

Tales from the Past / O'tmishdan ertaklar (1965)

Abdulla Qahhor (1907-1968)

OVERVIEW

Author Abdulla Qahhor is one of the most significant figures in twentieth-century Uzbek literature. His literary talent developed amid the harsh realities of the Soviet regime, and his creative activity unfolded within the tragic circumstances of the 1930s–1950s, which inevitably left a negative imprint on his work. Nevertheless, his devotion to truth and his strong sense of justice enabled him to rise above ideological pressure. Renowned as a master of realistic narrative, Qahhor produced prose works such as *Mirage* (1935), *Little Bird* (1958), and *Tales from the Past* (1965), as well as dramatic works including *Silk Suzani* (1950), *Hurting Teeth* (1954) and *A Sound from the Coffin* (1962). His public speeches, critical essays, and translations remain enduring monuments of twentieth-century Uzbek literature.

Novel *Tales from the Past* is an autobiographical work depicting Abdulla Qahhor's childhood. Beginning with scenes of everyday life, it expands to portray the major socio-political upheavals of early twentieth-century Turkestan, including the First World War, the October Revolution, the *Basmachi movement* (a national liberation uprising in Central Asia against Soviet rule), and the rise of Bolshevik power. True to his objective narrative style, the author presents reality through the perspective of a young protagonist who perceives the world in all its complexity and contradictions while maintaining deep respect for his family. *Tales from the Past* provides profound insight into the life, spirit, and collective consciousness of the people during and after the October Revolution of 1917.

Background In the preface to his novel, Abdulla Qahhar acknowledged Anton Chekhov as his ideological and artistic influence. Chekhov's vivid depictions of ignorance and hardship among the Russian people reminded Qahhar of similar realities he had witnessed. Abdulla Qahhar's early stories likewise portrayed the past in somber tones, attracting criticism from both contemporaries and later scholars. In *Tales from the Past*, Qahhar is restrained in depicting joyful childhood memories. In the preface, he recalls that a young critic, after reading excerpts from [the novel](#) published in a magazine, remarked that his writing was excessively gloomy. Half-jokingly, Qahhar explains that, to avoid accusations of pessimism, he titled the work *Tales from the Past* instead of *Excerpts from the Past*.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

<i>Abdulla</i>	a boy who grows from 7 to about 12 years old during the story
<i>Abduqahhor</i>	Abdulla's father, a blacksmith
<i>Mother</i>	Abdulla's mother
<i>Abdurahmon</i>	Abdulla's uncle, brother of Abduqahhor
<i>To'raqul Vofurush</i>	Wholesaler in the village
<i>Valixon So'fi</i>	Village school teacher and mosque servant

SYNOPSIS

Set in the early twentieth century in the Fergana region of Turkestan (now Uzbekistan), the novel follows Abduqahhor, a blacksmith who moves from village to village seeking stability for his family. It opens in Yaypan, where the family rents a room from Olim Buva but soon leaves after Abduqahhor is falsely accused of harassing Olim Buva's daughter. In their new home, the neighbors call Abdulla a "stranger," and he withdraws into silence. Soon, his mother gives birth to a daughter, and Abdulla takes on household duties. When his uncle visits, he urges the family to settle in Kokand as World War I begins.

In Kokand, the family lives with an uncle, but tragedy strikes when he accidentally kills his daughter for refusing an arranged marriage. Shaken, the family moves repeatedly as Abduqahhor struggles to find work. When Abdulla's sister dies of illness, the grieving family relocates to Qudash, where the deceitful landlord To'raqul Vofurush exploits them, forcing them to move once again.

In Buvayda, Abdulla attends the village school run by Valihon Sufi, but his father withdraws him after realizing the teacher's ignorance. The school soon collapses, and Valihon So'fi becomes Abduqahhor's enemy. Shortly afterward, Abdulla's mother gives birth to a son. Meanwhile, news spreads of the uprising against conscription (the October Revolution) and the *Basmachi* movement. Abdulla attends a *Jadid school* (combining traditional and modern education), soon closed by conservative clerics. Suddenly, Abdulla's younger brother falls ill and dies. The family grieves their loss and moves to Kokand, where Abduqahhor, unable to find work, joins the Bolsheviks' Red Guard. Abdulla changes schools three times. The school's principals change several times, and under different administrations, Abdulla serves at various times as a collector of donations for the hungry, a member of the Union of Young Workers, and even an anarchist. Owing to his strong academic performance, he is selected to attend the model Dorilmuallimin school. Abdulla is overjoyed and eagerly anticipates the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

