

Discussion Questions

- If one person can change the world, why don't more people do it? What characteristics does Greg possess that make the school projects not only possible, but successful?
- How do you think Mortenson's youth and childhood shaped him?
- How do you think his life as an explorer, outdoor adventurer and climber shaped his ability to persevere and succeed in creating change and hope in such a rugged and challenging part of the world?
- When Mortenson makes it to Korphe with his supplies for building the school, Haji Ali tells Greg, "Before it is possible to build a school, we must build a bridge. This is what Korphe needs now" (page 97). What does Greg realize about himself and his project at that moment?
- What are some of the other (symbolic) bridges that Mortenson finds himself building?
- How is building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan similar to climbing a mountain? What did Mortenson learn from his failed attempt to climb K2?
- What areas of Mortenson's personality have made him able to succeed so well in his efforts in Pakistan? What aspects of his personality have limited his success there?
- Describe why it is so significant for these villages to have a school built versus other things that are so important such as hospitals, clinics, etc.?
- What did you learn about the culture of Northern Pakistan?
- What risks has Mortenson taken and would they be acceptable if he was your father, son, significant other, etc.? Do you think he has been brave or foolish?
- After reading *Three Cups of Tea*, are you optimistic about peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan?
- This book is an examination of both the comforting and reaffirming power of culture and ritual and the stifling and unjust use of custom and tradition. In what instances did culture and ritual help sustain villages and people and in what instances did culture and ritual hold the people back?
- How does a life lived pursuing challenging adventure in rugged environments relate to other aspects of life such as school, work, society, etc.?
- Mortenson's tale of education as a means of overcoming ignorance and prejudice is impacted by events before and after 9/11. How does Mortenson address the attitudes of people in America toward the Muslim world?
- David Oliver Relin says that he wrote the story, but that Greg Mortenson lived it. He also says that "[r]ather than simply reporting on his progress, I want to see Greg Mortenson succeed" (5). What does this fact do to the narrator's objectivity? Is this a problem for the reader? Does it make Relin's version of the story suspect in any way?
- Why is it so important to include the local villagers in the building of these schools?

- Greg prepares to return to America by reading “the entry on each of the fifty states in the family’s set of encyclopedias” (page 39). What does this tell us about how Mortenson approaches problems? Are there other instances in which he acts without this type of preparation? When is he more successful? How do you approach potential obstacles?
- When Mortenson first attempted to raise money he typed out 580 letters and mailed them to “everyone who seemed powerful or popular or important” (50). What do you think of this marketing strategy? Could he have sought assistance more effectively? How?
- “One evening, [Mortenson] went to bed by a yak dung fire a mountaineer who’d lost his way, and one morning, by the time he’d shared a pot of butter tea with his hosts and laced up his boots, he’d become a humanitarian who’d found a meaningful path to follow for the rest of his life” (2). Have you ever experienced such a life changing moment? What event(s) led to your choice of a college? Your choice of a major?
- “For years, Mortenson had known, intellectually, that the word ‘Muslim’ means, literally, ‘to submit.’ And like many Americans, who worshipped at the temple of rugged individualism, he had found the idea dehumanizing” (68). Think of times in the book when Mortenson submits. What does he learn by letting go?
- Mortenson finds the “perfect teacher” for the Korphe school and says he will “be able to bridge both worlds” (7). What does he mean by this? Are there areas American teachers need to bridge within our school systems?
- Greg believes the difference between a terrorist and a productive citizen is an education. Do you agree? What other factors might contribute to whether a person becomes a productive member of a society?
- Greg decides that girls will attend his school, something not traditional in the local culture. Is insisting on your own cultural values always a good thing, or can it be a negative?
- At the beginning of his project, Greg has no financial resources. In fact, he doesn’t even have a home. He does, however, have a dream. Do you think most folks would deem him noble or crazy? Would you have chosen Greg for a friend or a significant other under these circumstances? Would you have given him money to pursue his dream or have turned him down?