogs like Polly save countless lives, not only of soldiers, but of civilians who are also targeted by the Taliban. In the present, Shadow has just saved the lives of Aman, his Mum, and the British patrol by discovering and alerting everyone to an IED buried underground. Brodie explains just how important dogs are to their efforts, to the lives of innocent civilians, noting that the Taliban ruthlessly kill dogs in order to make sure people die by IEDs. There is a tremendous difference in how Aman, Brodie, and Westerners view dogs –as lives worth saving who offer loyalty and companionship, who also save lives in turn –versus the Taliban, who have no problem killing dogs because it suits their purposes.

Aman comes to learn this, and more, when he and his Mum are taken to the safety of the British base. He sees how deeply Brodie and the other men of his unit love and trust Polly; and he knows as well that Polly has come to love and trust him as well. As Morpurgo demonstrates through this, there is a special kind of bond between dogs and people. That bond between Aman and Shadow, and between Brodie, the British, and Polly, in turn creates the possibility for friendship between Brodie and Aman. The two do indeed become friends, and before Aman leaves, Brodie extends a tremendous offer of friendship in that he will do all he can for Aman should Aman ever need a favor. This is symbolized in the very powerful gifting of Aman with a regimental badge –a deep and moving honor given from a soldier to a civilian. When Polly must stay behind with the unit, and when Aman and his Mum must continue on, they are deeply saddened to leave Polly behind. In such a short time, Polly has changed their lives forever for the better.

The British troops seen in the novel should also be noted for their human kindness. Along with the Americans, the British are working to defeat the Taliban so that the



people of Afghanistan may live peaceful and happy lives, while ensuring the rest of the world is safe from the terrorism the Taliban practice, and the terrorists they support. The British are risking their lives for world safety and for the people of Afghanistan. They know many of the people of Afghanistan, such as Aman and his Mum, are good and decent. This is largely why they bring Aman and his Mum to the safety of the base, and protect them until they are boarded on a bus in the nearby town. Aman comes to gain a healthy respect and love for the British and the West beyond what Uncle Mir has told him, and he begins to consider England his new home even though he has not yet arrived because of this. The British are especially kind to Aman and his Mum given their protection of Polly; and the kindness and love with which they treat Polly endears Aman to the ways of the British.

Aman also comes to learn, through the British, that freedom is something which must be fought for. The British, the Americans, and troops from many other friendly countries are combating the Taliban and seeking to destroy terrorism around the world to make it safer and freer for others. Aman recognizes the courage of the British troops who are fighting to make Afghanistan free. In the meantime, he and his Mum are still engaged in their own fight, a journey of struggle to find peace and freedom in England.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the British soldiers so amazed when they discover Polly with Aman and Mum? Why are they so thankful and happy that Polly is still alive?

Discussion Question 2

How do the attitudes toward dogs differ between Aman and the British and the Taliban?

Discussion Question 3

Although Shadow/Polly and Aman have become very close, Shadow must stay behind with the British while Aman and Mum continue to travel. Why? How do Aman and Shadow/Polly handle this?

Vocabulary

firefight, overwrought, suffering, appeal



The Little Red Train – We’re Going to Do It!

Summary

The Little Red Train: Aman – The people suspected of being the police turn out only to be the people handling them. Aman and his Mum, along with others, are allowed to stretch and then herded into another shipping container. Aman meets another young boy named Ahmed, and learns most of the other people –from countries all over –are looking for a better life in the West. Ahmed carries a little toy train with him. Unfortunately, there is little air, no food, and no water in the container. Many people die, including Ahmed.

All Brothers and Sisters Together: Aman – When the truck ride is over, Aman and his Mum learn they are now in Turkey. By way of truck and horse, Aman and his Mum begin to cross Turkey, along with the others, avoiding border patrols and being caught. They ultimately travel through Europe by truck, coming to the coast of France where refugee camps have been set up. One night, Aman, his Mum, and an elderly couple from Kabul sneak out of the camp into the countryside. The couple’s son arrives with a truck to bring them to England. From there, Uncle Mir arrives to pick them up and bring them to Manchester. The next day, Mir brings them to the police to claim protection as asylum seekers.

It’s Where We Belong Now: Aman – It is now the present. Aman explains Mir cannot visit them at the moment since he is in the hospital for an operation. Aman explains to Grandpa he has enjoyed life in Manchester with Uncle Mir, who has been a good and caring uncle. Aman reveals he had a difficult time of things at first, and was even picked on by some kids including one named Dan Smart. Aman explains it was Matt who took care of Dan for Aman. Aman also reveals that asylum seekers are not allowed to earn money, but his Mum volunteers and that he attends school at Belmont Academy, even though they have been at Yarl’s Wood for over a month now. Aman hopes to go on to study engineering in college. No matter what, Aman explains, it seems like the authorities are determined to send them back to Afghanistan, saying it is far different now. Aman now recalls the morning the authorities came for them.