SCENES

Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining Young Abdulla's family lives in a rented house owned by a baker, Olim Buva. While his father works long hours in the forge, Abdulla spends his days with his pregnant mother. One day, his father's nephew, a hunter, visits and forges bullets in their home. Out of curiosity, Abdulla secretly takes two. After the hunter leaves, he playfully strikes them with a hammer, and one discharges, wounding his mother in the leg. Terrified, he runs to call his father, but the injury proves minor. Instead of punishment, his parents praise his "bravery". Having lost eight children, his mother loves Abdulla even more dearly.

The Bicycle Misfortune Abdulla's father is returning from Kokand on his bicycle when he passes an old woman in the dark. To her, the strange sight of a man rushing forward without his feet touching the ground looks like a monster. Terrified, she faints, becomes ill, and soon dies. The woman turns out to be the sister of Olim Buva, the landlord. Shocked and guilt-ridden, Abdulla's father avoids going outside, fearing blame. But Olim Buva reassures him, saying it is Allah's will and not his fault – only that he must never again ride the "Ferris wheel". Humbled and afraid, Abdulla's father sells the bicycle immediately.

A Costly Misunderstanding A week later, Abdulla's father is walking down the street when he notices a woman in a *burqa* ahead of him. A branch has caught on her garment. Rushing to help, he quickly steps on it to free her. The woman, however, mistakes his action for harassment. She happens to be Olim Buva's married daughter and immediately tells her father. Furious, Olim Buva scolds Abdulla's father, recalls the earlier bicycle incident, and orders him to leave the house at once. Though he tries to explain, his words have no effect, and the family is forced to move to another neighborhood.

In the New Neighborhood In the evening, after moving to a new house, the boy goes outside, hoping to play with the local children. But they refuse to include him, calling him a "stranger". Deeply saddened, he withdraws into himself. After his mother gives birth to a baby sister, he mostly stays at home, helping with the housework and caring for his mother, who has now fully recovered. He rarely goes outside and speaks very little.

The Silent Boy When Abdulla's mother recovers from childbirth, the neighbors come to congratulate her. Most of the women are lively and playful: one pretends to be a gypsy fortune-teller, another parodies the men of the neighborhood and invents amusing nicknames, making everyone laugh. A plump, cheerful woman teases Abdulla, but instead of responding, he runs away in silence. After this incident, rumors about the "silent boy" spread through the neighborhood, worrying his parents. Meanwhile, his father takes on a new apprentice, Kulala. Abdulla feels unhappy, since working had freed him from interactions he prefers to avoid.

"Rich Man" with Singer Kulala enters the house and says that Abduqahhor is asking for money to buy a Singer sewing machine. Taking the money, he runs to the store where Abduqahhor is waiting. Abdulla follows him. In the store, a local merchant is demonstrating a Singer machine. A curious crowd gathers around. When the man shows how the machine works, the crowd is delighted. Abdulla's father decides to buy the Singer. Soon the people want to see the "rich" man who could afford such a wonderful machine.

The Singer Breaks His Silence Women from the neighborhood come to admire the Singer. A plump woman quickly sews a camisole and pants for Abdulla. When he steps outside in his new clothes, the

neighborhood children beg him to show them the machine. Excited, Abdulla runs back in and asks his mother to let the children see it. The plump woman is astonished to hear him speak, while his mother beams with joy. Abdulla, however, feels shy and embarrassed.

The Price of the Singer After buying the Singer, Abdulla's father gains fame and is seen as wealthy. Soon, however, people gossip about his past: they recall the bicycle incident, criticize him for neglecting prayer, and note that Abdulla is still uncircumcised. Troubled, the parents arrange a circumcision ceremony and invite the neighborhood to dinner. Once the *imam* (a religious leader in Islam) gathers everyone at the table, tensions ease. Yet he declares that clothes sewn on a machine are unsuitable for prayer. Alarmed, Abdulla's father hides the Singer and begins attending the mosque three times a day.

