Reluctant Fundamentalist Character List:

<https://www.gradesaver.com/the-reluctant-fundamentalist/study-guide/character-list>

The RF vocabulary:

<https://quizlet.com/20498890/the-reluctant-fundamentalist-vocabulary-flash-cards/>

alarming

mission

**Discussion Questions:** Please answer each part of the question, and use full sentences. We will use these for class discussion when you return from your holiday.

**1. At the beginning of the book, Changez says that his companion's "bearing" gives him away as an American. What does Changez mean by this? What are his deeper implications?**

By bearing, Changez means the American’s behavior is different from that of Pakistani. This implies that Changez knows the US well, so that he is familiar with American’s bearing and can immediately identify that man as American simply through his bearing.

Accent, posture, dressing, confidence,

Distrust, bad impression

2. **What do we learn about the American who sits across the table from Changez? How does Hamid convey this information? What do we never learn about the American? Consider how what we don't know about him influences our understanding of both Changez's monologue and the author's intent.**

We know where the man currently is (Lahore, Pakistan) and where he is from (the US). Also, we know that he is a muscular, well-dressed man with short-cropped hair and expansive chest, only through Changez’s part of the whole conversation which notes the American’s behavior. But we don’t know anything except that, including the man’s name, the purpose for coming to Lahore, his marital status, or even his true reaction and attitude throughout the book. What we don’t know determines that we can never be sure about whether what we know are real or just Changze’s opinion, which can be highly biased. The author does so to makes the novel more mysterious and attracting because the author is forcing the reader to think over about every detail and stereotypes in the book to determine who the American man is and why he comes here. Maybe a secret agent, or a spy, or just a tourist, or none of them.

A military man, conscious of his environment, discomfort, probably rich

**3. Who is Jim, and why does he take such a liking to Changez? What do they have in common? Is his sympathy for Changez genuine?**

Jim is the executive vice president in Underwood Samson, the company Changez is working for. At the same time, Jim acts as a mentor of Changez and gives him advices from time to time.

There might be several reasons for Jim’s affection towards Changez. First, Changez always treat people with somewhat politeness, making people comfortable to get along with. Moreover, Changez is diligent and has outstanding ability as an analyst, who never fails to rank first among his colleagues, which can be a great help to Jim and his company. Also, Jim appreciates some personalities of Changez that are similar to those of himself, like outsideness, acute observation ability, and the longing for fortune. Besides, their similar family backgrounds may also promote their relationships.

Jim and Changez have a lot in common, including that they are both watchful person and always the outsider, both talented analysist and work diligently, both initially poor and receive financial aid in Princeton, both both work part-time jobs far away from college when they are in Princeton to maintain a positive figure in front of their friends.

From my perspective, Jim’s sympathy for Changez is genuine, and even beyond sympathy. Admittedly, Jim once says that he feels no guilt about firing Changez, but this is because firing Changez or not concerns the future of his business and other colleague’s future, so he cannot selfishly keep Changez in consideration of the friendship while risking the whole company’s prospect. He also explains that he likes Changez, nonetheless. He adds that he can tell that Changez is going through hard times, and if he needs someone to talk to, Jim will buy him a beer. From this detail we can see that Jim really appreciates Changez and also has sympathy for him. Even though Changez cannot be a member of his company any more because of the rule of the company, Jim still sees Changez as a friend that he is willing to talk to.

Also, during the time when Changez still works for Underwood Samson, Jim treats him pretty well: provides him the opportunity to come here as a practice, talk with Changez wholeheartedly whenever Changez is in trouble. Even when Changez is not in good moment, he gives Changez several chances to help him and even provides him with a really important task.

Different people may have different ways of showing affection and different understanding of it. For an analysist like Jim who is strict to both himself and others, it can be said that the sympathy for Changez is genuine.

**4. In Chapter 5, Changez is in a hotel in Manila, packing his suitcase and watching television, when he sees the towers of the World Trade Center collapse. "And then I smiled," he confesses. Explore this scene as the turning point of the novel — in terms of plot, character, scope, and tone.**

In terms of plot, Changez initially enjoys all the best that is US that makes possible for him: he receives the most advanced education in Princeton the US university, he gets a well-paid job here, and even an American girlfriend. But after 9-11, everything changes: he finds it increasingly hard to concentrate on work and finally loose the job; his girlfriend becomes more and more distant and at last disappears, possibly suicides.