Locked Up: Aman – The nove shifts to the past. Aman recalls how several immigration officers and policemen arrived at the apartment building to pull them outside, telling them to shut up and yelling at them. Aman and his Mum are told they are being taken to a detention center, and will soon be sent back to Afghanistan. They are put into a van with cells, and are locked up in separate cells. At Yarl’s Wood, Aman and his Mum make such a racket when they learn they are to be kept separate that the authorities allow them to stay together. This teaches them never to give in to what the authorities say or decide. Uncle Mir visits until he has a heart attack and must going into the hospital. Aman’s Mum has a panic attack. Several weeks later, Aman and his Mum make such a



racket as they are being prepared to board a plane to return home that they are taken back to Yarl. Aman's Mum tells him they must always fight for their freedom and never give in, just like Aman's grandfather.

We're Going to Do It!: Grandpa – The novel returns to the present. Aman and his Mum vow never to give in. Grandpa is deeply moved, and as he says he will be back, Aman gives him the silver star regimental badge. Outside, Grandpa tells Matt all about the visit. Matt is stunned by the stories, because Matt has never heard all of them before. Matt vows to help Aman and his Mum however he can.

Analysis

The idea that freedom must be fought for, and that people can never give in is given clear vocalization by Aman's Mum in the chapter, *Locked Up*. Aman's Mum believes this as deeply as the British soldiers do fighting in Afghanistan. It is something that Matt and his Grandpa also believe, for they wish to help Aman however they can. Although they do not yet know how they will go about helping Aman, There is a sense of real friendship between Aman and Grandpa now, and the friendship between Aman and Matt is what now motivates Matt to find a way to help like never before. Grandpa and Matt also understand that it is not right for Aman and his Mum to be locked up at Yarl's Wood given their story, and this as well as friendship motivates them to help.

The bond between dogs and people continues to be demonstrated to be unique in this section of the novel. Based on what Aman has seen regarding the British and how they treat their dogs; and based on knowledge of how well Grandpa treats Dog, Aman can only consider this to be one of the many reasons he wishes to stay in England, and one of the many reasons he considers England to be his true home. When Aman and his Mum see how kind the British can be –such as with Matt and Grandpa –their love of England (now home to them) only increases. Simple acts of human kindness matter more than people think, Morpurgo argues. Kindness matters immensely.

Between Matt and Grandpa, and between Aman and his Mum, the kindness that comes with family in turn reinforces the thematic argument that family can always be depended upon. Because Matt has depended upon Grandpa for help, Aman's situation now has a better chance than it did before. Because Aman and his Mum have relied upon one another in their escape from Afghanistan, they have safely spent the last six years in England. They have also heavily depended upon Uncle Mir, who has unfailingly and unhesitatingly cared for Aman and his Mum. Now in the present time, Matt and Grandpa have become something like family to Aman and his Mum, and through this and their friendship, Matt and Grandpa are determined to do anything they can to help Aman and his Mum. The trust and faith that Aman places in Grandpa and Matt are symbolized by the gifting of the regimental badge to Grandpa.



Discussion Question 1

Describe Aman's life in England. Why does he now consider England to be home? Why is this so important to him?

Discussion Question 2

How did Matt and Aman first come to be friends? Why did this matter so much to Aman? Why does the friendship between Matt and Aman matter so much in the present?

Discussion Question 3

How do Aman and Mum continue to fight for their freedom, even though they are locked up in a detention center? Why does it matter so much to them that they fight for their freedom?

Vocabulary

seasick, terrified, detention center, playacting, impression



Shooting Stars – Time to Go Home

Summary

Shooting Stars: Matt – Matt feels hurt that Aman has not told him most of what he has told Grandpa. Matt's hurt turns to anger when he thinks about how Aman and his Mum are being treated at Yarl's Wood. Matt knows it is unfair, cruel, and not right. Matt tells Grandpa that, because he is a journalist, he should publish Aman's story and raise awareness about it, to organize protests, to gain the attention of the government. Matt knows Aman must have given his star to Grandpa has a symbol of trust, faith, and his reliance on Grandpa and Matt. Grandpa agrees, calls his editor, gets approval for the story, and sets to work. The writing moves Matt to tears. The article is accepted, a protest is planned for eight, and the story makes headlines on the front page. Matt's own parents, Mum and Dad, agree to help in any way they can. They decide to organize the protest itself while Matt and Grandpa get to work on banners which Dog keeps walking on, putting paw prints all over everything. That night, Matt and Grandpa count six shooting stars before going to bed.

Just Two of Them and a Dog: Matt – The next morning, Grandpa and Matt arrive at Yarl's Wood Detention Center with their banners and Dog. They have a copy of the newspaper with Grandpa's story on the front page. Grandpa, Matt, and Dog are alone, but they begin the protest by holding up the banners. A police car arrives. The police check to see what Matt and Grandpa are doing, saying it is alright so long as they don't block the road or cause a public nuisance. Hours later, still no one else has arrived. Grandpa tells Matt to give the star a squeeze for good luck. A short time later, Mir and his family arrive to protest. Mir is thankful for the article, introduces his family, and explains that Aman has written to Brodie for help, but he has never received a reply. This angers Mir.