Guarding the House, Moving to Kokand One morning, Abdulla's mother rises early to tend the baby and sees a man inside the house – likely a thief – who disappears as soon as he realizes she is awake. Though the family is poor, their Singer sewing machine gives Abdulla's father a reputation for wealth. Concerned, he buys a gun and begins guarding the house each night. Around this time, his brother arrives from Kokand to buy supplies for his daughter's wedding, since food is cheaper in the village. He urges Abdulla's father to move to Kokand, and, with war underway, he agrees.

A Household of Secrets The family moves to Kokand, where their uncle's household welcomes them warmly. The grandmother embraces Abdulla's father, while Savriniso, the uncle's daughter, clings to his mother in tears. They visit Savriniso's bedridden mother. Savriniso kindly offers Abdulla sweets. Soon, G'afforjon, the youngest son, returns from school but ignores him. When told to call his father, he cries capriciously. That evening, Abdulla's mother confides that Savriniso refuses to marry a man she does not love, but his father advises her not to interfere.

Tears Before the Wedding The wedding day approaches, and Savriniso suffers, crying incessantly. The groom, a young man and her uncle's apprentice – a short, cheerful youth – does not appeal to her. Abdulla and G'afforjon go to invite relatives, and their aunt treats them to nuts. Abdulla brings some to Savriniso; she thanks him, kisses him, and they eat together. He lays his head on her lap as the train whistle sounds, tears streaming down his face, and she murmurs a wish for the train to take her far away.

Houri Suddenly, his uncle appears, shouting, "Where is the train taking you?" Horrified, Savriniso runs into the room, followed by her uncle. A scream is heard, then a groan. The old woman's voice echoes – how could he have struck her so hard? Abdulla's mother rushes in; the uncle gestures for her to enter and then leaves. Savriniso lies unconscious, groaning softly. By morning, her condition worsens, and she dies. The boy is deeply saddened. G'afforjon joins him and says that their grandmother believes Savriniso has joined the *houris* (the pure, beautiful maidens of Paradise) because she left this world a virgin.

A New Home After Savriniso's death, the family moves to another house rented from Oq Domla, a healer who treats the mentally ill using traditional methods, striking patients with a rod. The groans of the madmen terrify the mother and the boy, prompting them to move again – this time to a small house owned by a weaver. The weaver's kind wife warmly welcomes and cares for them. Soon after, the uncle's wife dies, and the grandmother, together with the uncle's son, comes to live with the family.

Curses and Loss The grandmother is capricious and cruel, insisting that her meals be prepared separately and that she eats alone. She constantly provokes quarrels, accusing Abdulla's mother of wastefulness and cursing her and the children until the woman is utterly exhausted. Suddenly, Abdulla's sister falls ill. Desperate, the mother lashes out at both her husband and the grandmother. The girl is taken to Domla for healing prayers. One day she opens her eyes, and everyone rejoices – but the next day, the mother returns home carrying her lifeless body.

A New Beginning in Qudash Winter is over. Abdulla's father has found work and housing in the village of Qudash, and the family moves there. Kulala's brother, Dodarho'ja, who works in an oil mill, comes to visit and helps them settle into their new home. Soon, To'raqul *Vofurush* (Wholesaler), the house owner and a wholesaler, appears. He speaks kindly to Abdulla's father and gives him some money, saying he needs it now and that the father must earn 80 sickles for him. The father happily agrees. However, Dodarho'ja warns that he has made a mistake by underestimating Toraqul's cunning. The father does not take it seriously.

The Blacksmith and the Cunning Wholesaler Vofurush frequently visits Abduqahhor, asking for small sums of money to buy various items or requesting that Kulala be sent for them. Since these requests cost little, Abduqahhor hesitates to demand repayment. To free himself from Vofurush more quickly, he spends his money on the needed materials and then complains of having none left. Vofurush stops for a while but soon begins asking Abduqahhor to forge sickles. He takes them so often that the blacksmith eventually has none left to sell.