In terms of character, Changez gradually turns from a lover and supporter for America to be against it. Meanwhile, Changez always used to follow what others want, but after this incident, he gradually becomes able to identify who he is and makes bold decisions like resignation from Underwood Samson.

In terms of scope, Changez initially only sees the great wealth and skills he gets from Princeton and Underwood Samson, works to the fundamentals, and never knows who he really is. But now he begins to realize his own identity and belonging, and that what he is working for has no difference with putting his own country in greater danger. He started not to only focus on the fundamentals but to see things in a boarder and more emotional way.

In terms of tone, Changez used to be joyful, but somehow soft ccareful, but now the tone is pretty strong despite of a bit sorrow.

**5. In Chile, Changez befriends the head of the publishing company his firm is there to value. Why are the two men drawn to each other? Why has Changez suddenly become so disinterested in his work? Who were the janissaries? Why does their history resonate so strongly with Changez?**

There should be several reasons for Juan and Changez to be drawn to each other. For Changez’s part, Juan’s appearance reminds Changez of his “maternal grandfather”. Also, Juan can sensitively notice the difference between Changez and his coworker. He knows what is bothering Changez, and he is willing to offer help. For Juan’s part, first, when Juan and Changez meet for the first time, Juan asks them what they know of books, and Changez is the only one that says his father’s uncle was a well-known poet, and all his family love books. Given that they have the same interest of books, they are easily drawn together. Second, since Juan is having conflict with the owner of the company who wants to sell the company, and Changez seems to be the easiest to be brought down to let the company not be sold, they are drawn together.

Changez is becoming less and less interested in his own work because even though he is supposed to do so, he cannot help instead reading news and worrying about the possible war between India and Pakistan, with American maintaining a policy of neutrality. He worries a lot about his family back in Lahore but can do nothing for help. Changez is also distracted by beauty of Valparaiso, the city of the company, with melancholy atmosphere pervaded, which reminds him of Lahore. Most importantly, Changez thoughts can no longer only focus on the fundamentals, but also are given to “the critical personal and political issues that affect one’s emotional present”.

At a lunch with Juan, he talks about janissary. They are Christian boys who were captured by the Ottoman Empire at young age and trained to fight to erase their own civilizations, and as a result, they were extremely loyal because they had nothing else to turn to.

Changez feels like he has become a “modern-day janissary, “a servant of American empire”, because he never known who he really is. He is working for a country which is putting his own country at a relatively dangerous place to face the war. That has no difference with fighting to erase his own civilization as janissaries.

**6. Discuss the two meanings of "fundamentalist" Hamid's title plays on — the first religious, the second suggested by Underwood Samson's business commitment to "Focus on the fundamentals." What do the different meanings suggest about the novel's themes?**

In terms of religion, fundamentalist is those conservative theologians who stick to some strict doctrines. By saying Changez has become a reluctant fundamentalist, the author wants to convey that it is American’s unfairness and racism that promote thousands of innocents to become the enemy of the US, and thus making things go the way they want least. Changez is only one of them.

While viewing the word fundamentalist from the perspective of business commitment, fundamentalist is those who works to every detail and focus only on their work. Changes realizes later that the slogan can discourage the employees to feel guilty by distracting them and obliterating any personal emotion they have.

**7. The Reluctant Fundamentalist turns out to be quite a page-turner — a political thriller that builds to a memorable conclusion. What exactly happens at the end of the novel? What clues or foreshadowings tipped you off as to how the book would end? Why does Changez tell this stranger his story?**

The end of the novel stopped at the scene that the American starts to take something metallic out of hi pocket, but what happened next remained unsure. It could be that Changez is an anti-American terrorist that plans to kill the American man from the beginning, or that the American is a secret agent, or both, or either.

