

# **Sunrise Over Fallujah Study Guide**

## **Sunrise Over Fallujah by Walter Dean Myers**

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# Plot Summary

*Sunrise Over Fallujah* is a young adult novel by Walter Dean Myers. The story follows the trials and experiences of eighteen year-old Harlem native Robin “Birdy” Perry through the opening months of the Iraq War in 2003.

Having seen 9/11 as a teenager, Birdy feels compelled to do something important for his country. So, he joins the U.S. Army. He becomes part of the Civil Affairs unit, dedicated to winning the hearts and minds of Iraqi civilians following combat operations. Birdy’s unit does everything from handing out supplies, to playing soccer with kids, to trying to soothe things over following accidental deaths. He and his teammates feel proud of what they are doing, and because they do their work so well, they are given the task of working with Special Operations forces to secure a cache of improvised explosive device detonators from southern Iraq. The unit is ambushed, during which time Birdy is wounded. Jonesy, his closest Army friend, is killed.

At the end of the novel, Birdy is transferred to Ramstein in Germany to be treated.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

While Robin “Birdy” Perry, a Harlem native, is on his way to Iraq, he writes to his Uncle Richie, a Vietnam War veteran. It is February 27, 2003. Birdy recounts reading his uncle’s letters from Vietnam and hopes that the Iraqis will not want to fight. He hopes that they will just surrender. Birdy also reflects on the anger of his father at Birdy’s wanting to join the military, instead of going to college. After 9/11, Birdy wanted to stand up and do something for his country.

Upon arriving in Iraq, Birdy and the others are assembled inside Kuwait at Camp Doha. They are listening to Major Spring Sessions as she addresses the Civil Affairs (CA) unit in which Birdy has been placed. The unit is composed of a medical team, an intelligence team, security personnel, and a flex team that will work directly with the local civilian population.

Major Sessions hands things over to Captain Coles. Coles is tall, thin, and very sincere. He begins to get the members of the team acquainted by having them introduce themselves. There is Corporal Eddie Evans, Corporal Charlie Jones, Sergeant Robert Harris, Corporal Marla Kennedy, Private Robin Perry, Specialist Jean Darcy, Corporal Victor Rios, PFC Shelly Danforth, and Corporal Phil Pendleton. The unit is attached to the Third Infantry, who along with the Fourth Marines, will lead the attack if it comes to combat. The Civil Affairs team will work with Iraqi civilians and begin the rebuilding process following cessation of combat. Coles cautions the team to do their work, as he works for Major Sessions, who works for Colonel Armand Rose, a veteran whose service stretches back to Grenada in 1983. Both of them demand excellence.

After Coles dismisses them, Kennedy comes to talk to Birdy, for she remembers him from Fort Dix in New Jersey. Charlie “Jonesy” Jones also speaks with Birdy, explaining he is in the military to save up some money. After serving, he will open a blues club and jam with God on Sunday. Jones has a very close relationship with God. Jonesy tells Birdy that they’ve got to watch out for each other as well, especially because Birdy is tall and tall guys try to be heroes. Birdy says he isn’t the hero type.

### Chapter 2

Special detachments for Medical, Construction, and Intelligence units are created. Medical is led by Captain Miller, a no-nonsense woman who acts like she knows what she is doing. Construction looks like fun to Birdy. Intelligence doesn’t hold too strong of an appeal to Birdy, since they spend most of their time dealing with reports, messages, and so on.



Birdy is assigned to the Flex team. Coles explains that if anything goes wrong, they'll get blamed for it. The unit is given three Humvees. Coles, Jonesy, Birdy, and Kennedy are assigned to it. This is First Squad.

Second Squad consists of Sergeant Harris driving, Darcy on the squad gun, and Evans. Third Squad consists of Love driving, Danforth on the Humvee's gun, Pendleton, and a quiet guy named Corbin. Ahmed Sabbat is their field interpreter. He is an American, though his parents are originally from the Middle East.

Evans believes it will all be over by July. Harris thinks a major fight is coming. Coles explains that Saddam Hussein remembers the Gulf War. Being smart, he knows he can't stand up to the United States. A guy with tattoos –including one that reads ALKN – says Saddam is going to get smoked. Marla Kennedy is surprised at how much Harris wants to fight. Harris explains that the only thing people in the Middle East respect is power. Kennedy asks Coles why he is in the military. Coles explains that he joined back when he was twenty-two, figuring the military would work for him until he found out what he wanted to do instead; but, he hasn't gotten to that point yet. He does, however, like Civil Affairs because it puts a human face on things. The unit, along with a thousand others, see a film about Saddam and his butchering of the Kurd people. Troops from the Third Infantry unit are ready to go and fight. Colonel Rose reminds everyone that they represent the United States and the world will be watching them. How they conduct themselves will reflect on the United States. This is especially important for the Civil Affairs unit. The purpose of the potential war is regime change, not making the people of the country suffer.

Kennedy and Birdy talk at breakfast the next morning. The Hoodlums –a nickname for Special Operations guys –have disappeared. Coles sits down with Birdy and Kennedy, and explains that all signs point to go. The soldiers ask about Coles hometown. He explains that he is from Allentown, Pennsylvania. His family goes back to England. Danforth says he is from right outside of Richmond. Marla Kennedy says it sounds like a war movie, with everyone talking about where they're from. She goes on to say that they'll end up killed. Then, she walks away. Second Squad names their Humvee "Def Con II." First Squad calls their Humvee "Miss Molly" because Birdy is mad at Marla for calling him "Birdy." Birdy then e-mails his uncle, asks about his dad, and talks about the floors in tents that can be assembled and disassembled.

### Chapter 3

Tension builds as it seems combat is inevitable. Jonesy and Birdy worry about their training, wondering if other American troops were better trained than they were. Birdy and Jonesy pray to God that night because Jonesy believes that he is at a crossroad and needs to make a deal. Darcy, Jonesy, and the others are later concerned about the rules of engagement, whom to fight, whom to disarm, whom to let go, and so on. Each of the squad members trains with the guns on the Humvees, but Kennedy is the best. They are told that it comes naturally to some people. Coles tells them that every man is responsible for every other man in the unit. Everyone has to watch out for everyone. A small, round Specialist comes over and asks if Jonesy and Birdy want to join a prayer



group, but both of them decline. After lunch, the call comes in to move out. Civil Affairs will be following two infantry brigades. They drive through the night and into the next morning. As they travel, Coles explains that if they only go in and fight, they'll be seen as tough guys. However, if they help to rebuild and teach democracy, they'll be seen as good guys as well. The column rolls into Iraq.

