

The Road to Mecca – Study guide questions

Exercise page 75

- 1) 3
- 2) Helen, she is the protagonist of the play. The entire play is played out in Helen's home. She is also the reason Elsa comes to New Bethesda, to visit Helen because she is worried about her emotional state. Helen is also the reason for Marius's visits; he cares for her and tries to fit her into his world. All of the characters gather at Helen's home to discuss her emotional state and future.
- 3) Elsa relates to Helen through her "Mecca" she sees it as Helen wants it to be seen and she has been drawn to it from the first moment she saw it as she states " Believe me Helen, when I saw your "Mecca" for the first time, I just stood there and gaped." (Page 22). To Elsa, Helen's "Mecca" is a miracle "...your little miracle of light and colour" page 23. Helen and Elsa also share trust between each other, they are friends and share a passion for Helen's art.
Marius relates to Helen through their friendship, the possibility of love and the history he has with her. Marius cares for Helen and wants to be involved in her life and to 'help' her even if they do not agree on her "Mecca" as Marius himself states "A true friendship should be able to accommodate a difference of opinion." (Page 44) Marius sees Helen the way he wants to see her and not for the person she truly is.
- 4) Yes, all three characters have gotten closure on aspects of their lives of which they were still unsure; they have all also come to conclusions about their lives. Helen has realised that her "Mecca" is complete "My Mecca is finished..." page 74 she has also finally stood up for herself against Marius, the church and the town who want to dictate her life. Elsa opened up about the hardships she faced while she was away, she also learns to trust again when she metaphorically tells Helen to catch her "Open your arms and catch me! I'm going to jump!" page 76 this statement also refers back to a previous conversation between Helen and Elsa about trust in which Elsa tells Helen a story about a father and a son and the lesson of trust (page 20) showing that Elsa truly puts her faith in Helen. Marius realises he has lost the battle to change Helen back to the woman she once was, and after years of trying he realises he must let her go and move on as he states " All these years it has always felt as if I could reach you. It seemed so inevitable that I would, so right that we should find each other again and be together for what times was left to us in the same world." (page 69) But he also realises that Helen is happy in her world.
- 5) Art vs. Religion: The church is against her "Mecca", Helen chose her art over the church on the first Sunday she chose to stay home and make her first owl and she understood that there would be consequences for her actions but her art was more important to her she states in a conversation with Marius "...But don't think that missing church that Sunday was something I did lightly, Marius. You don't break the habit of the lifetime without realizing that life will never quite be the same again. " (page 63)
Apartheid: The play is set in apartheid South-Africa. Elsa struggles to come to terms with the situation, she is faced with an apartheid situation when a black farm workers wife was kicked off the farm by the "baas" when her husband died and Elsa picked her and her baby up beside the road hiking (page 7) She also encourages her students to freedom of speech and ends up with a hearing at her school because of it. She wants the coloured people's

decisions and thought to be listened to as well as she states on page 13 "...has anybody bothered to ask the coloured people what they think about it all?" The lack of people's rights is a central theme as Helen also feels her rights are being stripped away.

Women's rights: Women's rights are brought up in various conversations in the play. Such as Helen not being able to live alone because she is an elderly women or that it is frowned upon for her to make her art because it is not something women must be capable to do. Katrina's life is also a part of the theme of women's rights as her husband abuses her "And making all sorts terrible threats about her and the baby." (page 11) also that she cannot leave him because "They're married" (page 11) she is also only seventeen years old so it is also a child's rights issue. Another example is the women Elsa meets beside the road that was evicted from the farm by the "baas" because her husband died.

Trust: The trust between Helen and Elsa how it is broken in the middle of the play but built up again at the end.

Journeys: The journey Helen takes her entire life to complete her "Mecca" and the one that lies ahead now that her "Mecca" is completed. Elsa's journey to forget all the negative things in her life and to move on to a better place. Marius's journey to save Helen ever since she started her "Mecca" as well as the journey he completed since his wife passed, and in the end of the play to forget Helen and how he feels about her.

