

Discussion questions for *Call Me American*

1. What did you know about Somalia before reading the book? Did the book change any impressions you may have had?
2. Would you characterize Abdi as extremely lucky or as someone who creates his own luck?
3. Abdi faces war, famine, abuse, political and police corruption, bureaucracy and family strife. What are some personality traits that help him get through this?
4. Abdi's mother tells him that Mareekans (Americans) "eat pork, drink wine and have dogs in their homes." Later, his impression of Americans is formed by action movies and the Marines. How does Abdi's idea of America differ from the reality he finds when he arrives here? Do you recall any discoveries that were humorous or poignant?
5. Cultural differences across generational, tribal and national lines can lead to misunderstandings and violence. How does that impact him in Somalia and Kenya? Does that change when he gets to the U.S.?
6. The Muslim religion appears as a primary "character" in this book. How does its presence influence Abdi, his parents and his siblings? How does Abdi learn to forgive his teacher, Macalin Basbaas?
7. How does Abdi's relationship with his parents—and particularly his mother—change over time. To what extent were these typical stages of youth or something unique to a developing country like Somalia?
8. Abdi felt his only choices were to become a sheik or join the militia. Why are some young men drawn to terrorist groups? Do you see parallels for teens growing up in crime-ridden neighborhoods in the U.S.?
9. Has Abdi's experience made you think about things you take for granted in your life? Which was more impactful to you – his battle to survive in Somalia or his battle to assimilate in the U.S.?
10. Has reading this book changed or refined your attitudes toward immigration or admittance of refugees or asylum seekers into the U.S.? If so, how?
11. Do you believe other nations have a role or responsibility to countries in need? To what extent? How does the ongoing climate crisis influence your opinion?
12. Many of Abdi's fellow Somalis in Maine dream of returning to Somalia someday. Do you think that's the case with many refugees? How does your family's immigrant story compare to his?