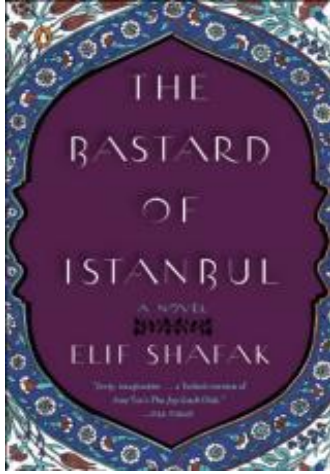


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# The Bastard of Istanbul

by Elif Shafak

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## About the Book

In her second English language novel, Turkish author Elif Shafak confronts her country's genocidal past in a colorful tale set in both Turkey and the United States. At its center are the four sisters of the Kazanci family, who live together in Istanbul, and Armanoush, the Armenian-American stepdaughter of their brother, Mustapha. Events are set in motion when Armanoush secretly travels to Turkey and unwittingly uncovers a secret that links the two families together and ties them to the 1915 Armenian massacre. Full of vigorous, unforgettable women characters, **The Bastard of Istanbul** is a bold, powerful tale that will confirm Shafak as a rising star of international fiction.

## Discussion Guide

1. On page 34, to whom, and for what, is Zeliha apologizing?
2. The women of this novel create many rules for themselves. Identify and list them, discussing the circumstances that each reflects.
3. How do the various characters in the novel express their femininity or womanhood? How do both the religious conservatism and the secularity of Istanbul influence them?
4. Asya wants so much to be different from her mother. Yet she is like her in so many ways. Compare and contrast Zeliha and Asya.
5. On page 135, Auntie Cevriye says, "The problem with us Turks is that we are constantly being misinterpreted and misunderstood." Share your idea of what it must be like to live in Turkey. Has this book changed or reinforced your opinion?

6. Born on different continents and raised in different ethnic traditions, what do Asya and Armanoush have in common? How are they different?
7. Asya and Armanoush both find themselves in families that encourage conformity and dislike "standing out," despite the fact that both families love their black sheep regardless. Explain the reasons each family feels this way and cite examples of how each acts out its preference.
8. Everywhere in this story are symbols of contradiction—or, more specifically, the concept of being many different things at once, existing in a state between belonging and separateness. Find some examples of this theme throughout the novel.
9. On pages 179–180, Asya and Armanoush discuss their differing opinions on the role of remembrance and the past. With whom do you most agree and why?
10. Zeliha refuses to tattoo her lover, Aram, with his chosen design: an upside down tree with its roots in the air. What does it mean to be displaced but not placeless? How does this concept apply to the characters of the novel?
11. Istanbul is personified in many different ways throughout the novel. It also serves as a symbol with many layers of meaning. While sharing drinks and dinner with Aram, Zeliha, and Asya, what is it that Armanoush comes to understand about Istanbul and its hold over Armenians and Turks alike? What significance does this portrayal of the city have for the novel and its characters?
12. With the weight of the truth on her shoulders, Auntie Banu wonders if it's better for human beings to endlessly pine to discover their history or to know as little of the past as possible and forget what small amount is remembered. What do you think?
13. What is the significance of naming each chapter after an ingredient of the dessert *ashure*?

## Author Bio

Elif Shafak is an award-winning British-Turkish novelist. She writes in both Turkish and English, and has published 19 books, 12 of which are novels. Her work has been translated into 55 languages. Her most recent novel, *10 MINUTES 38 SECONDS IN THIS STRANGE WORLD*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and RSL Ondaatje Prize; and chosen as Blackwell's Book of the Year. Her previous novel, *THE FORTY RULES OF LOVE*, was chosen by BBC among 100 Novels that Shaped Our World.

Shafak has been conferred Doctor of Humane Letters by Bard College in 2021. Shafak holds a PhD in political science, and she has taught at various universities in Turkey, the US and the UK, including St Anne's College, Oxford University, where she is an honorary fellow. Shafak is an inspiring public speaker and twice TED Global speaker; she contributes to major publications around the world and she was awarded the medal of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

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# **The Bastard of Istanbul**

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