SYNOPSIS

Born at the stroke of midnight at the exact moment of India’s independence, Saleem Sinai is a special child. However, this coincidence of birth has consequences he is not prepared for: telepathic powers connect him with 1,000 other ‘midnight’s children’ all of whom are endowed with unusual gifts.

Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem’s story is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirrors the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious.

‘Huge, vital, engrossing... in all senses a fantastic book’

Sunday Times

STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

Consider the role of marriage in Midnight’s Children. Do you think marriage is portrayed as a positive institution?

Do you think Midnight’s Children is a novel of big ideas? How well do you think it carries its themes?

If you were to make a film of Midnight’s Children, who would you cast in the principle roles?

What do you think of the novel’s ending? Do you think it is affirmative or negative? Is there anything you would change about it?

What do you think of the portrayal of women in Midnight’s Children?

What is the significance of smell in the novel?

Midnight’s Children is narrated in the first person by Saleem, a selfconfessed ‘lover of stories’, who openly admits to getting some facts wrong. Why do you think Rushdie deliberately introduces mistakes into Saleem’s narration? How else does the author explore the theme of the nature of truth?

What do you think about the relationship between Padma and Saleem? Consider the way that Padma’s voice differs from Saleem’s. Does language have an important role to play in Midnight’s Children?
Consider the reaction of Saleem and his parents to the discovery that he is not their son. Do you think Amina and Ahmed are good parents? Why does Saleem refer to India as 'Mother India'? Does Rushdie's portrayal of the family challenge your views of Indian society in any way?

Throughout his narration, Saleem uses the images and language of Bollywood to describe the actions unfolding. How effective do you think this technique is? Discuss the ideas of perspective, illusion and reality raised by the novel.

An extended image of the radio is used to describe one of the central events of the novel: the first appearance in Saleem's head of the other midnight's children. Why do you think Saleem uses modern media forms as a way of understanding what is happening to him? How well does this square with his use of myth and legend? Do you think the blend of the ancient and the modern works in Midnight's Children?

Saleem veers between the past, the present and the future. What do you think Rushdie is trying to achieve by rejecting a more straightforward chronological structure? Compare Saleem-the-child with Saleem-the-adult. Would you agree that both are convincing characters?

How are the personal and the public linked throughout the novel? Discuss the ways in which the Midnight's Children Conference reflects the make-up of India after the Partition.

Discuss Saleem's belief that his life influences the fate of his nation. Why do you think he feels guilty and responsible?

Midnight's Children was written in 1981. How relevant do you think it is to 21st century debates about fanaticism? Why do you think the final chapter is entitled 'Abracadabra'? How successful do you think the use of magic is in terms of furthering your understanding of the novel?

In 2008, Midnight's Children won the Best of Booker award. Why do you think this novel has been singled out for this award?

RECEPTION & REVIEWS

'One of the most important books to come out of the English-speaking world in this generation' The New York Review of Books

'India has produced a great novelist...a master of perpetual storytelling' V.S. Pritchett, New Yorker

'Salman Rushdie has earned the right to be called one of our great storytellers.' Observer

'The literary map of India has been redrawn... Midnight's Children sounds like a country finding its voice.' New York Times

'A brilliant and endearing novel.' London Review of Books

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2008/jul/10/bestofbooker Guardian
Salman Rushdie was born in 1947 into a middle-class Muslim family in Bombay. His grandfather was an Urdu poet, and his father a Cambridge-educated businessman. He was sent to school in England at the age of thirteen, at which point he had already decided to become a writer. He continued his studies at King’s College, Cambridge, reading history. After graduating in 1968 he left for Karachi, Pakistan, where his family had moved in 1964. He tried to start a career in television but the censorship he came up against inspired a move back to the UK.