## Analysis

Walter Dean Myer's novel *Sunrise Over Fallujah* opens in late February, 2003. United States Armed Forces are on the brink of war with Iraq. The forces are waiting inside Kuwait to see how things will play out. Among the American forces is the Civil Affairs unit, to which Robin "Birdy" Perry, an eighteen year-old Harlem, New York native, belongs. Birdy, like many other Americans, felt the urge to do something for the United States following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. So, he joined the military. Birdy writes letters to his uncle throughout the novel, as well as to his parents. Through the letters, the reader discovers early on that Birdy's father wanted him to go to college. Since Birdy's uncle is a Vietnam veteran, Birdy is able to speak to his uncle about things that deal more directly with the military. It will be an important outlet for Birdy.

As all signs point toward war, the reader gets to know the names of many of the people in the unit. Many of the members of the unit do not know one another, and so use the time to do just that. Jonesy and Birdy become friends pretty quickly. Some of the members of the unit are a little more stand-offish; but, this is due more to the gravity of the situation rather than who they are as people. The soldiers all speculate about how the potential coming war will turn out. While an American victory will occur, the question is how long it will take. Another question is how heavy the fighting will be. Coles reminds everyone that Saddam Hussein is clever and knows that he can't match the United States blow for blow or man for man. This is a true, but ominous, statement for the CA unit and the Coalition Forces at large.

As it turns out, war is unavoidable. In March, the United States Armed Forces, together with military contingents from various other allied nations, invade Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein and liberate the Iraqi people. Civil Affairs is following in two infantry brigades. As the third chapter closes, Birdy and his squad roll into Iraq.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Birdy and so many Americans feel the need to join the military following 9/11?

## Discussion Question 2

While no one doubts an American victory in Iraq, the debate is on about how long the war will take. How long do the members of Birdy's unit believe it will take? What sobering knowledge does Coles drop on all of them? Why does this matter?



## Discussion Question 3

Why do Birdy and Jonesy connect so quickly? Is it because they have things in common, or for other reasons? Explain.

## Vocabulary

crucial, objective, expertise, concept, noncombatants, savvy, periodically



# Chapters 4-6

## Summary

### Chapter 4

The plan is straightforward. The Marines go in first, pushing aside resistance, while the Third Infantry Division secures positions and establishes lines of communication, forward operating bases (FOBs), alternating jobs with the Marines. They travel on, stopping periodically, and then bed down for the night. A sandstorm hits the next morning. Major Sessions orders everyone to get down. The sandstorm lasts two days. Watching CNN, the soldiers are able to see how some Iraqis are cheering for the Americans. They are also cheering because they are now free. Word also trickles back about casualties. The 507th, the same crew Birdy and the others had recently spoken to, have taken on many. Near An Nasiriyah, north of Highway 1, five were killed and many captured. Three female American soldiers have been captured. As the convoy continues on, more and more casualties are reported from the 507th. Coles reports their unit is headed that way, for there is still heavy fighting going on in the area. As they near An Nasiriyah, they can hear fighting in the distance. They drive into the town, and parts are pretty badly damaged. Soldiers from the Third say that there are still enemy troops moving around. Ahmed explains that a lot of the older Iraqi civilians are welcoming the Americans.

Birdy and some of the men search a house, where they find a rocket-propelled grenade launcher (RPG). It has been recently fired. Inside the house are also an old man, an old woman, and a little girl. There is also a boy who is a little younger than Birdy. The boy is taken outside. A sniper opens fire but doesn't hit anyone, and a gunner from a Humvee takes the sniper out. The Iraqi boy tries to run during the exchange, but he is shot down and killed. The old woman comes running out of her house and falls to her knees beside her dead grandson.

### Chapter 5

As the day wears on, the Civil Affairs unit remains in An Nasiriyah, speaking to locals, interacting with the children, and doing their best to keep things under control. But the sight of the dead boy stays on Birdy's mind. A sergeant with a Southern accent tells Birdy that one gets used to the killing, even though it doesn't help at night when one tries to sleep. It is March 25, and Birdy writes a letter to his uncle that he might not send. He talks about the death of the boy and how it has shaken everyone up. The medical team sets up shop. There are innumerable Iraqis with birth defects, physical ailments, etc., that in the U.S. would be treated or healed, but in Iraq, with poor medical care, have not been. Jonesy worries about being able to differentiate the enemy from civilians. Coles reports that their unit is to head over a hundred miles to An Najaf, to treat some wounded Iraqis. Marla thinks they are moving along too fast, but orders are





orders. Birdy takes over his Humvee's turret gun for the trip. They drive north along the Euphrates River.

As they near An Najaf, they can hear fierce fighting going on. Civil Affairs hunkers down for the night. At 1000 hours military time (10:00 civilian time), the unit moves out again. As they enter the city, they come under fire. They hit two of the assailants, but a third gets away. They move on to café, being used as a makeshift hospital. There, wounded Iraqis are being treated for their injuries. With the exception of one being shot, all of the Iraqis have burns, or have been hit with debris or shrapnel. The men search the male civilians for weapons, while the women search the female civilians for weapons. None are found. Birdy helps Marla bring an injured little girl over to the hospital. The fighting has died down in the area, but spread elsewhere. Everything becomes terrifying for Birdy, including using the bathroom. He doesn't want to die with his pants around his ankles.