Singing in the Rain: Matt – Mir cannot understand why Brodie has never written back. It is then that cars begin to arrive, urged on by Mum and Dad. Among them are the kids from the soccer team. Television crews follow. A couple hundred people ultimately join the protest. The people shout to have Aman released. More policemen arrive as well, causing Matt to realize how serious the situation is. Dog barks at the police dogs that are brought on-scene. It then begins to rain. Everyone begins to sing the song "Singin' in the Rain" which causes the police to smile. At last, the rain stops. Inspector Smallwood of the police then arrives, announcing that Aman and his Mum have already been sent to Heathrow Airport for return to Kabul, Afghanistan, that morning.

Time to Go Home: Matt – Matt and the others are stunned by this news. Inspector Smallwood urges everyone to go home and get warm. It is then that a car arrives, and a dog just like Dog gets out. It is Polly/Shadow, and Sergeant Brodie and his daughter, Jess. Brodie apologizes for being late, but says there was traffic in London. He also reveals that an Icelandic volcano has gone off, causing all flights to be grounded and all airports to be closed. He reveals he saw the story in the paper, received permission



from his commanding officer, and went to London to see the government to press the case of Aman and his Mum. The government has declared Aman and his Mum a special case, and they will be allowed to stay in England after all. The crowd cheers, and begins singing once more. An hour later, Aman and his Mum arrive by car. Everyone is thrilled. Brodie explains he never received Aman's letter, and that sometimes, things simply get lost in the mail. Brodie also explains he has been in and out of hospitals fifteen times thanks to an IED injury. Brodie and Jess reveal they have officially renamed Polly, Shadow. That night, Matt and Grandpa watch stars once more. Grandpa finds the stars to be beautiful, while Matt now considers volcanoes to be great.

Analysis

Friendship proves to be utterly important in difficult times as the novel comes to a close. Matt and his Grandpa, who are motivated not only by moral right but by their friendship and family-like considerations of Aman and his Mum, take great steps to ensure that Aman and his Mum may be freed. They organize a protest, and Grandpa puts his talents as a journalist to good use by exposing the story of Aman and his Mum to the public at large. It is Sergeant Brodie who comes through for Aman in the end, however, as he personally appeals to the government on behalf of his friendship with Aman –and the relationship between Aman and Polly, now officially renamed Shadow. That special relationship and bond between Aman and Shadow, which led to the saving of countless British, American, and civilian lives, now provides the foundation for Aman and his Mum to remain in England.

The bond between dogs and people is unique, Morpurgo continues to argue as Brodie and Jess arrive at the protest. Brodie and Jess are impressed with the love Aman has for Shadow and the care he ensured she had while she was lost in Afghanistan. This compels Brodie to defend Aman and helps to make it possible for Aman and his Mum to remain in England. Not only has Shadow saved countless more lives since her return, but this would not have been possible had Aman not brought Shadow back. Because of this, Aman is considered a hero, and Brodie is willing to do whatever he can to help Aman. The volcano in Iceland helps things by shooting so much ash into the air that flights are impossible and airports are closed.

The reason why the protest gains so much traction at all –and the reason why Brodie even learns of the protest to begin with –is because Matt is able to rely on his family. Grandpa writes the article and prevails upon his editor to receive front-page, headline placement for the story. Matt's mother and father also throw their hands into things, helping to organize the protest itself, and helping to spread the word about it. It is because of the article and the protest that such attention is given to Aman's situation, and to Yarl's Wood in general. It is thanks to the article that Brodie even becomes aware of Aman's situation at all. The releasing of Aman and his Mum would not have been possible without the help of Matt's family.



Discussion Question 1

How do Matt and Grandpa finally decide to tackle the issue of getting Aman and his Mum to remain in England? Why do they take this approach?

Discussion Question 2

Why has it taken so long for Sergeant Brodie to become involved with not only the protest, but with helping Aman? Why is this so important to both Brodie and Aman?

Discussion Question 3

How does it become possible for Aman and his Mum to remain in England, especially as it relates to Shadow/Polly? Why does this matter so much?

Vocabulary

procrastinating, protest, persuade, public nuisance, almighty, anxious, bucked



Characters

Matt

Matt is the fourteen year-old best friend of Aman and the grandson of Grandpa. Matt is a kind and protective teenager who deeply loves his family and dogs. He values being best friends with Aman. When Matt learns of Aman's situation at Yarl's Wood, Matt tries as hard as he can to get in touch with Aman. He has no success until he brings Grandpa in to help. Matt, angered by Aman being locked up, encourages Grandpa to write about the situation. Then, Matt joins his Grandpa in staging a protest to secure the release of Aman and his mother.

Aman

Aman Khan is the fourteen year-old best friend of Matt, and the son of Mum (Mrs. Khan). Aman is fiercely loyal of his family, especially his Mother who went to jail on his behalf for stealing food. Aman is a kind, perceptive, and courageous teenager who, while living in Afghanistan, finds a stray dog amidst the background of violence caused by the Taliban. Aman befriends the dog. He, his mother, and the dog leave Afghanistan for safety in England.

Aman is saddened to learn the dog belongs to the military, but he becomes heartened by how well Sergeant Brodie and the others love dogs. Safe in England under asylum for six years, Aman and his mother are scheduled to be deported to Afghanistan. Aman places his faith in Matt, Grandpa, and Brodie to prevent this from happening. His trust is well-rewarded.

