

Books in a Box

Reading Guide

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the best place to begin



whatcom county
library system

Books in a Box Information

We hope you will enjoy the convenience of having multiple copies of the same title to share—either with your official book group or with an unofficial friends-and-family group!

Some general information about the kits:

- ◆ Kits check out for six weeks.
- ◆ Kits are available to reserve, but we cannot guarantee their availability for specific dates.
- ◆ One person in the group is responsible for the kits full return.
- ◆ Return kits in person at any Whatcom County library.

How do I find a list of all your kits?

- ◆ Go to www.wcls.org
- ◆ Click on “catalog”
- ◆ In the Subject Keyword Search type “book club kit”

This list includes kits owned by both Whatcom County and Bellingham Library Systems. Please note that the Bellingham kits must be picked up and returned to the Bellingham Library. Whatcom County kits can be reserved and sent to any location for pickup.

Suggested Discussion Questions

(The following questions provided by the publisher)

1. Why does Mortenson choose locations for new schools on a "last-place-first" basis? What qualities does he admire in the people who live at the end of the road?
2. What enables Mortenson and CAI to be successful? What principles guide their decisions and ways of working? Why would a larger nongovernmental organization (NGO), U.S. military, or governmental agency possibly be less effective than the ragtag team of CAI?
3. What roles do Wakil and Sarfraz play in the effort to build schools in Afghanistan? What motivates them to work with such passion and commitment and to be separated from their families for ten to eleven months annually?
4. Thousands of letters, e-mails, comments, and criticisms about *Three Cups of Tea* from readers, women's book clubs, educators, and more were considered in the writing of this book. Because of those suggestions, this book has more diagrams, charts, maps, photos, as well as a who's who, glossary, and an addendum with extra information about girls' education, and a Web site, www.stonesintoschools.com. Do you think these additions, in response to thousands of readers, helped to create a better book, and help the readers relate more to the people in the book?
5. As well as being an inspiring, uplifting story, *Stones into Schools* is also a great read. What did you like best about the book, and what do you think could have been done to make it even better?
6. How does Mortenson build and sustain suspense over the course of the book? Who are some of the most colorful, engaging, admirable characters we meet in its pages?
7. Mortenson and Sarfraz always take time to consult the shura (elders) of the villages where they plan to build schools and invite the people of the area to become their teachers (p. 191). Why is this type of humble listening important? How does this approach differ from that used by many larger NGOs?

8. What are some of the greatest acts of kindness and dedication in *Stones into Schools*? What makes these acts so moving and inspiring?
9. Why is it so important that the people of Bozai Gumbaz finish building the school themselves?
10. How does CAI respond to the devastating earthquake in Pakistan? What makes a relatively small effort like "Operation School Desk," which was initiated by a child, so poignant and important?
11. Most of what we know in the West about Afghanistan comes through the mainstream media. In what ways does *Stones into Schools* give us a more human portrait of Afghanistan and its people? In what ways do the Afghan and Pakistan peoples we meet in the book defy the Western stereotypes about themselves and Muslims in general?
12. How has reading *Stones into Schools* changed your view of Afghanistan and the American involvement there?
13. A big component of Mortenson's effort is to encourage Western children to read more and to appreciate the value of education and respecting elders, an idea that he has learned from the communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan. *Three Cups of Tea* has a young readers' and children's picture book, and Penguin will publish a young readers' and children's picture-book edition for *Stones into Schools* in late 2011. Do you think it's important that Western children learn about poverty, war, slavery, and extremism and that families and communities can do collective readings of the same book?

(The following questions provided by LitLovers.com)

1. If you've read *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson's first book, how does this compare? Do you find it as inspiring or as dramatic as the first book?
2. Again, if you've read *Three Cups of Tea*, in what ways does Mortenson seem to have changed? Consider, for instance, the effect that becoming a celebrity has had on his efforts. How would you say Mortenson comes across in this book?
3. Mortenson talks about the Taliban as a "ring of men with Kalashnikovs who help to sustain the grotesque lie that flinging battery acid into the face of a girl who longs to study arithmetic is somehow in keeping with the teachings of the Koran." Talk about the ways in which Mortenson's schools—especially his belief in educating girls—challenges that repressive culture. Why in his view is it important to educate girls?
4. What role does the U.S. military play in the book? How—and why—does Mortenson change his views about the US war effort in Afghanistan?
5. How has Mortenson's work affected U.S. foreign policy and military strategy in Afghanistan and elsewhere? What have we as a nation, as a world community, learned from him?
6. Why is Mortenson angered by both Pervez Musharraf (then-president of Pakistan) and Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan's president, when both praise his work?
7. Talk about how Mortenson and his local compeers cut through bureaucracy to accomplish their goals.
8. Although deeply inspiring, is Mortenson's vision for peace—through education and literacy—realistic or naive?