For the first possibility, evidence exists that the American seems to be very uncomfortable to be with Changez, but Changez keep speaking in a polite yet demanding way and insisting on keeping the man with him until midnight. That might have certain sinister purpose. Also, Chagez says that he has become an anti-American professor who is always angry and aggressive towards the US. The act of

For the second possibility, first, the American is very likely to have a gun, since he reaches under his jacket for several times that night. When Changez is talking about Erica and the lights suddenly go out, the man jumps to his feed and reaches into his jacket. When Changez reminds him that there is a bulge in his jacket where people usually conceal guns, the man does not deny but changes his position. Second , when having dinner with Changez, the man keeps suspicious. He refuses to add sugar and only drinks it until [Changez](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-reluctant-fundamentalist/characters/changez) switches cups with him. Third, when Changez asks him if he is familiar with the military, he seems to assent. And he receives a phone call every hour sharply, but he dares not answer it in front of Changez but instead uses text message. So the American man must be working for a highly organized organization, probably secret agent or spy. Lastly, after listening to Changez’s story, the man seems to be unsurprised. A likely possibility is that the man has already known that information, which can only be obtained beforehand through government sources.

However, these evidences are blurry and some are not mentioned clearly in the novel. Moreover, they might be biases and unreliable since they are only Changez’s subjective words.

The reason for Changez to tell the American man his own story is not clearly stated in the novel, but I think there might be different probabilities if we know who Changez and the man really is. First, the conversation may be aimless, and Changez himself is a talkative person who happened to feel like talk to someone, and since the man is American, Changez may feel a sense of resonance and thus tells him his personal story. Another possibility is that Changez knows this man is American, and due to his resentment towards the US, he wants to do something sinister to this man (probably along with the waiter since he seems to act weirdly). He has to keep talking with the man in order to have the chance to let him be alone at midnight so no one will find out what happened then. Many other possibilities may exist, but we can never what really happened.

**8. Since 9/11, there has been a growing trend in contemporary fiction to write about the tragedy of that day and its aftermath. What devices in this novel do you think make it unique in its approach to the 9-11 tragedy?   
(Questions issued by publisher.)**

One of the most unique things about this novel to approach the 9-11 tragedy is that this novel is a monologue, which is made up purely of Changez’s words during a conversation between an American and a Pakistani, who are from two civilizations involved in this tragedy. The novel shows 9-11 from a Pakistani’s perspective instead an American. Through the conversation, Changez, as a Pakistani once living in the US, describes his own growth and change of life because of 9-11. In fact, the 9-11 tragedy affected thousands of people like Changez. Also, the 9-11 tragedy is serves as a symbol of the collapse of America’s indestructible dominance of the world, so Changez’s first reaction towards 9-11 is a smile.

**9. Find any passage in the book that you particularly enjoyed, and write a short analysis of it. Be sure to include the chapter and page number.**

“These thoughts preoccupied me when I should have been gathering data and building my financial model…the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful.”

--Chapter 10, pp. 163

When Changez is in Chile to analyze a publishing company, Changez loses himself in the beauty of Valparaiso and because of this, he can no longer concentrate on his own work. The imagery of Valparaiso with melancholic atmosphere reminds him of his own home, Lahore, where buildings are all damaged to ruins because of war. When describing the attractiveness of Valparaiso, the author says that “a sense of melancholy pervaded its boulevards and hillsides”, making the feeling of melancholy substantialized into something that is present everywhere. Also, since it reminds him of Lahore, the city Valparaiso itself is a symbol of sensibility, while the workplace symbolized the rational part of his mind. There is an inner struggle for Changez between his work and the beauty of Valparaiso; between sensibility and rationality; between the success in the US and the patriotism in Pakistan. The act of distraction by Valparaiso represents his subconscious preference for choosing to follow his sensibility and going back to his motherland. What is also remarkable is the last sentence: the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful. It uses personification because the word “proclaim” is used for ruins. It means that, in city Valparaiso and Lahore, only remnants of ancient architecture can proclaim the beauty of the city in the past. It can also can be understood as the attractiveness of incomplete beauty. Only by going through vicissitude can something, or somebody like Changez, become beautiful inside.