Grandpa

Grandpa is the widowed grandfather of Matt. Although initially reluctant to become involved with helping Aman because he does not know Aman, Grandpa is willing to at least get to know Aman at Matt's urging. It is through learning about Aman's story that Grandpa solidly decides to do something about Aman's situation, saying he will do whatever he can to help. With Matt's encouragement, Grandpa writes an article about Aman which makes headlines and leads to the staging of a protest.

Mrs. Khan (Mum)

Mrs. Khan, known as Mum, is Aman's mother. She is the sole surviving member of Aman's family to escape the savagery of the Taliban. Out of love, Mum goes to jail on behalf of Aman, during which time she spends a week in prison being beaten by Taliban-backed policemen.



Initially, she resists efforts by her own mother and brother, Mir, to get her to leave because she does not wish to leave her own mother behind. When her own mother is killed, Mum decides it is time to go. Safe in England for six years, Aman's mother is traumatized by her time at Yarl's Wood because it reminds her of prison in Afghanistan.

Dog

Dog is the brown-and-white spaniel owned by Grandpa and named by Matt. Dog is a friendly, loyal, and aging dog whose photograph brings Aman to tears as Aman remembers Shadow. When banners are prepared for the protest, Dog helps out by trotting across the banners and adding his painted paw prints to them.

Shadow/Polly

Shadow/Polly is a brown-and-white spaniel handled by Sergeant Brodie and used as a bomb-sniffing dog in Afghanistan. During a firefight, Polly runs off, travels hundreds of miles north, and is taken in and cared for by Aman. Polly comes to be called a shadow as she loyally watches out for Aman and his mother, thus earning the new name Shadow.

Shadow then comes to find a bomb at a crossroads while traveling with Aman and his mother, simultaneously alerting nearby British troops to the threat. Among the troops are Sergeant Brodie, who is thrilled to see she is still alive. Shadow returns to service with Brodie until she and Brodie are sent home. Shadow also comes to attend the protest in defense of Aman with Sergeant Brodie.

Sergeant Brodie

Sergeant Brodie is a British combat infantryman who leads patrols in Afghanistan while fighting the Taliban. As the handler of Polly, he is devastated when Polly runs away. Fourteen months later, he is thrilled when Aman appears with Polly. Brodie is so moved by what Aman has done to care for Polly that he ensures Aman and his mother are kept safe at the British base until continuing on with their journey. Brodie even gives Aman a regimental badge as a sign of honor and friendship. Polly serves on with Brodie and the British until they are sent home following a bad injury sustained by Brodie. Brodie and his daughter, Jess, decide to rename Polly as Shadow in honor of Aman. Later, the three join the protest for Aman. It is Brodie who manages to personally convince the government that Aman should stay.

Jess Brodie

Jess Brodie is the teenage daughter of Sergeant Brodie. Jess loves her father and Polly immensely. In honor of Aman, they rename Polly as Shadow. Later, Jess and her father attend the protest to keep Aman in England.



Uncle Mir

Uncle Mir is the brother of Aman's mother, and he is the uncle of Aman. A longtime transplanted citizen of England, Mir arranges money and contacts to help Aman and his Mother escape Afghanistan for England. In England, Mir goes above and beyond to care for Aman and his Mother. Later, Mir joins the protest to keep them in England.

Matt's Parents

Matt's mother and father are spoken to and spoken of, but they are never seen in the novel. They are immensely supportive and kind parents, both going out of their way to try to help Matt get in touch with Aman at Yarl's Wood. Both become essential to organizing the protest to keep Aman in England as they rally friends, spread the word, and usher people to the protest.

Symbols and Symbolism

Formal Letter of Permission

In order for Grandpa to visit Aman at Yarl's Wood, he must write a formal letter seeking permission. After getting permission, he is able to visit with Aman on Wednesdays. Wednesday is the only day that Yarl's Wood is open to adult members of the public.

Monopoly

Monopoly is Aman's favorite game. It symbolizes his love of the West and friendship. Aman learns how to play Monopoly with Sergeant Brodie, thereafter coming to consider it his favorite game. Aman sees it as a bridging of two worlds, the establishing of friendship, and the promises of the West.

In England, Aman loves to play Monopoly with Matt. Aman always wins. In Yarl's Wood, Aman wins a round with Grandpa. They find it amusing to be in jail playing a game in which players can go to jail.

Family Photo

A photograph of Grandpa, Matt, Dog, and the rest of the family is shown to Aman by Grandpa. The photograph causes Aman to cry. Aman explains this is because Dog reminds him so much of Shadow. This leads to Aman telling Grandpa about his story, his travels, and his journey to England.

Soccer Team Photo

A photograph of Aman's soccer team from Manchester is shown to Grandpa. Aman uses the photograph as a way to explain how much England has become a part of his life and how much he now considers England to be home. He uses the photograph to show Grandpa what his new life is like and what things are possible now that were not possible in Afghanistan.

IEDs

IEDs, or improvised explosive devices, are bombs assembled by the Taliban from different kinds of explosive materials. IEDs are planted along roadsides, at crossroads, and wherever they can kill people. They can be triggered by remote control or by the presence of people. Shadow, as Polly, is trained to sniff out and find IEDs in order to save the lives of foreign soldiers (British and American) and Afghan civilians. By finding IEDs, Polly saves countless lives.



