

About the Island

by ReadWorks



Rashid grew up in a very different Bahrain from the Bahrain of his parents, his grandparents, and their grandparents. But he was nine years old and didn't know anything about his country's history. He went to school with friends from all over the world, so he assumed that Bahrain had always been full of all kinds of people.

His best friend was Seher, a girl whose parents grew up in Pakistan. They had moved to Bahrain when Seher was a baby. Seher's best friend was a girl named Prajakta. Her family came from India, which confused Rashid slightly because he thought Indian people were meant to have darker skin. When he asked Seher about this, she explained that Indians from different parts of the country had different complexions. Prajakta was from central India, a state called Maharashtra, and most people there had fair skin and light eyes.

The next time Rashid sat next to Prajakta in class, he took careful note of her eyes and found that Seher was correct: Prajakta's eyes were practically hazel! He smiled to himself, and then realized Prajakta had noticed him staring at her.

"What are you looking at, silly?" she said.

"Oh, nothing," he said. "I was just looking at the color of your eyes."

"Ooh, Rashid was looking into Prajakta's eyes," class clown Thomas said in a singsong voice.

"Rashid has a crush on Prajakta! Ooh!"

The whole class began oohing at this statement, making Prajakta blush in fury and Rashid laugh and laugh. It took Mrs. Biggins several minutes to calm her students. "Stop being so daft, all of you," she scolded in her crisp British accent.

When Rashid told his mother the story at home that evening, she sighed.

"What's the matter, Mama?" Rashid asked her. "Didn't you like my story?"

His mother smiled and petted his head. "Of course I did. You tell wonderful stories, and I'm glad you and your friends have so much fun at school. It's just, dear boy, that you don't know much about where you come from." She pointed at the framed pictures on the wall. "Those are your uncles, your grandfather, and his brothers. None of them had friends from India and England."

"What do you mean?" Rashid asked. "Why not?"

"Bahrain has been a land of immigration," she said. "But the world looked different back then. Let me tell you about Bahrain's history."

"We do history in school," Rashid protested. He didn't know if he wanted to sit through another lecture. The harsh summer was over, and he wanted to be outside playing soccer while the days were still long and warm.

"This isn't the kind of history that Mrs. Biggins or Mrs. O'Hare will know," his mother said. "Your teachers are very well-educated, of course, but they came here from Britain just a few years ago to teach at our international schools. To really learn about Bahrain, you need to talk to someone who has been here for a long time."

"Like you or Baba?" Rashid asked his mother, becoming more interested in what she was saying.

"That's right. Rashid, you are part of a family that has lived on this island since 1783, but Bahrain's history goes back even further in time. Four thousand years ago, there was a completely different civilization in this part of the world, called the Dilmun civilization. The Dilmun people were very active traders, bringing all kinds of goods to and from the Middle East. And so Bahrain and its neighbors received a lot of immigrants, who were traveling along the trade route."

"What did they trade back then?" Rashid asked.

"People didn't have computers and books and toys," his mother said with a smile. "What do you think was around four millennia ago?"

Rashid was stumped. He looked at the photos of his family for help, but they smiled benevolently down at him. "They didn't have computers back then," he said to his mother, "but I have one now, and I can use it to find out!"

"Excellent," his mother laughed. "I will start working on dinner while you do some research."

Rashid was amazed to learn that the Dilmun civilization centered around the tiny island he was growing up on now, back when Bahrain's population was much smaller-nowhere near the 1.1 million people here today. At the time of the Dilmun civilization, he learned, people traded raw materials such

as timber, ivory, lapis lazuli, gold, and pearls from the Persian Gulf.

"Pearls, Mama!" Rashid announced to his mother. She was instructing the chef about dinner preparations and held up her hand, telling Rashid to wait until she was finished.

"What were you saying, Rashid?" she asked him, once she had finished speaking to the chef.

"We may not trade timber or ivory anymore, but I know that Bahrain is famous for its pearls."

Every day, on his way to school, Rashid's driver used to take him past the Pearl Roundabout, one of the most famous and beautiful monuments on the island-that is, until the government had destroyed the monument in 2011 because of all the protests occurring there. Now the driver took him a different way to avoid the monument's glaring absence. Rashid still missed it.

"That's right," his mother said. "And it's still a big part of our economy. The archipelago of Bahrain has been an important pearl trading center for centuries."

"Archipelago?"

"That's the word for a group of islands," his mother said. "Did you know the word for Bahrain means two seas, for the two main islands that make up the country?"

Rashid didn't wait to hear any more. He had already dashed off to call Seher and tell her all the things he had learned.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Where does this story take place?

- A. India
- B. Pakistan
- C. Bahrain
- D. Britain

2. Rashid's mother tells Rashid about the history of Bahrain. What motivates Rashid's mother to do this?

- A. She wants Rashid to know the history of where he comes from.
- B. She wants to help Rashid study for an upcoming history test in school.
- C. She wants to keep Rashid from going outside to play soccer with friends.
- D. She wants Rashid to learn about Bahrain's role in the pearl industry.

3. Bahrain has a very long history. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

- A. Bahrain has historically played a large role in the pearl industry.
- B. Bahrain has been an island of immigrants.
- C. The Dilmun civilization traded goods to and from the Middle East.
- D. Four thousand years ago, Bahrain was part of the Dilmun civilization.

4. Based on the story, what conclusion can you make about Rashid's family?

- A. They are a relatively new family in Bahrain.
- B. They are a very old, rich family in Bahrain.
- C. They do not value their history in Bahrain.
- D. They do not like the new immigrants in Bahrain.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A. Rashid learns about the history of Bahrain.
- B. Rashid learns about people from different parts of India.
- C. Rashid has a crush on Prajakta, a girl from India.
- D. Rashid learns the meaning of the word "archipelago."

6. Read the following sentences: "[Prajakta's] family came from India, which confused Rashid slightly because he thought Indian people were meant to have darker skin. When he asked Seher about this, she explained that Indians from different parts of the country had different **complexions**. Prajakta was from central India, a state called Maharashtra, and most people there had fair skin and light eyes."

As used in this sentence, what does the word "**complexion**" mean?

- A. the color of the iris of the eye
- B. an attitude toward foreign people
- C. the color or appearance of the skin
- D. a style of traditional Indian dress

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The Dilmun civilization traded a number of raw materials with the Middle East, _____ timber, ivory, and pearls.

- A. obviously
- B. therefore
- C. meanwhile
- D. including

8. Bahrain is an important trading center of what commodity?

9. Why did Bahrain receive a lot of immigrants during the Dilmun civilization?

10. Based on the story, how has Bahrain changed since the Dilmun civilization, and how has it stayed the same? Support your answer using information from the story.