Author Bio: Greg Mortenson

Source: www.bookbrowse.com

Mortenson grew up on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania from 1958 to 1973. His father established a teaching hospital, Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center, and his mother founded the International School Moshi.

He was a U.S. Army medic in Germany during the Cold War (1977-1979), where he received the Army Commendation Medal, and later graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1983, and pursued graduate studies in neurophysiology.

His lifelong interest in mountaineering culminated in a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, the world's second highest mountain, which changed his life.

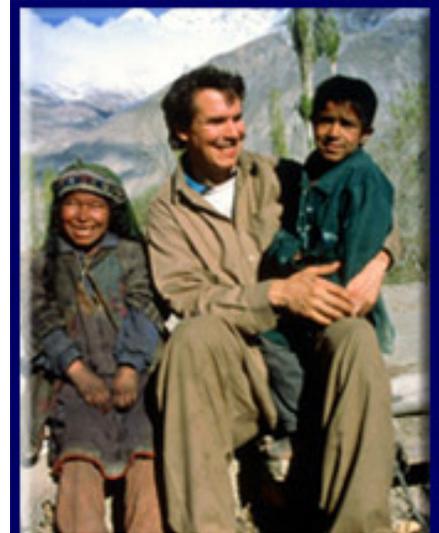
Since 1993, Mortenson has dedicated his life as a humanitarian devoted to promote education, especially for girls, in remote, volatile regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

As of 2007, Mortenson has established 58 schools in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan, which provide education to over 24,000 children, including 14,000 girls, where few education opportunities existed before.

His cross-cultural expertise has brought him to speak on U.S. Capital Hill, National think tanks, the Pentagon, Dept. of Defense, U.S. State Dept., libraries, outdoor groups, universities, schools, churches, mosques, synagogues, business and civic groups, women's organizations and much more.

NBC newscaster, Tom Brokaw, calls Mortenson, "one ordinary person, with the right combination of character and determination, who is really changing the world".

While not overseas half the year, Mortenson, 49, lives in Bozeman, Montana with his wife, Dr. Tara Bishop, and two children.



Reviews

[Kirkus Reviews](#)

★ Mortenson, Greg. [Stones Into Schools: Promoting Peace through Education in Afghanistan and Pakistan](#). Penguin Books USA, 2009.

A heartening follow-up to the bestselling *Three Cups of Tea* (2003). Mortenson and his NGO Central Asia Institute (CAI) have been committed to building schools in the most remote corners of Pakistan and Afghanistan for the last 16 years. Here he resumes where he left off in his previous book and spotlights the extraordinary efforts to make good on a promise he made in 1999 to villagers of the Wakhan Corridor, a rugged, isolated area of northeastern Afghanistan. The Wakhan is occupied by the Kirghiz, who had been forced out of their land with the coming of the Soviets before returning to restricted migratory patterns, and are cut off from basic, life-sustaining government services. For Mortenson and his well-meaning, multiethnic crew he calls his "Dirty Dozen," the village of Bozai Gumbaz proved to be "the definition of our last-place-first philosophy." By enlisting the help of the local leaders and supplying

the Kirghiz with necessary building materials (hailed by yak), the CAI fulfilled one of its main goals: to get the people to build a school on their own. Based in Bozeman, MT, Mortenson tells the remarkable story of how his group operates. He travels America giving talks, raising awareness and enormous sums of money (\$900,000 poured in after a 1993 Parade article), considering proposals about where next to build a school (it must be at least 50 percent girls) and courting local commandhans, or warlords. The organization had to contend with threats of kidnapping, Taliban violence, the Kashmir earthquake of 2005 and ingrained injunctions against educating girls. In his humble, winning style, the author writes of making peace with the U.S. Army, whose bombing caused enormous civilian bloodshed. *Three Cups of Tea* is now required reading for counterinsurgency officers, and Mortenson effectively demonstrates the "cascade of positive changes triggered by teaching a single girl how to read and write. "Inspiring evidence of the tsunami effects of a committed humanitarian.

Suggested Related Reading

Islam, by Karen Armstrong.

Veiled Courage: Inside the Afghan Women's Resistance, by Cheryl Benard.

There is no Me without You: One Woman's Odyssey to Rescue Africa's Children, by Melissa Fay Greene.

The Faith Club: A Muslim, Christian, Jew - Three Women Search for Understanding, by Ranya Idliby, Suzanne Oliver and Priscilla Warner.

Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools, by Jonathan Kozol.

The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror, by Bernard Lewis.

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations - One School at a Time, by Greg Mortenson.

Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil, by Deborah Rodriguez.

The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East, by Sandy Tolan.

Web Resources

LitLovers Guides: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-non-fiction/988-stones-into-schools-mortenson>

Book/Author Webpage: <http://www.stonesintoschools.com/>

PBS interview: <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/01152010/profile2.html> (video or text)

The World Bank report on Girl's Education: <http://tinyurl.com/djo3w>

Pakistani Ministry of Education: <http://www.moe.gov.pk/>