Regimental Badge

A regimental badge, silver in color with a picture of castle walls on it and the words Royal Anglian, is given to Aman by Brodie as a symbol of friendship and honor. This is done because Aman has cared for Polly, ensuring her survival. Polly's good care ensured that she will continue to save countless lives.

Receiving the badge, which is literally the symbol of the regiment, is a very high honor when given to a non-combatant. It denotes honor and friendship being bestowed upon someone who has played an important part in the regiment's work.

Shipping Containers

Shipping containers loaded onto trucks are the primary way refugees are smuggled between countries in the Middle East and Europe. The containers symbolize the extraordinary risks people are willing to take to cross borders illegally. The containers are often airtight and have no ventilation, have little room for movement, and lead to deaths –such as Ahmed's. Aman and his mother travel in several shipping containers through the course of the novel in order to cross the border of Afghanistan and Iran and to find their way to the coast of France.

Newspaper Article

A newspaper article, encouraged by Matt and written by Grandpa, makes headlines and alerts the public to the plight of Aman. The article details Aman's extraordinary story of travel to England, and calls for a protest to keep Aman in England. The article also alerts Sergeant Brodie to Aman's situation, allowing Brodie to appeal to the British government to allow Aman and his mother to remain in England.

Protest

A protest advocating for Aman and his mother to remain in England is called for by Matt and Grandpa in Grandpa's article. The protest comes to feature several hundred people. Matt's parents help to organize it. The protest is carefully watched by the police, who allow it to go on because it is the right of the people and because it is a peaceful protest. Although Brodie, Jess, and Shadow arrive late at the protest, the news they bring is good: Aman and his mother will be allowed to stay in England.

Volcano

The eruption of a volcano in Iceland unwittingly aids the efforts of Grandpa and Matt to protest the deportation of Aman and his mother. The black ash thrown into the sky grounds all flights and causes all airports to close. This means Aman and his mother

cannot be returned to Afghanistan, which gives Brodie the time needed to plead the case to let Aman and his mother stay.



Settings

Manchester

Manchester is the city in England where Matt and his family live, and where Aman and Aman's Mother have lived with Uncle Mir up until being taken to Yarl's Wood.

Manchester is where Aman and his Mother now consider to be home, and they will do whatever they can to be able to return to Manchester to live out their lives. Aman loves his live in Manchester not only living among the free and kind British people, but because he can play soccer there, study in school there, and can attend Manchester United soccer games.

Bamiyan

Bamiyan is a valley in Afghanistan where Aman, his Mother, their family, and the Hazara people make their homes. Bamiyan is a beautiful and peaceful place until the Russians, and later the Taliban, take control of the country. Bamiyan becomes the place of much violence and destruction as the Taliban target all those who they do not like, including the Hazara and Aman's family. Not until the Americans arrive does the Bamiyan valley become anything resembling what it used to be, but even then there is still violence caused by the Taliban. It is from the Bamiyan valley that Aman and his Mother decide to leave for England.

Bamiyan jail

A Bamiyan jail is where Aman's Mother is taken when she takes the blame for stealing apples on behalf of her son. Aman's Mother is locked up and savagely beaten for an entire week before being released. This experience both devastates and traumatizes her, making her future time at Yarl's Wood to be especially horrifying. Aman's Mother comes to have terrifying flashbacks and panic attacks about Bamiyan's jail anytime she is in an enclosed space, or when the pressure at Yarl's Wood gets to be too much.

Yarl's Wood Detention Center

Yarl's Wood Detention Center is located not far from where Matt's Grandpa lives. Yarl's Wood Detention Center is a military-controlled compound where illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, and others awaiting deportation to their countries of origin are kept. Yarl's Wood is surrounded by barbed wire and guards, for the British government does not want to take any chances that a bad person among those awaiting deportation could cause trouble. Grandpa and Matt believe it is unjust and not right for Aman and his Mother to be facing deportation given what they have done, so Matt and Grandpa organize a protest on their behalf outside the gates. Grandpa is especially unhappy that children are being kept in such a place.

Iceland

Iceland is an island country located to the northwest of Europe that features several large volcanoes. Toward the end of the novel, a volcano erupts and sends ashy clouds into the sky. This causes air traffic across Europe to be grounded, and all airports to be shutdown. Because of this, Aman and his Mother cannot leave England for Afghanistan, which in turn gives Sergeant Brodie time to plead their case.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship is important in difficult times.

Friendship is important in difficult times, argues Michael Morpurgo in *Shadow*. While friendship is a good thing in good times, it is especially important in difficult times. In the novel, the friendship between Aman and Matt proves to be vital to the fate of Aman and his Mum, especially in relation to Aman's friendship with Sergeant Brodie.

Aman and Matt become friends not long after Aman's beginning school in England. When other kids make fun of Aman and pick on him, it is Matt who sticks up for Aman. The two quickly become friends, forming a bond over enjoying spending time with one another, playing Monopoly, and playing soccer. Aman and Matt soon become best friends.