The Dispute at the Market Abduqahhor faithfully carries out Vofurush's errands. At times, he allows his student Kulala to take a few shekels from these errands to sell at the market for his family's support. One day, Vofurush sees Kulala there, slaps him, and takes the money. That evening, Kulala's brother, Dodarho'ja, enraged, attacks Vofurush and tries to beat him. Vofurush then complains to the *amin*, (the elder of a village in Central Asia), falsely accusing Abduqahhor of the attack. As punishment, Dodarho'ja is exiled, and the *amin* sternly warns Abduqahhor that he too may face exile. Abduqahhor tries to explain, but the *amin* refuses to listen.

The Quarrel at Vofurush's House Vofurush beats his young wife, and she screams. Neighbors gather and knock on the door, ready to break it down. At last, he opens it and sees the crowd. Spotting Abduqahhor, he lashes out, accusing him of turning people against him. Abduqahhor denies it, saying everyone heard the beating and only wanted to stop it. Vofurush shouts louder until a young man grabs him and throws him out. Furious, Vofurush runs to the *amin* to complain. The *amin* orders Abduqahhor to leave the village.

Watermelon Rind The family moves to the village of Buvayda. Since it is neither sowing nor harvest season, work is scarce. Abduqahhor spends his days shoeing horses. One day, he injures his hand on a horse's hoof and cannot work for about forty days. Abdulla and Kulala linger in the workshop, unsure what to do. Other boys gather at the forge, where Kulala entertains them with magic tricks using a watermelon rind and a *magnet*. Soon, rumors of his "magic" spread. People admire him, saying if the apprentice is this clever, the master must be extraordinary – and their father's fame grows.

Whispers of Magic One day, a richly dressed woman comes to Abduqahhor's house and tells her story. She is the beloved fourth wife of a wealthy man from a village, but he has recently grown cold toward her. She suspects that his second wife is casting a spell on him, depriving her of the ability to have children. She asks Abdulla's mother to persuade her husband to pray and remove the spell. Abdulla's mother is surprised but does not entirely reject the request and promises to speak with her husband.

Abduqahhor's Magic Abdulla's mother tells Abduqahhor about the woman. At first, he laughs, but his mother yearns for her and, sincerely believing in his "abilities", asks him for help. He agrees and asks her to bring him a jug of water. He says he will bless the water, and after drinking it, her husband will love her again as before. After this incident, his fame among women grows, and more and more people begin coming to him with requests.

Rumors and Reproach in the Village A rumor spreads through the village that Abduqahhor intends to seduce a woman who came to him seeking help with infertility. The mother timidly begins to accuse her husband, which enrages him; he places all the blame on her, since she asked him to help the woman. After this incident, the young men of the village send a man in a burqa after him. The father notices this and, after that, stops working on lifting the magical spell.

Valihon So'fi Abdulla's father decides to send him to school. His teacher is Valihon So'fi . The school follows an old-fashioned model, where children simply memorize words noisily. At home, when Abdulla recites a verse of the Quran, his father notices that he is doing it incorrectly. He goes to the teacher and asks him to show Abdulla the correct way. So'fi cannot find the error, but Abdulla's father points it out and corrects him. After this incident, he takes his son away and begins teaching him himself.

The Teacher's Secret Valihon So'fi visits Abduqahhor and confides that he is struggling – his income from serving in the mosque is meager, forcing him to teach despite never having received a proper education. He begs Abduqahhor to keep this secret. Although Abduqahhor promises, the news spreads, and soon half of the students leave the So'fi's school. Before long, all the students are gone. Enraged, Valihon So'fi turns against Abduqahhor, accusing him of neglecting *namaz* (Islamic daily prayer) and disturbing worshippers with the clamor of his forge during prayer.

Conflict at the Forge One day, a *yuzboshi* (military leader commanding a hundred cavalry) comes to the forge and, noticing a *jodi* (a handled tool for cutting hay), asks Abduqahhor to bring it to his house. Displeased, Abduqahhor replies that he should send someone to fetch it instead. Offended, *yuzboshi* becomes enraged. Valihon So'fi, *yuzboshi's* confidant, seizes the moment to accuse Abduqahhor of impiety, tax evasion, and debauchery. Worn down by these attacks, Abduqahhor tries to make peace, but the So'fi refuses.