Jonesy later reports that Captain Coles was chewed out by a higher-up, for not wanting to act as a messenger to transport prisoners back to Psychological Operations. Jonesy points out some of the dead Americans and admits to not wanting to transport prisoners after seeing that. Birdy wonders what would happen if he were to die, and wonders if his father would blame him for his own death. They are to transport three prisoners. Second Squad takes two; Birdy's own squad takes one, an old man. Ahmed rides with them. The old man speaks English. He explains that he worked in London as a taxi driver for twelve years to earn money. He says he bought an AK-47 years ago for protection. When the gun was found, the old man was taken prisoner. He hates that his home has been shot up and wants to know if he will be killed. Birdy says Americans don't kill their prisoners. After dropping off the prisoners, Cole reveals the Third will be headed to Tallil Airport. Jonesy worries that the Third is moving too far, too fast, and not securing enough ground behind them. Civil Affairs picks up a new intelligence officer, Captain Phil Nelson, and two other intelligence types. They are now headed to a mining area, controlled by a U.S. Marine detachment. Intelligence people want to know more about the area. They want to see if the locals are glad Saddam is gone. Coles says that the chain of command is getting weak, with units moving so fast they are hard to find. As they travel, they pass American units, and some British units. Ahead, a wagon and some Iraqis block the road. Birdy's Humvee must detour around it, but they end up stuck in marshy wetland. The Iraqis who have blocked the road get a rope and help pull the Humvee out with their mules. The Iraqis then cheer for the unit as they go along on the road.

After they leave the mining area, the unit makes camp and field showers are had. The stench from the swamp is washed off. Jonesy tells Birdy that the country they are in is all in the Bible. Birdy says he goes to church sometimes; Jonesy says he never does, but his father is a minister. Birdy writes to his mom and dad, telling them about Iraq being an odd mix of old and new things and buildings. On April 12, Birdy writes to his uncle, explaining that major combat operations have ended and most of the Iraqis are glad to be rid of Saddam, though they are afraid of what will come next. The Iraqis are a little tense around the Americans. There are rumors that Coalition forces could be going home within two weeks.



## Chapter 6

Birdy, Jonesy, and Civil Affairs are not happy because they are painting port-o-potties at an Iraqi military school near Rasheed Airport. But, Birdsy thinks it is all right that the Third Infantry Division and the Fourth Marines are pulling down statues and getting on the news because they did all the fighting. Things are relatively peaceful, and the mood is joyful and relaxed. A man named Colonel Opdyke comes to speak to them, saying that Civil Affairs is integral to building democracy and ending the war. He explains a support mission accidentally took out a school and some kids, so Civil Affairs is supposed to go patch things up. War is not like the movies. Italian troops currently patrol the area. The locals are not very trusting of the Americans. The mothers of the dead children are offered money, but they say they want their children back instead. The women shout and scream at Birdy and the others, but Cole tells Ahmed to keep offering apologies anyway. As they head out, an Iraqi ambulance swerves ahead of them, and two enemy combatants with RPGs get out. Marla opens fire; Cole shouts on the radio that they are under attack. The squads spill out of their Humvees and engage the enemy. Both attackers and the driver are killed. CA finds vials of drugs in the ambulance and confiscates them, as well as the RPGs. That night, Birdy has a nightmare about being shot.

It is now May 6, 2003. Birdy reports to his uncle in a letter that things are going pretty well and he's getting along with his squad mates. Birdy enjoys being in Baghdad. He can easily tell which areas are wealthy. He can also tell that the entire area was once a beautiful place. Major Sessions explains that there has been a request from people in Ba'qubah for medicine for their farm animals. The villagers are mostly Sunnis and may have ties to the Sunnis in Lebanon. The Medical Squad, as well as a security detachment from the Third, will also go along. A massive guy named Maire from the Third takes the lead as they travel. Birdy worries about car bombs as they drive along. It is discovered that it is not animals that are in need of medical assistance, but people. Maire doesn't like it and decides he wants to move out. Captain Miller of the medical unit orders her own people to bring out the supplies, forcing Maire to wait. It is revealed the Fedayeen, militia fighters, are forcing people to fight for them. They are killing or torturing those who don't. They are even doing this to innocent children. Seeing the wounded children hurts Birdy deeply. Miller tends to some of the injured, and leaves medical supplies behind. Maire worries they will go straight into the hands of the enemy.

## Analysis

The Iraq War is initially a brief affair. While there is some heavy fighting, the skill, precision, and elite caliber of the American military cannot be outdone. Indeed, American success is so fast and overpowering that some American combat units are unable to be located by their own commanders. Apart from combat, Civil Affairs teams, including Birdy's, have a much more difficult time of things. While the combat forces engage and defeat enemy contingents, the Civil Affairs unit engages the Iraqi people, to befriend them and offer them aid. Many Iraqis are thrilled that Saddam is gone, while others worry about who will replace him. Supplies are given out to the Iraqi civilians, as



well as medical assistance. Through early May, things are relatively peaceful, apart from the occasional insurgent attack.

Things for the Iraqi civilians are not going as well. There is now a struggle for power among many of the internal groups in Iraq, including the Fedayeen, who are forcing men and children to fight for them against the Americans and their allies. This horrifies the Americans, who have further resolve to defeat the enemy elements. Saddam Hussein's conventional military forces may have been defeated, but unconventional forces are now taking over operations. Such an example are the insurgent thugs who use an ambulance to try to kill Americans.

Birdy is appalled at the way that the insurgents are handling things, especially when it comes to harming children. Birdy is also deeply hurt by this, knowing that children should never have to see things like war. The irony here is that Birdy is not much older than some of the Iraqi children, yet a few months of war have already aged him into a young man with the experiences of someone who should be decades older.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Is the Civil Affairs team successful in the work that they do? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is particularly disturbing to Birdy about the actions of the Fedayeen?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe the initial success of American and Coalition Forces in Iraq. Despite these successes, what problems are caused? How do Birdy and the other members of CA deal with them?

## **Vocabulary**

tentative, anguished, vulnerable, makeshift, shrapnel, sporadic, subdued, precariously, incredulous, collateral damage, careened



# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

### Chapter 7

Private security firms are taking over a lot of work in Baghdad, especially protecting important Iraqis. Getting in and out of the city means going through a maze of concrete roadblocks and obstacles. Rios gets a letter from his mom who is upset because his younger brother wants to join a gang back home. Jamil, one of the Iraqis hired by the military to do small odds-and-ends jobs, says that he and his people want to live and worship in peace. Birdy receives a letter from his mother, along with her prayers and well-wishes. She asks him if he needs anything. She tells him he is the hero type, but Birdy disagrees.