When Aman is taken away to Yarl's Wood, Matt is stunned. He knows that what has happened to Aman is not right. Since his friend has been treated so unfairly, Matt does everything he can to help Aman. Matt asks his parents to call Yarl's Wood. and he writes letters to the government about Aman and Aman's Mum. Matt later encourages his Grandpa to visit Aman. Grandpa also writes an article about Aman's situation.

Because Aman was so kind to *Shadow* and because *Shadow* went on to save countless lives, Aman is befriended by Sergeant Brodie. Brodie gives Aman a regimental badge as a symbol of honor and friendship, vowing to do all he can should Aman ever need his help. When Brodie reads the article about Aman's situation, he upholds his promise of friendship, pulls strings and prevails upon the government to declare a special exception for Aman and his Mum to remain in England.

Family can always be depended upon.

In the novel *Shadow*, Michael Morpurgo argues that one can always depend upon their family. In the most difficult moments of life, sometimes family is all that remains. This is certainly the case for Aman and Matt. Family comes through at the most important moments of their lives. Their presence brings important consequences, especially for Aman.

In Afghanistan, family is all that Aman can rely on. The Taliban kill people they do not like and destroy the people's towns. As a result, Aman and his family must live in caves, where they manage to scrape by. When Aman's father is taken away by the Taliban, Aman must often steal food to survive. When Aman is caught, his Mum, out of love, takes the blame. She is tortured in jail for a week.

When Aman's grandmother is killed by the Taliban, Aman and his Mum decide to leave Afghanistan for England. To do so, they must rely on money and contacts provided by Uncle Mir, who has been a longtime citizen of England. *Shadow* becomes a third



member of the now very small Khan family, with Aman's Mum even welcoming Shadow into the fold. They travel together and endure horrible situations in their pursuit of freedom in England. In England, Mir cares for Aman and his Mum until they are taken to Yarl's Wood. Mir continues to press their case after this.

Matt is stunned when Aman and his Mum are taken to Yarl's Wood. Matt relies on his mother and father to place calls to the facility to inquire about Aman, since Matt cannot do it himself. Matt prevails upon Grandpa to actually visit Aman in Yarl's Wood, and then encourages his Grandpa to tell Aman's story in a newspaper article. A protest is organized, with Matt's mother and father laying the groundwork and spreading the word. Because of their efforts, the protest is attended by hundreds.

The bond between dogs and people is unique.

The bond between dogs and people is unique, argues Michael Morpurgo in *Shadow*. The bond between a person and a dog has no conditions. It is founded only upon love, companionship, and loyalty. The relationship is beneficial to both person and dog. This proves to be especially important for Aman.

Afghanistan's culture holds dogs to be unclean. The dogs' lives are not considered worth much. Even Aman at first is annoyed by Shadow's presence at the cave when she first appears, but quickly warms up to her. Even Aman's Mum later comes to consider Shadow a member of the family. Shadow watches out for Aman and his Mum by protecting them and getting in between them and bad strangers. Shadow travels with them across the country where the attitudes of other Afghans toward dogs are on clear display, such as the man who wants Shadow only to see her killed in dog fighting.

The attitudes of Afghans are contrasted clearly with the British, who even outside of war treat their dogs as members of the family, and treat their dogs with love and tender care. In war, dogs are considered invaluable because they can sniff out bombs and save lives. The Taliban deliberately try to kill dogs because of this. Sergeant Brodie and the other British troops are thrilled to discover that Shadow is still alive, and this helps to bring about friendship between Brodie and Aman.

When Aman and his Mum are put into Yarl's Wood, Brodie learns about the situation and immediately heads to the government. He describes Aman's efforts to save and care for Shadow, which means that countless lives were saved by Shadow's safe return. Because of this, the British government grants a special exemption for Aman and his Mum by allowing them to stay in England, all because Aman shared a special bond with Shadow.



People must fight for their freedom and never give up their fight.

People must fight for their freedom and never give in, argues Michael Morpurgo in *Shadow*. Morpurgo's argument is voiced clearly and succinctly through the character of Mum. Having seen so much horror and sadness in her life, Mum knows that freedom is worth fighting for and the only thing that can bring about peace and new life.

Aman's family has a history of fighting for freedom. Aman's grandfather battled the Russians and Afghan Communists when Russia invaded many years before. Aman's own father comes to side with the Americans against the Taliban, knowing the Americans are good and have brought about hope for the future. Aman himself comes to care for and protect Shadow, a British military dog who has the talent for sniffing out bombs. In his own way, Aman has helped the war effort for freedom against the Taliban by doing this.

When Aman's grandmother is killed, Aman and his Mum decide it is time to leave Afghanistan. They decide their freedom must occur somewhere else, and decide England is the best place to go. In order to get to England, they must fight in their own way, struggling through many miles of journey. They must deal with corrupt local police, border guards, and smugglers of refugees who are unkind and uncaring. It is a difficult fight to get to England, but Aman and his Mum succeed.

In England, after six years of asylum, Afghanistan is considered safe enough to return people like Aman and his Mum. Aman and his Mum now consider England home, and do not wish to leave. Each time they are to be deported, Aman and his Mum yell, bang on things, and create such a racket that the authorities return them to the detention facility. Aman's Mum explains here that they must always fight for freedom in whatever way they can, even if it is just making noise. Aman and Mum delay their deportation, allowing Matt and Brodie time to work on their behalf.