Exercise page 81

- 1) At first glance I found the art strange because it reminded me of a graveyard, but you look at the individual pieces you can see the different images that she tried to depict, but I still don't find them attractive.
- 2) I think she would have been a creative person with an interesting imagination, who loved making statues and incorporating them in her garden. I think she also had a love for animals and the middle-east with the different images she depicts.
- 3) Yes, there is a sculpture that looks like a church which reminds me of Christianity. It could also be a mosque which reminds me of the Muslim religion. There is also an image of a face which reminds me of an extinct religion. Then there are also statues that refer to different cultures with their own unique religions.

Exercise page 82

- 1) Single, adulterer, Outspoken, troubled, caring, dominating, rude, independent, strong, truthful, trustworthy
- 2) Elsa has trust issues, she has had an affair with a married man who chose his wife over her, she was also impregnated by him but she had an abortion which only added to her emotional instability. She is also against the apartheid government and tries to advocate against this government, she tries to teach people about freedom of speech. She is also against traditions and conformity. Elsa also struggles with "Afrikaner" conventions.
- 3) Elsa is worried about Helen's emotional wellbeing because of the letter she received from Helen as stated on page 27. She is Helen's friend and has come to support her and help her through the difficult time she is having.

- 4) Elsa is Helen's only true friend who accepts her and her art just as they are; she is a lover of Helen's work. Elsa and Helen trust only each other. Elsa also makes Helen feel like a "young girl" again.
- 5) Helen is a friend but also makes her life better with the art she creates. Helen is the only person she is truly honest and herself with. She is her confidant and her shoulder in times of need.

Exercise page 82:

- 1) It is the first time truly expresses her hurt in a physical manner about all the sadness she has experienced. Elsa feels remorse about the baby as well as the relationship she had with David. She has feelings of hate and sadness towards herself, David, the apartheid nation, and the school she is teaching at. She mourns for her dead baby and by seeing this woman and her strength in these horrible circumstances, she is disappointed in herself and her actions.

Exercise page 82:

- 1) To talk to Marius and tell him her true feelings and to stand up for what she wants.
- 2) She challenges her to cry and let go of the anger (page 73), she also challenges her into awareness and her responsibility (Page 61)

Exercise page 83:

- 1) She is saying that she will take a leap of faith not only by putting her trust in Helen again but also in her own life by moving on from the hardships she has experienced and starting over.

Exercise page 83:

- 1) Marius has come to help her fill in the forms for "Sunshine home for the aged". He and the church council want Helen to move into the old age home because they don't think she can look after herself anymore. (Act 2 49-51) He has also brought her some vegetables out of his garden (Act 2 page 40) Marius visits Helen on a regular basis; he is the only person in town who visits her except for Katrina.
- 2) Yes, he has good intentions towards Helen. He believes she needs help and is concerned with her wellbeing and feelings. (Act 2 page 55) Marius sees Helen as confused and being able to take care of herself (Act 2 page 56) The reason for his concern is the candle incident where Helen nearly burned the house down (Act 2 page 57)
- 3) No, he just cares for her wellbeing (act 2 page 55) and her safety. He cannot truly be in love with her because not know or understand the real her (act 2 page 24) He does not like her "Mecca" and thinks she has changed (Act 2 page 53). Marius tries to treat Helen like a child, he sees her as confused needing protection from herself and Elsa (Act 2 page 56-57) Marius wants to be her protector rather than her lover. He sees her art, her "Mecca" as a nightmare (page 61) If he was truly in love with her, he would love her "Mecca" as well; it is a part of her. (Page 61-62). Marius also feels betrayed by Helen and her "idolatry" (page 63) He speaks clearly about his feelings for Helen on page 64 where we realise that maybe he

could be in love with Helen as he states that she does not know his “true feelings” for her. He saw Helen in his future alongside him and that they would “be together” page 69.

Exercise page 86

- 1) No, this is her own “pilgrimage”. Her “Mecca” is her own journey of self-discovery and it is a world she has created for herself which she visits daily. Her “Mecca” does not have any involvement in Islam or religion.
- 2) Her Art is a journey for her; each piece takes her a step closer to self-discovery, and new creative outlets. Her “Mecca” takes her on her pilgrimages to freedom, creativity and light.
- 3) The values of the “old” Christian church that she should be in church each Sunday, that she is not allowed to make these ‘strange’ art pieces and that she should conform to the church and societies rules for what is acceptable behaviour.