### Chapter 8

Although the official war has ended, there is still combat going on. When Birdy goes out on patrol, he sees many civilians who have been killed by the enemy. The three women kidnapped from the 507th, including Jessica Lynch, are rescued and are alive. Life becomes routine for the men and women of CA. Baghdad is jokingly referred to as they drive-by capital of the world. Four chaplains, and various American military personnel are invited to visit a mosque, and following that, on the way to Saddam's palace to shop at the military PX set up there, a Humvee is blown up by an IED. Two Marines are killed, and others are wounded, including Iraqi civilians. Later, Birdy writes his father and tells him that he loves him and respects him. He explains that things overall seem to be going good.

### Chapter 9

Large packages from home means everyone gathers around, hoping for something edible. Victor Rios has ordered a monkey off of e-Bay, hoping that it is something he can wear on a necklace, like an amulet that will protect him. It turns out to be a giant stuffed monkey. Along with it comes a letter praising the U.S. military and an explanation about the giant monkey. Since Rios is a soldier, a giant monkey was sent instead of a little monkey. Rios doesn't want the monkey, so Marla takes it. She names the monkey Corporal Yossarian after the central character from the novel *Catch-22*. CA is later sent out after a Red Crescent ambulance is accidentally hit from the air. First and Second Squads, along with Captain Miller and other women from Medical, are sent. Thirty or forty soldiers from the 422nd are already there. Miller is invited in for tea by one of the local women, along with the other medics. Birdy is ordered to go along as well. Coles doesn't want to go in. In the midst of ambushes, IEDs, and disguised assassins, it is clear that humanity and patience are wearing thin.



The local woman speaks English, having studied English in Seattle. Her name is Halima. She says she has incredible respect for Americans. She goes on to say that the Americans don't know her country. Most of the men in the village wanted to wait for the Americans to arrive to see what they would do, but then Saddam's thugs rounded them up and forced them to fight. One of Saddam's men shot at a passing plane, only to have the truck in which the men were traveling hit by the plane. The children of the village saw it happen. Halima begs Miller and the others to treat Iraqi lives as precious as they treat their own. She explains the children are wounded deep inside, having seen things no child should have to see, and they are now asking why Americans want to kill them. Miller apologizes deeply. Outside, Birdy kicks a soccer ball around with the local kids and shows them the stuffed monkey. A boy named Omar gets Birdy, Coles, and two guys from the 422nd to play a game of soccer. Omar and his teammates run circles around the Americans, who have heavy combat gear on. Omar says they can win any day, and Birdy says the Americans will win next time. The report Coles writes up explains there was no friendly-fire incident and that the dead village men could indeed be called enemy combatants.

## Analysis

As May drags on, things begin to change for the worse. The first assaults on American and Coalition Forces using remote-detonated IEDs (improvised explosive devices) begin to occur regularly, as well as insurgent attacks by individuals disguised as civilians. Birdy witnesses one such assault. The power struggle among different Iraqi groups and tribes intensifies. Innumerable civilians are killed by their own people. Things become very tense for the Americans, who are doing their best to befriend the Iraqi civilians, as well as to earn their trust, all the while hoping that they will not be killed by the very same people.

Despite the difficult security situation, Civil Affairs begins to have some real success working with Iraqi civilians. They are able to conclude that a particular incident, in which a truck full of men is killed, is a justified action given that someone from the truck fired at an American aircraft. While in the village, Birdy discovers the children love to play soccer. He and a few others jump into a small pick-up game with the kids. Although Birdy and the Americans lose, they are encouraged by the willingness of the children to get to know them. The willingness of Birdy and his squad members to engage the children on this level also resonates with the children, as well as their families.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the combat situation in Iraq change for the Americans through May? How does this affect the situation in Iraq for Civil Affairs and the Iraqi civilians?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Birdy take the time to play soccer with Omar? What are the consequences of this action?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do Birdy and the American and Coalition Forces begin to lose their patience and their desire for humanitarianism as May wears on?

## Vocabulary

obscene, edible, humongous, defiantly



# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

### Chapter 10

Harris and Jonesy almost get into a fist fight over a show about prostitutes, and how Harris says most women are whores. Coles later announces they will be escorting some Intelligence guys into the Rusafa district in the morning. Lieutenant Davis and Corporal Lawler, the Intelligence guys, explain that they have gotten information on an IED factory in the Old City. Davis explains that IEDs have emerged as a real threat. Coles later questions Jonesy on what happened with Harris, but Jonesy doesn't want to start things up again. In the Old City, the squads set up a perimeter around the suspected IED factory. They listen to the break-in and the sweep by the Infantry. Nothing is found. The address is taken down for financial compensation purposes. Marla, casually looking through a flour barrel, finds detonators. Two men who live in the house are arrested. She explains she grew up in a foster home, and nobody ever smoothed out the top of flour the way it had been in the barrel. Birdy wonders if he will make it through the war alive.

### Chapter 11

Major Sessions hands out the next assignment which is to help a mother find her lost son. The kid is Muhammad Latif Al-Sadah, son of an Imam. The Al-Sadah part cannot be mentioned on the search, as other tribes might want to hurt him. Fighting has broken out between tribes. The kid had been out past curfew and disappeared. They bring Jamil along with them because Ahmed has been taken away for other duties. They are to search hospitals, morgues, and other places for the kid. Jamil explains that in America, Americans debate the cost of things; but, in Iraq, a poor man will never approach a doctor. Major Sessions comes along as well, leading the operation. When Major Sessions gets sick waiting in a morgue, she is dropped back off at the Green Zone, the safe part of Baghdad. Birdy and the others continue the search at a jail. They find a boy who looks twelve but might be fourteen, who insists he was out after a goat after curfew when the British caught him and turned him over to the Americans. He is the right boy. Marla is interviewed about the effort. When the boy is reunited with his mother and the other women see the reunion, they thank and praise the Americans, which makes Birdy grateful for once.

### Chapter 12

Jerry Egri, a Polish-American, is assigned to CA to serve as a liaison between the Americans and the Polish troops in Iraq. Jerry, who also coached soccer, agrees to teach Birdy, Jonesy, and the others the basics of soccer, so they can rematch against Omar's team. They practice and practice. Word of the game leaks out, and new crews cover it. Omar's team now consists of older players from other villages, too, who have





also found out about the game and want to play. The Iraqis again run circles around the Americans. Afterward, Omar and four of his friends eat lunch with the Americans.

