“Often hilarious, always interesting . . . this book describes with humor the intersection and overlapping of two cultures.”
—The Providence Journal

Background Information

Information below is adapted from a variety of sources. Follow the links to learn more!

“In 1972, when she was seven, Firoozeh Dumas and her family moved from Iran to Southern California, arriving with no firsthand knowledge of this country beyond her father’s glowing memories of his graduate school years here. More family soon followed, and the clan has been here ever since. Funny in Farsi chronicles the American journey of Dumas’s wonderfully engaging family: her engineer father, a sweetly quixotic dreamer who first sought riches on Bowling for Dollars and in Las Vegas, and later lost his job during the Iranian revolution; her elegant mother, who never fully mastered English (nor cared to); her uncle, who combated the effects of American fast food with an army of miraculous American weight-loss gadgets; and Firoozeh herself, who as a girl changed her name to Julie, and who encountered a second wave of culture shock when she met and married a Frenchman, becoming part of a one-couple melting pot.

In a series of deftly drawn scenes, we watch the family grapple with American English (hot dogs and hush puppies?—a complete mystery), American traditions (Thanksgiving turkey?—an even greater mystery, since it tastes like nothing), and American culture (Firoozeh’s parents laugh uproariously at Bob Hope on television, although they don’t get the jokes even when she translates them into Farsi).”

Other Texts and Awards

Funny in Farsi has been on the bestseller lists of the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle and the LA Times. Author Firoozeh Dumas was nominated for the Thurber Prize for American Humor, the first Iranian author to be nominated. She was nominated for the PEN/USA Award in Creative Nonfiction and she received the Spirit of America Award in 2008 from the National Council of Social Studies.

Dumas has written pieces for the NY Times, LA Times, Wall Street Journal, Good Housekeeping, Gourmet, and the San Francisco Chronicle.


Learn More About Firoozeh Dumas
firoozehdumas.com

Biographical information provided by Random House and Peg Shaffer
1. Firoozeh Dumas tells some funny stories about her family’s experience living in this country. What were your favorites and why?

2. Dumas uses humor to tell us about her experiences as a newcomer to this country. How would the experience of reading this book differ for you if it were told from a more serious perspective?

3. Dumas writes about her family’s confusion over the names of American foods such as hot dogs and hush puppies and phrases such as “elbow grease” and “wild goose chase.” Can you think of other examples of American terms and names that might confuse newcomers? Have you ever traveled to another country and had a similar experience with language?

4. In what ways might you relate Dumas experience of starting a new life in this country with your coming to a new life in college?

5. How do you think Firoozeh’s family felt about her writing funny stories about them? How do you think your family would react if you wrote a book about them?

6. Firoozeh’s husband, François, has a significantly differently experience as an American immigrant than does Firoozeh. Why do you think that is?

7. Firoozeh’s parents don’t speak English fluently or understand American culture as well as she does and it sometimes led to embarrassment for her. Can you relate her experience to sometimes being embarrassed by your family?

8. What role did television play in Firoozeh’s family’s adjustment to American culture. Why do you think her father loved the Bob Hope show even when he couldn’t understand the jokes? Why do you think he was so fascinated by Bowling for Dollars?

9. What role does television play in your own life? Can you connect your media consumption to any of your hopes or dreams?

10. In order to fit in, Firoozeh changed her first name. Many immigrants to this country do the same thing. Could you change your name? How important is your name to your own sense of self?

11. Consider for a moment your own biases. How do you react to someone who doesn’t speak English or doesn’t speak it well? Do you make assumptions about that person’s intelligence?

12. The book is considered a memoir. What do you know about the memoir genre? Why is it not called an autobiography?

13. What is your own family’s migration story? Are there elements of the author’s story that match your family’s story?

14. Was there a story in the book that surprised you? Why?

15. What role does religion play in the book? What role does religion play in your own sense of identity?

16. Describe a time when someone made an incorrect assumption about you or your background. How did you feel? How did you respond?

17. Describe a time when you made an incorrect assumption about someone. What was that experience like? How was the situation resolved?

18. The author states that she wanted her text to be funny without being mean. Was there a story you felt may have crossed that line? Why?
Did You Know?

- In 2013, approximately **41.3 million immigrants** lived in the United States, an all-time high for a nation historically built on immigration.
- The United States remains a popular destination attracting about **20 percent of the world’s international migrants**. Immigrants accounted for **13 percent of the total 316 million U.S. residents**;
- Adding the U.S.-born children (of all ages) of immigrants means that **approximately 80 million people, or one-quarter of the overall U.S. population**, is either of the first or second generation. (Source: Migration Policy Institute)

More Notable People with Iranian Heritage

- Hamed Haddadi is an Iranian professional basketball player, the first Iranian to play in the NBA.
- Golshifteh Farahani is a popular Iranian actress who works internationally.
- Javad Nekounam is an Iranian soccer star known for his 2006 World Cup performance.
- Forough Farrokhzad was an Iranian poet and film director, one of Iran’s most influential female poets of the twentieth century.
- British-Iranian Omid Djalili is a popular stand-up comedian, actor, television producer and writer.
**#1 Discussion Group Preparation Assignment:**

You will need to complete these questions as preparation for the book discussion groups on Sunday, August 23, 2015. One or more of these questions may be used to guide your discussion.

1. Take a few minutes to review the current state of US and Iranian relations at the U.S. Department of State site: [state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm](state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm). How are the current relations related to the issues described by Dumas in her memoir?

2. Take a few minutes to review the entries at the Encyclopedia Britannica site: [britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/662699/Persian](britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/662699/Persian). What is the relationship between ‘Persian’ and ‘Farsi’?

3. Take a few minutes to read the excerpt about Islam in America from the PBS.org site: [pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/islam-in-america/](pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/islam-in-america/). How was Islam introduced to the United States? How many followers of Islam currently live in the United States? What is a question that you have about Islam that you would like to learn more about?

4. Take a few minutes to read about the experience of women in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies: [pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/women/index.html](pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/women/index.html). What are some misconceptions that the site attempts to address?

5. The author will be on campus on September 22nd and will present at 7:30 p.m. in Emens auditorium. What question would you like to ask her?

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**#2 Common Writing Experience Essay Assignment:**

Once you’ve finished reading the book, log on to the Freshman Common Writing Experience website at [bsu.edu/About/AdministrativeOffices/FreshmanConnections/WritingExp.aspx](bsu.edu/About/AdministrativeOffices/FreshmanConnections/WritingExp.aspx) to learn more about the essay.

You will then log in to the Freshman Blackboard Community on the Ball State University website at any time beginning July 15 and before August 15. We will send you an e-mail when the date approaches. When you log in, you will receive a prompt asking you to compose an essay on one of two specific questions, ideas, or issues raised by the book. You will have two hours to complete the essay, so be sure that you have sufficient time and are ready to write when you log in. This data may be used for assessment purposes and will not affect your course placement. All students participating in Freshman Connections Common Reading Program are expected to complete this assignment, regardless of current placement in the Writing Program or prior credit (AP, dual-credit, transfer, or other) for one or more Writing Program courses; if you’ve received such credit, you will still receive credit for those courses.

If you have any questions please e-mail us Freshmanconn@bsu.edu.