Exercise page 87

Helen is a forward thinking, unusual woman for her time. Since her husband’s death she has not conformed to what is expected of a widowed white woman. Helen did not truly mourn her husband, nor did she join the other ladies of her age in church activities. She went against all that was seen normal by living on her own and not getting married again. She stepped away from her religion and started making sculptures which was not ‘normal’ for that time.

The people would have reacted in the same way people usually do when someone is different; by pushing them away. The people must have tried to avoid Helen as they now saw her as strange and unstable. Most people would have thought she went insane. That is why Helen only has three friends. The children were afraid of her and her house but so also were the parents.

Exercise page 89

When two people get married they are connected to one another and there are certain roles as dictated by society that should be filled by each individual, it cannot be said for all marriages but in many the women are not “free” this would have been especially true in Helen’s time. In many marriages the woman is part of her husband’s household and sadly is not as free to make her own choices. Some men would even go to the extent of believing that their wife is their property which leaves a door open to abuse and domestic violence.

Exercise page 89: Essay

- 1) He is married
- 2) She fell pregnant, had an abortion and ended up with a broken heart
- 3) Angry, hateful, sad, emotional

- 4) Remorseful, guilty, sad
- 5) Both David and Elsa were consensual adults, they knew it was wrong but they continued the affair. They are both to blame
- 6) No, she had a choice in having an affair with a married man and she also chose to have an abortion, she could have chosen differently. We do not know Katrina's background if she was married or by her parents or what her situation was, but Katrina does not choose for her husband to drink and beat her, it is not in her hands.

Exercise page 91

- 1) She got a picture (dreamed) of an owl which was to be her first sculpture which she had to start work on immediately while it was still fresh in her mind. She wanted to remember clearly what she saw. (page 62)
- 2) He feels "grieved" and betrayed. He thinks Helen has turned her back on him and religion as he states "You turned you back on your church, on your faith and then on us for that?"(page 62) He does not understand the importance it held for Helen.

Exercise page 91

Activity	Expected or not	Reason
Attending church	√	People of Helen's age are set on religious customs such as attending church every Sunday
Taking care of her home	√	It is a social norm
Going out with single men	√	Most widows will want another companion, it should be acceptable to date again if a person is lonely and wants another companion
Socialising with other villagers	√	Social norm
Making art	√	It keeps a person busy while you stimulate your mind and do something fun and artistic. Many old age homes and old people do arts and crafts to keep busy
Talking to people of other races	√	It does not matter your age you should not discriminate, it is also not apartheid South-Africa anymore in many old age homes you will find people from different races to socialize with.

Exercise page 93

Marius sees that Helen has changed. Marius realises what is going on for the first time in 15 years. According to Marius, Helen turned her back on the church, her faith and on the community especially him (page 63) because of the sculptures she is making. He sees the statues as “monstrosities” that have stolen Helen away from them and he feels that they cannot replace human love and affection, and the yard is a “nightmare” (pg. 61) Marius is disappointed in Helen for the choices she has made to get where she is now and disappointed in himself that he did not notice earlier. (pg. 59 -69)

- 1) Fear – “it frightens them” page 59
 Being different- “...she dared to be different!” Page 60
 Idolatry- “...it might have been called idolatry.” Page 61
- 2) Elsa sees the statues as an expression of freedom – “...they express freedom” page 61
 She sees her “mecca” as beautiful and a miracle – “...your little miracle of light and colour.”
 Page 23
- 3) Elsa sees them as art and an expression of freedom. Marius sees them as monstrosities and a nightmare. They have opposite viewpoints.

Marius almost gives a defensive response to Helen’s statues the reason for this is that they are different. People don’t accept something or someone that is different so easily. **In the play it can be seen that Helen being different scares the children and the people in town only because they are not educated and do not understand.** Elsa does not fear the statues or Helen even though they are different she sees them as an expression of freedom and a beautiful miracle created by Helen. Elsa and Marius both have different views about Helen’s wellbeing and art, which intern leads to an argument.

Exercise page 93

Character	Their interpretation of Helen’s art
Helen	A journey Light Freedom Art
Elsa	Helen’s life pg. 55 Monsters pg. 60 Freedom 60-61 Miracle
Marius	Ornaments pg. 51 Hobby pg. 53 Nightmare pg. 61 Idolatry pg. 61