Iraqi insurgents have improved their IED use, where they use a cell phone to detonate the devices. Coles is down because his three year-old daughter has been hospitalized due to a vaccination reaction. Word later comes to move north on Highway 4 and help the Iraqis take over the area following successful combat operations by the Second Infantry. The plan is to convoy up to Ba'qubah with a bus of Iraqi policemen and a bus of PR guys. Two Stryker vehicles go along as well –one in the lead, one in the rear. On the way back, one of the buses explodes. A Stryker is knocked onto its side. The explosions are a result of daisy-chained IEDs, meant to go off one after another, but not all of them detonated. None of the PR guys or the Stryker guys have been killed. But Third Squad's Humvee is off the road. Pendleton has been killed, and everyone else inside –Victor Rios and Sergeant Love – injured. Many others, including Jonesy and Major Sessions, have been injured. There is a lot of crying. Marla first makes the connection that somebody knew about the convoy, and had prepared for it. They hold a memorial for Pendleton the day that Saddam's two sons are killed. Victor is being transferred to Ramstein in Germany for serious medical treatment. Marla is seriously depressed. Birdy thanks his mother for sending along dolls in a package because the unit has distributed them to Iraqi girls.

## Analysis

The time spent so far in Iraq has had some serious effects on the Civil Affairs unit, as well as on the relations between Americans and Iraqi civilians. The patience with the Iraqi civilians is growing thin, but so is patience between members of the Civil Affairs unit, evidenced by the near-brawl between Harris and Jonesy over a television program. However, the actions of Birdy and other members of the Civil Affairs unit have paid off to the point that the Iraqi children are excited to have a rematch with the Americans in soccer. The game is actually covered by the news. Iraqis and their children travel from far and wide to see the game occur. While the Americans lose the soccer rematch, friendships and good relations are sewn tightly between the locals and the Americans. This is exactly the sort of trust the Americans have been looking for. Many are able to see that the Americans mean no harm to them. Now a willingness to cooperate with the Americans on a level beyond friendship beckons.

However, not all is good news for the Civil Affairs unit. The Iraqi insurgents improve their methods of attack and the sophistication of their weaponry. They begin to attempt massive IED attacks, such as chaining together a series of them along roads. They begin to detonate them using specialized detonators that are triggered by cell phone calls. Inside information is leaked out to the insurgents as well, enabling them to plan and prepare for their attacks well in advance. The team also suffers the loss of Pendleton and the severe wounding of others, including Rios.





## **Discussion Question 1**

How has the fighting in Iraq evolved since the end of major combat operations? How do Birdy and the Americans try to combat the insurgents?

## **Discussion Question 2**

In what ways does Iraq strain the members of Civil Affairs? How do the members respond to the increasing pressures?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does the soccer rematch between the Americans and the Iraqi children matter so much? What effects does it have?

## **Vocabulary**

anonymously, sophisticated, deliberately, compensate, horrendous, sanitation, infidel



# Chapters 13-16

## Summary

### Chapter 13

Birdy and the others are struck by how weird things are in Baghdad. Someone buys onions, while someone is killed down the street. Coles tells the people in his unit that some Sunnis were found dead in a garage. They had been bound and killed execution-style. Something isn't right about it, he says. Some engineers explain that some Iraqis have been found dead near the power plants north of Baghdad. Coles asks Birdy what he thinks of war. Birdy says he doesn't like war. Coles says war teaches people things. He has learned just how much he loves his family, for example. Birdy wonders if the people killing Sunnis are the mostly-Shiite Iraqi police force members. Birdy reflects on how he is now willing to kill to stay alive.

### Chapter 14

Hamid Faisal Al-Sadah, a tribal leader, says the Coalition forces are not properly protecting his people against the insurgents in Fallujah. Coles explains the CA is going in with Miller, the Medical detachment, and a psychological operations major from the Third Infantry Division to talk to Al-Sadah. The Iraqis are beginning to respect what the Americans are doing. Even American citizens back home are sending over donations of everyday supplies and school supplies for the Iraqis. Coles, Jonesy, Birdy, Marla, and Second Squad meet up with the PSYOP major and six infantrymen. Major Scott compliments the CA, and they are all invited into the meeting place, a massive tent, to eat with the Sheik. He speaks English well and compliments America.

Scott says both sides can cooperate with each other, to make things better for one another. Al-Sadah says that the first objective of the war in Iraq was to remove Saddam. That war is over. The Americans have won. Now there is a second war going on. There is now a struggle for power between external and internal groups. The Iraqis worry about who will rule Iraq next. Al-Sadah says he will do his best, as does Scott. Talib Al-Janabi, one of the men with the Sheik, tells Miller they need all medical supplies because they have very few. Miller goes off to look at the medical situation, while the others are told to stay put because there are insurgents in the area. Night falls. Some of the soldiers sleep, others talk quietly and nervously. Marla plans on going on to college when she gets out. At 5:30 the next morning, the call to mount up is given. As Birdy goes to the bathroom, he comes across two Iraqis kidnapping Captain Miller. Birdy kills them both. Miller tells Birdy that he stopped them from raping her, but he couldn't stop them from ripping up her soul.

The sun rises over Fallujah, and CA returns to Baghdad. Miller thanks Birdy again, and Marla comes to sit with Birdy. The next morning, Colonel Rose tells CA they have a new assignment, directly from Central Command. The first three squads and the medical unit



are going to As Sayliyah for a briefing first and then on a special mission. They are taken to Doha, Qatar, where they are given a day off. They realize it is the calm before the storm. Two mornings later, they meet with Lieutenant Colonel John Kelly, a career man, whose father was also a career man. He talks about the power struggle in Iraq. Kelly explains that they can spread democracy if they do it right. A major, who is Asian in appearance, goes on to explain that they will be playing on the enemy's own turf now, with no rules. If there is fighting, it will be done by their security team. The mission so far seems vague. It is to win hearts and minds. Some of the CA will be in the field, while others will be back in the States training more CAs. Major Sessions has the details on what is being called the Insertion Team. It will consist of First and Second squads. All others are dismissed.