Human kindness matters.

Human kindness matters, argues Michael Morpurgo in *Shadow*. Human kindness –the doing of good deeds for another simply out of respect of another human being for the sake of being human –has important and immense consequences. Even simple acts of human kindness can matter in the darkest times.

When Aman and his Mum remain as the sole surviving members of the Khan family – with Aman's father and grandmother both dead at the hands of the Taliban –they decide they must leave for England. Before she is killed, Aman's grandmother offers up a simple act of human kindness by giving up her prized jewelry to Aman and his Mum so that they may sell it if they are in need of money to travel.



Out on the road, Aman and his Mum face countless acts of cruelty and barbarity, most importantly when the local corrupt police steal everything Aman and his Mum have. Only Shadow remaining loyal helps to keep their spirits up enough to continue on. At the same time, a free truck ride to Kandahar by a friendly truck driver –a simple act of human kindness –makes all the difference to Aman and his Mum. It not only helps them on their journey, but gives them great heart and great hope.

When Aman and his Mum arrive in England, Aman is bullied by some of the kids at school. Matt steps in to defend Aman. This simple act of human kindness begins a friendship between Matt and Aman which will result in both boys becoming best friends. When Aman is put in Yarl's Wood, Matt becomes his fiercest defender, urging Grandpa and the rest of the family to protest on Aman's behalf. Matt not only bases his defense of Aman on the idea that Aman being locked up is not right, but because Aman is his best friend and there is a sense of loyalty which motivates Matt to advocate on Aman's behalf.



Styles

Point of View

Michael Morpurgo tells his novel *Shadow* in the first-person limited-omniscient narrative mode, from the points of view of Matt, Aman, and Grandpa. The novel is a combination of three distinct people and three distinct stories best told by the people who themselves lived the events they now relate. The novel begins and ends with Matt serving as narrator, setting the stage for the novel and concluding it. Grandpa serves as narrator while speaking with Aman, and Aman serves as narrator in recounting the events of his past and the events which led him and his Mum to England.

Aman's story forms the core of the novel, for it is from his story that the circumstances of the present –being kept in Yarl's Wood, and the efforts of Matt and Grandpa to free him –are possible. Because none of the characters know exactly what is going on with the others (for example, Aman does not know what Matt is up to, nor does Matt know the full story behind Aman's past), the narrative of each of the characters is limited in knowledge of events going on. However, Morpurgo allows the reader an omniscient perspective to learn firsthand of the things going on with each of the characters as the novel shifts between narrators.

Language and Meaning

Michael Morpurgo tells his novel *Shadow* in language that differs according to the character currently narrating. This is done according to the fact that the novel comprises three distinct narrators, each speaking in first person. The sections of the novel told by Matt are full of passion and determination, as Matt endeavors to do all he can to help Aman and Aman's Mum. For example, in the chapter *Shooting Stars*, Matt clearly explains his hurt and anger at Aman's situation, and his desire to do something: "It was unfair. It was cruel. It wasn't right... The more I thought about it, the clearer my thinking became... I knew exactly what we should do. I didn't know if it would work. I only knew we had to try" (Morpurgo, 142).

Sections told by Grandpa are more reserved, questioning, and reflective, which in turn reflect Grandpa's long life and his intelligence. Consider the chapter *We Want You Back*, where Grandpa first goes into Yarl's Wood. He is very observant, noticing everything from the gates to the guards, but wonders what good the visit will do: "So what was the point of visiting? I mean, what could I do? What could I say that would make any difference?" (Morpurgo, 14). Sections of the novel told by Aman are very thoughtful, very emotional, but very simple and to the point. This allows Morpurgo to convey great emotions through the simplicity of Aman's language. For example, in the chapter *Bamiyan*, a simple phrase from Aman speaks volumes about his world under the Taliban: "The Taliban blew up our whole lives" (Morpurgo, 33).

Structure

Michael Morpurgo divides his novel *Shadow* into unnumbered, titled chapters, which weave between the present and the past as the novel moves toward its conclusion in the present. The novel begins in the present with Matt and Grandpa seeking to visit Aman and his Mum, who have already spent more than a month at Yarl's Wood. The novel then shifts back in time six years to Afghanistan as Aman tells the story of how he came to leave Afghanistan. The novel then shifts back to the present temporarily as Grandpa explains he wants to help, but he needs to know the rest of Aman's story, and how Aman has come to England. The novel then shifts back in time six years, during which Aman concludes the story of his journey and arrival to England. This also includes befriending Matt, and includes Aman's dreams of going to college in England to become an engineer. The novel then returns fully to the present where Grandpa writes an article for, and Matt and Grandpa organize the protest that will be carried out on behalf of Aman and his Mum.



Quotes

Yarl's Wood, that's it.

-- Matt (When the Stars Begin to Fall)

Importance: When Matt goes to visit Grandpa, he explains to Grandpa the situation in which Aman and his family have found themselves. Asylum seekers to England from Afghanistan, Aman and his family are being kept at Yarl's Wood until they can be sent back to Afghanistan. Matt is very unhappy with this, begging the British government to let them stay, and trying his best to visit Aman.

