

***Darius the Great Is Not Okay* Reading Questions**
Regular English 9

Directions: You are *strongly encouraged* to use these questions to guide your understanding and keep track of information that will be helpful in your mandatory class discussions, test, and written assessments at the beginning of the school year; however, they are *optional* for Regular English 9 students and will not be taken for a grade.

GUIDED READING QUESTIONS:

1. What does Darius mean when he says, “Persians are genetically predisposed to like tea?” What does he reveal at this point in the book about Iranian culture and his relationship to it? (Khorram 2) ← *These notations tell you on what page the information can be found in the 2019 printed Penguin Books copy of the novel.*
2. How does Darius feel about his physical appearance? Why does he feel this way? (13)
3. How does Darius connect with his father? How does Laleh connect with her mother? How does Darius feel about these divisions and connections in his family? (21)
4. Have you or anyone you know ever been asked where you are from? How does this make you feel? Why do you
5. think people ask this question? (31)
6. What is a “slingshot maneuver”? What causes Darius to experience them? (34)
7. What does Darius mean when he says, “Stephen Kellner was a Paragon of Teutonic Masculinity”? (42) What feelings does this reveal about how he sees himself?
8. Why don’t Darius and Babou know how to talk to one another? (47) *Consider barriers beyond language.
9. When Darius first arrives in Iran, what feelings does he experience? (64)
10. Describe Darius’s reaction to the question, “What are you depressed about?” (68)
11. What does Darius mean when he says, “Farsi is a deeply context-sensitive language”?
12. What does it mean to “taarof”? What can you infer about the custom and what it means from the way people interact with one another?
13. What is a “Soulless Minion of Orthodoxy”? (106) Why do you think Darius use this label to describe people?
14. Why is Sohrab singled out among his peers? How do the others treat him based on this difference? (111)
15. What does Darius mean when he says, “You can learn things without them being said out loud too”? What does he learn? (133)
16. How does Darius feel when his family speaks Farsi around him? (134)
17. How does Darius feel when his father starts watching Star Trek with Laleh? What do you think are some of the reasons for his emotional response? (145)
18. What is Persepolis and why does Darius go to visit with his family? What cultural and/or spiritual significance does it have for them? (155)
19. What does Babou mean when he says, “It’s important to know where you come from.” Why is it important for Darius to know his history? Why is it important to know your history? How might trips like the one Darius’s family takes to Persepolis change a person’s view of their place in society? (158)
20. Compare Darius’s relationship to his Persian family with Stephen Kellner’s on page 187. What types of emotions do his observations cause him to feel?
21. What does Sohrab mean when he says, “Your place was empty before...” (190) Describe what this expression really means.
22. Why is Sohrab being “the first friend [Darius] has ever had” both good and bad? (195) How does overhearing his parents talking about his friendship with Sohrab affect Darius?
23. What does Darius mean when he describes being a “Fractional Persian”? (201)
24. What does it mean to love the idea of someone rather than the reality? How does this relate to Darius’s relationships? (202)
25. Explain how Darius shows both courage and vulnerability when he stands up to his father on page 224.

26. What does Darius mean when he says, “I wondered if I was a tourist.” (229–230) Discuss the spiritual significance for him of visiting The Towers of Silence. What do you suppose makes Darius feel like “a tourist in [his] own past”?
27. What do you learn about Sohrab’s father on page 243?
28. What do Darius’s realizations on pages 244 and 267 reveal about Sohrab and Darius’s relationship?
29. What revelation surprises Darius on pages 272 and 273?
30. Contrast what happens on page 279 with the scene when Sohrab tells Darius “his place was empty.”
31. What do you think causes Darius’s changed opinion of himself and Yazd on page 280? Draw connections between what you have learned about characteristics of depression and their manifestation in this moment. How does the situation contribute to his mental state?
32. What does Darius’s father admit on page 285? How does this change their relationship? What causes the “harmonic resonance” between them? What is a common social stigma around men crying or showing open displays of vulnerability?
33. Sometimes it is said that “Hurt people hurt people.” Connect this saying to Sohrab’s revelations on page 294.
34. Identify some similarities and differences between Darius and Sohrab from pages 296–297 or any other parts of the novel. How do these traits draw them together?
35. What connection did Cyprian Cusumano, *Soulless Minion of Orthodoxy* (maybe) make between Darius from *Portland* and Darius the Great? What changes do you notice in Darius at the novel’s conclusion?

POST READING QUESTIONS:

36. Now that you’ve read a coming-of-age story, also known as “Bildungsroman,” which scenes stand out to you as key moments that change Darius’s perspective of himself and others?
37. What events in the novel contribute to Darius feeling more or less authentically Persian? Try to isolate specific scenes or conversations.
38. *The Lord of the Rings* is an adventure story and one of heroism. What connections does Darius make between *The Lord of the Rings* and the world he lives in? Why do you think he superimposes science fiction or fantasy over events, places, and encounters in the real world?
39. Compare Darius’s personality at the beginning of the novel with who he becomes by the end. What did he gain by going to Iran? What did he let go of?
40. How does Darius’s relationship with Sohrab evolve throughout the course of the novel? How does their relationship change each of them? What does Darius learn about himself (and Sohrab) as they grow closer, experience separation, then reunite again?