## Chapter 15

Kelly gives another briefing about kidnappings increasing in southern Iraq. The people who live there have always lived there. They hate Saddam for draining their marshes to use for mining. The bad guys in the area are the Badr. They are probably backed by Iran. The Badr are targeting the southern Iraqi, forcing them to bring detonators to sell in Baghdad in exchange as ransom for their kids. The CA is to work as negotiators against the Badr. The CA team will also be working with Special Ops guys in the area, Coles explains, as they are enroute south to Al Amarah. British and Japanese forces are in the area. They are taken by chopper five miles southeast of the city to a desolate looking region. They meet up with the American Special Ops guys, who say they are Fifth Group. Colonel Roberts, the commander, welcomes Coles and the others. Roberts explains the negotiations will be tough, because they tribes don't trust anyone not blood-related based on past experience. Roberts brings in a translator named Fadel and a sack of money to be used for negotiations.

An hour after sunset, they head out and meet with local tribal leaders. Coles tells them they believe they can get the children back unharmed. In addition to giving the tribal leaders the kids, the CA will give them money in exchange for the detonators. They agree. They head to an arranged meeting point for the detonators. But the exchange of kids, money, and the detonators comes under enemy attack. The Specials Ops team scrambles to the defensive. Jonesy is hit, and Birdy is injured in the foot. Back at camp, Miller treats Jonesy. Birdy prays to God for Jonesy's survival.

## Chapter 16

Robert's men prepare defensive positions around the camp, surrounding it with concertina wire. Birdy goes back to see how Jonesy is doing. Jonesy doesn't make it. Miller treats Birdy's wound –a nasty cut. Roberts says the mission is a success because the detonators are traceable. Back in Baghdad, a memorial service is held for Jonesy. New assignments are handed out. Most members of the three squads will be recycled back through a training process center. Birdy tells Marla he loves her. She brushes it off, but she says she will be thinking of him. Marla will be training new CA operatives. Coles, Harris, and Darcy are going to Doha. Birdy is going to Ramstein for his wound. He wonders what Jonesy's blues place would have looked like. He believes that Jonesy



could have done it. Birdy writes a letter to Uncle Richie that he will never send. He speaks about witnessing the horrors of war and seeing things he had never before seen. He wonders where God has been in the middle of all of the mess. He tells his uncle he respects him for not talking much about Vietnam. Birdy wonders what he will say to his own kids one day about Iraq.

## Analysis

The hard-earned successes that Birdy and the Civil Affairs unit have managed to rack up ultimately mean that the scope and dynamic of their mission and their responsibilities change. They are given a far more difficult assignment that involves coordination with a Special Operations team, the most elite among American military forces. Civil Affairs travels to southern Iraq. There are various aspects to their mission. First, they are to retrieve Iraqi children who have been kidnapped. Then, they are to get their hands on detonators so that they can trace the detonators' construction. They are to befriend the residents of southern Iraq. The mission goes well, until the exchange. The Americans are ambushed by an unknown number of enemy assailants, who ultimately kill Jonesy. Jonesy's loss devastates the Civil Affairs unit.

As the novel draws to a close, the Civil Affairs unit is disbanded and its members are sent to retrain, rest and refit, train others, or recover from injuries. Birdy's narrative is concluded with a letter to his uncle. The letter describes how he has come to respect his uncle's refusal to talk about war. Birdy will want to tell his kids something about war when he is older, but he says that he doesn't know how only a few words will ever be enough to describe the utter horrors that go along with war. Birdy has now come full-circle in his life. His uncle again proves to be an invaluable outlet for Birdy, who can communicate experiences that few others will ever have with someone who has had them, in a few words.

## Discussion Question 1

Will Birdy tell his children anything about war? Explain.

## Discussion Question 2

Is Birdy's decision about whether or not he will tell his children anything about war a sound decision? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does it matter so much that Birdy is able to write to his uncle and speak about war?

## Vocabulary

civvy, proficient, desolate, considerate, philosophy, elated, priority



# Characters

## Captain Coles

Captain Coles is commander of the First, Second, and Third Squadrons in the Civil Affairs unit attached to the Third Infantry in the U.S. Army. He is from Allentown, Pennsylvania, and has been serving since the age of twenty-two. He is intelligent and kind, and has high expectations for his unit. He personally heads up First Squad and becomes friends with Birdy. Coles also has a wife and kids at home in the States.

## Marla Kennedy

Marla Kennedy is a rough-and-tumble orphan from New York who grew up in various places until finally finding a home with a caring black foster family. She is brash and has a sharp tongue, but she has a heart of gold, comforting Birdy in moments of crisis, and proving to be an excellent gunner.

## Spring Sessions

Major Spring Sessions is one of the commanders in Civil Affairs. She is incredibly attractive and devoted to her job. She is respected by her commanders and sets the bar high for her subordinates.

## Charles Jonesy Jones

Charles “Jonesy” Jones is a native of Georgia who dreams of opening a blues club after he gets out of the Army’s Civil Affairs unit. He is a passionate believer in God, though he never attends church. His father is a minister. Jonesy and Birdy become quick friends as they become part of First Squad, but Jonesy is ultimately killed in combat. His loss devastates Birdy and the entire CA unit.

## Omar

Omar is an Iraqi child who befriends Birdy and various other Americans through the playing of soccer. Omar’s friendship with Birdy and the Americans also encourages friendship between other members of the village and the Americans.

## Robin Birdy Perry

At eighteen years old, Robin “Birdy” Perry is the narrator and main character in Walter Dean Myers’s novel “Sunrise Over Fallujah”. Birdy is a native of Harlem, New York, who



witnessed 9/11 as a teenager, and who joined the U.S. Army with the intention of doing something important to protect and defend his country. Birdy is a member of the Civil Affairs unit, responsible for winning the hearts and minds of the people of Iraq following military combat.

Birdy befriends Jonesy, a member of the CA unit, as well as Marla Kennedy and Captain Coles. Together, they form First Squad and head out on various missions which range from smoothing things over with locals to distributing supplies to reunited lost kids with their parents. Birdy is horrified by war and its consequences, especially when innocent children are targeted by the enemy. Birdy becomes part of a classified mission to obtain detonators from a southern Iraqi tribe, as well as to rescue kidnapped children, but the American forces are ambushed. Jonesy is killed, and Birdy is wounded in the leg, ultimately being sent to Ramstein in Germany to recover.