And they keep kids in there?' Grandpa breathed.

-- Grandpa ("And They Keep Kids In There?")

Importance: When Grandpa and Matt head to Yarl's Wood so that Grandpa may visit Aman and his family, Grandpa is surprised to see the place surrounded by barbed wire. This angers Grandpa to think that children are being kept behind barbed wire. Grandpa, who has not been looking forward to the visit, is now determined to carry out the visit.

I don't want promises.... I just want you to listen to our story. That's all. Will you do that?

-- Aman (Shadow)

Importance: When Grandpa goes to visit Aman, a family photograph upsets Aman because Dog reminds Aman of his own dog, Shadow. Aman hopes that Grandpa may be able to help them get out of Yarl's Wood, but Grandpa says he cannot make any promises. Aman says he does not wish for promises, but he asks Grandpa to hear his story. Grandpa readily agrees to listen.

The Taliban blew up our whole lives.

-- Aman (Bamiyan)

Importance: Aman begins his story by talking about the rise of the Taliban after the Russians were defeated. he explains the Taliban were cruel and murderous, and destroyed entire towns. Aman explains that he and a hundred others went to live and hide in caves to escape the Taliban, and that not until the Americans came did things begin to get back to normal. However, some Taliban remained, and took away Aman's father. Aman's father was never seen again.

We left Bamiyan the next day, the day Grandmother was buried.

-- Aman ("Walk Tall, Aman")

Importance: After the Taliban kill Grandmother, Aman and his Mum decide it is now time to leave Bamiyan for England. They are deeply saddened by the death of Grandmother, but have money, jewels, and the determination to reach safe places. They set out at once, with Aman looking forward to a new life in England.



At least, we have one friend left in this world. She has great courage, this dog. I was wrong about her. I think maybe this dog is not like other dogs. She may be a stranger, but as such we should welcome her and look after her... I think she is more like a friend than a dog, like a friendly shadow that does not want to leave us. You never lose your shadow.

-- Mum ("Walk Tall, Aman")

Importance: As Aman and his Mum begin their journey to England, they approach Kabul. After being treated horribly and being robbed by the police, Aman and his Mum realize the dog is still with them. Mum says she was wrong about considering the dog unclean. Now she believes that the dog is more like a friendly shadow that should be welcomed and cared for. It is from this that Shadow takes her name.

Bamiyan is hundreds of miles away, up north. This whole thing is impossible.

-- Sergeant Brodie (Polly)

Importance: When Shadow finds a bomb at the crossroads, she alerts the nearby British soldiers as well as Aman and his Mum to the danger. The bomb is safely handled. Brodie is amazed to learn of Aman's tale of finding Polly, because Bamiyan is an extremely far distance away. Brodie and his men then bring Aman and his Mum to the safety of a nearby village to learn more and to ensure Aman and his Mum are cared for.

I knew the answer. She knew the answer. I think we both kept hoping that both of us were wrong.

-- Aman (Silver, Like a Star)

Importance: When Sergeant Brodie brings Aman, his Mum, and Shadow back to the base, Aman and Shadow both wonder what the future will hold. They wonder whether Shadow will journey to England with them, or stay with the soldiers. Aman and Shadow both believe, however, that Shadow will more than likely end up remaining with the soldiers. It is a heartbreaking though, especially when Shadow has been through so much with them.

The more I know, the better. I need to know everything.

-- Grandpa ("The Whole Story, I Need the Whole Story")

Importance: After Aman relates the story of how he came to find Shadow, and how Shadow went back to her British unit, Aman's Mum begs Grandpa for help to avoid deportation. Grandpa says he will do all he can to help, but he cannot make any promises. He goes on to explain that he will need the rest of the story –how Aman and his Mum made it to England –so that he can better understand the situation and how he might be able to help.

We told them all this before, but it is not good. They give us all sorts of reasons.

-- Aman ("It's Where We Belong Now")



Importance: Aman explains his new life in Manchester to Grandpa. Aman explains how much he enjoys living in Britain and being British. He explains that he and his Mum have tried repeatedly to convince the British authorities to let them stay, but that the British authorities seemed determined to send them back no matter what. Aman and his Mum express to Grandpa just how much they do not want to go back.

We must fight for our freedom and never give in.

-- Mum (through Aman) (Locked Up)

Importance: When Aman and his Mum are prepared for return to Afghanistan, they make such a racket that the authorities are forced to take them back to Yarl's Wood. Aman's Mum says that his father and grandfather would be proud of them for putting up such a fight. Aman knows that he must fight for freedom so it is not taken away.

Anyway, the long and the short of it is that Aman and his Mum are staying. A special case, the minister called it, when he'd heard me out, a very special case.

-- Sergeant Brodie (Time to Go Home)

Importance: When the protest is organized, Sergeant Brodie arrives late, and apologizes. He explains he has been to London to see a government minister to personally plead Aman's case. Because of this, Aman and his Mum are being allowed to stay in England. Brodie reveals this has been possible because he himself explained the history of Aman and Shadow.