## Uncle Richie

Uncle Richie is a Vietnam veteran and Birdy's uncle. Richie's experiences in Vietnam are very much like Birdy's experiences in Iraq. So, Birdy often writes to Richie about the war.

## Birdy's Dad

Birdy's dad is the brother of Richie. Birdy's dad had intended for Birdy to go to college. He is angered and unhappy when Birdy chooses the military instead. Birdy's dad ultimately comes around to respect Birdy's decision.

## Birdy's Mom

Birdy's mom is incredibly patient, kind, sweet, and supportive of Birdy. She often writes to him. She helps lead a toy drive to send dolls to Iraq for the girls living there.

## Colonel Rose

Colonel Rose is the overall commander of Civil Affairs. He is a no-nonsense man who sets the bar high for his unit.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## IED

IEDs -improvised explosive devices -are utilized by Iraqi insurgents loyal to Saddam Hussein, as well as by various internal and external groups seeking power in Iraq. IEDs are assembled from a variety of things, including old artillery ammunition, and are set off through the use of detonators. IEDs kill numerous Americans, Coalition Forces members, and civilians.

## Soccer Ball

The first real connection that Birdy and Civil Affairs have with the local Iraqis is through soccer games with local Iraqi kids. They use soccer balls to play the game and have soccer balls sent over to Iraq to distribute to the kids.

## Detonator

Used to set off explosives, detonators are produced often by outside groups and smuggled into Iraq for sale to insurgents. The final mission of Birdy's CA unit is to secure a batch of detonators to determine who is making them.

## Kevlar Body Armor

Kevlar body armor is worn by American troops and Marines in Iraq. The body armor helps protect soldiers and Marines from being killed or wounded in battle.

## M-16

M-16s are basic assault rifles, carried by a majority of American troops in the U.S. Army. Birdy carries an M-16 throughout the novel, and uses it to defend both himself and others, as well as to kill two Iraqis thugs attempting to rape and kidnap Captain Miller.



# Settings

## Kuwait

Kuwait is a neighboring nation to Iraq that was invaded by Iraq during the Gulf War, only to be liberated by an American-led global coalition of allies. Kuwait becomes one of the staging grounds for the American and Coalition forces during the invasion of Iraq. When the novel begins, Birdy and the CA unit are located in Kuwait.

## Iraq

Iraq is the main setting for the novel. It is a Middle Eastern nation run by the evil and thuggish Saddam Hussein, a dictator who uses violence and biological and chemical weapons against his own people. Iraq is liberated by American and Coalition forces. It becomes a hotbed of insurgent violence, terrorist activity, and irregular combat, ultimately subdued by American troops.

## Baghdad

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq. During the darkest days of the postwar occupation, it becomes one of the few relatively safe areas to be. Baghdad is where the Civil Affairs unit and Birdy are headquartered.

## Highway 1

Highway 1 is one of the major roads in Iraq, connecting Baghdad to Fallujah. Highway 1 is used by Birdy and the Civil Affairs unit to get to Fallujah for meetings with local warlords and tribal leaders.

## Southern Iraq

Southern Iraq is a region dominated by tribes who hate Saddam Hussein. They are being forced to sell detonators to insurgents in Baghdad because their children are being held hostage. Birdy and the Civil Affairs unit head to southern Iraq to resolve the situation, but they are ambushed by the enemy. During the engagement in southern Iraq, Jonesy is killed and Birdy is wounded. However, the mission itself is successful.



# Themes and Motifs

## War

War is a major theme in the novel *Sunrise Over Fallujah* by Walter Dean Myers. The Iraq War comprises the backbone of this book. The war begins in March, 2003 when American-led Coalition Forces invade and liberate Iraq.

Birdy joins the US Army following 9/11, because he wants to serve and protect his country. The US Army is dedicated to protecting the United States and engaging in war when ordered to do so. By its very nature, the Army (and all branches of the U.S. Military) must be prepared for war. Birdy goes through extensive training for his role in Civil Affairs and learns how to fight as well as to handle situations with civilians. While war does have positive effects (such as liberation and overthrowing despots), war does have very serious consequences as well.

War, by its nature, means death and destruction. No one is safe when war occurs. Soldiers, as well as civilians, lose their lives. Some deaths are intentional, others are not. Some Iraqi deaths are caused by other Iraqis, as well as accidentally by Americans, for example. Homes and businesses are shot up and destroyed, and insurgents use cowardly tactics –such as hijacking ambulances –to fight Americans and Coalition Forces.

War also affects Birdy on a very personal level as well. Beyond his own maturation through war, Birdy experiences terror and heartbreak. He sees Jonesy, his closest friend in the military, die as a result of combat. He sees how evil Iraqi insurgents target innocent children. Birdy resolves to do something right and to do good as a soldier.

## Friendship

In the novel, Birdy quickly becomes friends with other members of the Civil Affairs unit, especially Jonesy and Captain Coles. Jonesy and Birdy first agree to watch out for one another, but this soon evolves into friendship as they learn more and more about one another. It is Birdy who attempts to help save Jonesy's life during combat in southern Iraq. He doesn't do this just because it is his role as a soldier. Jonesy is also his closest friend in the unit. Birdy becomes friendly with Coles, who is older than the others. Since Coles is older, he serves as something of an older brother figure. The unit looks to Cole for advice and encouragement, as well as for orders.

Forming friendships is not so easy with other people. Sergeant Harris does not get along very well with people and never learns how to cultivate a friendship. Marla Kennedy worries about getting close to anyone because her life as an orphan has always been so temporary. She worries about getting close to anyone in the military because anyone can be killed at any time. Nevertheless, she does become friends with



Birdy, Coles, and others in CA. She provides emotional support for Birdy at several points in the novel, including following the death of Jonesy.

## Coming of Age

Coming of age is an underlying theme in the novel *Sunrise Over Fallujah* by Walter Dean Myers. Coming of age involves the emotional, spiritual, and moral growth of an individual through trials, tribulations, and real world experiences. In this case, it is Birdy and the Iraqi children who come of age.

When Birdy begins the novel, he has experienced the horrors of 9/11. This causes him to want to do something for his country. As a result, he joins the US Army, becoming a member of the Civil Affairs unit. Birdy begins the novel as someone who has never experienced killing another person, open conflict, or war in general. While in Iraq, he experiences war firsthand. He sees dead bodies, watches friends like Jonesy die, and sees destruction and hatred all around him. He must kill enemy insurgents in order to save himself and the lives of his fellow soldiers. War is a sobering experience for Birdy, who comes to understand why his Uncle Richie never spoke much about his own experiences in Vietnam. Birdy comes to appreciate life, freedom, love, friendship, and family even more by the end of the novel.

Iraqi children also come of age during the novel *Sunrise in Fallujah*. The Iraqi children live a squalid, tense existence under the evil Saddam Hussein and his ruling thugs. Following liberation, the Iraqi children see violence and death. They see their fathers, brothers, and other men dragged off by insurgents, terrorists, and Saddam supporters to fight against the Americans and each other. They learn firsthand about the evils associated with war. They see the delicate nature and the importance of human life. They also learn that Americans are genuinely good people by their experiences with Omar, Birdy, and the soccer matches. Americans can be trusted and befriended.

# Styles

## Point of View

Walter Dean Myers has written *Sunrise Over Fallujah* in the first-person, limited-omniscient perspective of Birdy. One reason the author chose this perspective is that the novel deals with Birdy's own story about his experiences in the Iraq War. There is no one better to tell this story than Birdy. The novel is told in limited-omniscient perspective because Birdy is not always aware of an event at the same moment that it is occurring. The reader only discovers and learns as Birdy discovers and learns. The second reason the novel is told in first person is to make the story more real to the reader. The experiences of war are horrifying and terrible. Through Birdy's firsthand account, the reader is able to experience the war and its impact on a much deeper level. *Sunrise Over Fallujah's* author is a military veteran. This certainly allows Myers to interject even more realism into the story.

## Language and Meaning

Walter Dean Myers tells his novel *Sunrise Over Fallujah* in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for two primary reasons. The first is that Birdy is an eighteen year-old young man who joins the Army after graduating from high school. He is a native of Harlem. The simple, straightforward language aligns with Birdy's characterization as someone who does not have higher education. The second reason is that war is often terrible for those involved. Important messages and points are made unnervingly clear in the course of the plot about such things.

## Structure

Walter Dean Myers structures his novel *Sunrise Over Fallujah* into sixteen consecutive, linear, and chronological, unnumbered chapters. The chapters are punctuated by letters home, written by Birdy to his mom, dad, and uncle. The lack of numbered chapters seems to underscore the point that time passes by both quickly and agonizingly slowly in the novel. The letters home are often in contrast to the chapters. Birdy limits what he tells his uncle, but he also limits even more what he tells his mother and father. This underscores the point that veterans often do not want to talk about the horrifying experiences they have had in war.



## Quotes

Uncle Richie, I felt like crap after 9/11 and wanted to do something, to stand up for my country. I think if Dad had been my age, he would have done the same thing.

-- Birdy (Chapter 1 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Writing home to his Uncle Richie, Birdie explains his reason for joining the United States Armed Forces. Birdy, who experienced the terror of 9/11, wanted to do something for his country. So, he has joined the Army.

I feel good about defending my country, about being in Civil Affairs. You know, we bring a human face to war. I feel real good about that.

-- Coles (Chapter 2 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** As Birdy befriends other members of the Civil Affairs unit, he learns more about his commander, Captain Coles. Coles relishes the work they do, for they bring a human side to war. They deal with the aftermath of combat, and it inspires and haunts them.

You get used to the killing." He said the words softly. "It don't help much at night when you're trying to sleep, but you get used to it.

-- Unnamed Sergeant (Chapter 5 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Following combat where Birdy sees men die, an unnamed sergeant explains that Birdy will get used to the killing. However, it will not help him sleep at night. Killing comes naturally in a war. It can only be expected and dealt with as best as possible.

No, Mama, I'm not the brave type. Not over here where the booming goes through you, where explosions in the distance shake your whole body. It's hard to be brave when you can stumble across a world of hurt around any corner, where dying become so casual you don't even notice it sitting next to you.

-- Birdy (Chapter 7 paragraph 49)

**Importance:** While his mother and others think of Birdy as a hero, Birdy doesn't think of himself as a hero. He has other things on his mind, such as death and survival. He doesn't believe he is doing anything heroic. He is just doing his duty.

I hadn't thought about it much, but Jonesy was right. We needed one another to get out of this war alive. We needed one another and a whole lot of luck.

-- Birdy (Chapter 10 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** As patience among Americans wears thin with the Iraqis, patience also wears thin among members of the same units. A near-brawl occurs between Jonesy and Harris over a television show. Jonesy tells everyone they will need each other to get out alive, and Birdy knows he is right.



To take a human life had always been so heavy a deal. It had always meant that some terrible thing had happened, some horrible wrong had occurred that brought people to the far ends of sanity. But now I was willing to kill because I was afraid of being killed, willing to kill people I had never met, had never argued with, and who, perhaps, had never wanted to hurt me. But I was afraid and so I would kill.

-- Birdy (Chapter 13 paragraph 43)

**Importance:** As the war drags on, Birdie does become accustomed to killing. But, he does not kill for fun or for sport. He kills for survival. Killing is a part of war, and Birdy has become used to it in many ways.

I sat down on a pile of sandbags and realized how tired I was.

-- Birdy (Chapter 16 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** After months of war and the mortal wounding of Jonesy, Birdy sits down by himself. He discovers how tired he is. He is not just tired from exhaustion. He is tired of war and combat as well.

I did not want to be here. I thought of the places I could be: Harlem, Philadelphia, Chicago. I did not want to be in Iraq.

-- Birdy (Chapter 4 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** As Civil Affairs follows the Third Squad and the Marines into Iraq, a bad sandstorm hits that lasts for two days. Birdy wants to be at home, or anywhere, other than Iraq.

I didn't want rest. I wanted to be outside if we were attacked. I wanted to hurt something, to make something right. But what?

-- Birdy (Chapter 16 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Here, it is revealed how helpless Birdy feels following the death of Jonesy. Birdy wants to do something important, something right, or to even hurt something. However, he doesn't know what or how. He is hurting deeply and feels as if things are beyond his control. But, such is the case with war.