The Lamp Stand So'fi doesn't hesitate to slander Abduqahhor. His friends devise a new punishment for him: they catch him at night and tie him to a pole on the market dome, attaching a candle to his back. The villagers call this punishment "the lamp stand", and according to custom, the disgraced person must leave the village. But early in the morning, the owner of the teahouse notices him, rescues him, and brings him home. After this, So'fi falls ill and remains bedridden for a long time. Fearing complaints against him, Abduqahhor begins looking for a new home.

The Camera and the Belly One day, a Russian couple's cart breaks down near Abduqahhor's workshop. The man is a surveyor sent to measure local property, and the woman is his wife. They ask Abduqahhor to repair the cart. While he works, the woman, curious about his family, gestures to see their home. His pregnant wife bursts into tears, confessing her fear of childbirth after losing many children. When the Russian woman photographs her, she mistakes the camera for binoculars, believing it reveals the baby in her belly. As the couple departs, they kindly advise taking her to the maternity hospital to give birth.

A Modern Birth Abduqahhor decides to take his wife to the hospital for childbirth. In Kokand, they stay with an aunt while he arranges for Abdulla's mother to be admitted. The grandmother opposes the hospital birth, believing it to be a violation of custom, but Abduqahhor insists. His wife safely gives birth to a baby boy, and the family rejoices.

A "Human Factory" When they return to the village, neighbors gather to see the boy who was born in the hospital. Overjoyed, the mother tells an exaggerated version of events, claiming that a machine delivered the baby, another machine bathed her, and yet another prepared the food. Astonished, an elderly neighbor woman exclaims, "They've invented a human factory!"

Rumors of War and Fear of Conscription The Abduqahhor family learns of the outbreak of World War I two months after it begins. Horrific rumors circulate about the war and the Tsar's order to conscript local men into non-combat labor battalions. People say that if a worker falls ill, he is hung upside down and wax is drawn from his mouth. In the factories, it is said, the light in his eyes turns blue, and he loses his individuality. Meanwhile, true reports emerge of unrest and uprisings in Khujand and Tashkent. The people wait in fear for the order to arrive.

Forced Contributions to the Labor Local authorities begin collecting money from the population, persecuting those who refuse to join the labor battalions. The rule is clear: anyone unwilling to work for hire must either provide a replacement or join themselves. Officials offer assistance in finding hired workers, but residents must cover the costs. The *ellikboshi* (a minor local official or elder) and Valihon So'fi are appointed as collectors. They come to Abduqahhor demanding money. When he refuses, So'fi angrily declares that opposing them is equivalent to defying the entire village, and Abduqahhor reluctantly agrees.

The People's Anger The people are enraged when local officials begin collecting money not only from hired laborers but from everyone. The *yuzboshi* (a military leader) profits from this, pocketing the surplus. One night, Abdulla hears gunshots and wants to rush there with Kulala, but his father stops him. The shooting continues late into the night. By morning, the truth emerges: armed village youths storm the *yuzboshi's* house, hurl gold coins at him, force him to swallow them, and then kill him.

The White Tsar's Favorite Russian officials arrive to investigate. The villagers bow their heads before the dignitaries. Three Russian officials, dressed in white caps and white uniforms with yellow epaulettes, walk at the front, surrounded by local officials and soldiers. By evening, they leave, taking about twenty peasants with them. The villagers bow their heads again as they depart.

The day before In midwinter, news spreads of Tsar Nicholas's abdication and the revolution. Though the people barely understand it, they hope the workers will return and life will improve – but nothing changes. Instead, conditions worsen. Forced by officials to join the labor battalions or pay for replacements, peasants

lose their savings and lack tools for spring sowing. Prices rise, food runs out, and artisans suffer most. Abduqahhor receives no orders. Abdulla and Kulala roam the village, sharpening tools for a few coins – barely enough to eat. Their mother complains Abduqahhor is getting fat. He laughs: “God forbid they get fat like me”. But in truth, he is swollen from hunger.

Plague and New Names The hired laborers gradually return just as a plague sweeps through the village, claiming many lives and leaving homes empty. Even Abdulla’s father, who has never prayed before, begins attending the mosque. By autumn, the plague fades, and more laborers come back. New words spread among the people – Lenin and Bolshevik. A relative visits Abduqahhor, praising Lenin for ending the war but doubting his dream of equality between rich and poor.

Jugs The family moves, weary of Valihon So’fi’s harassment. Though their new home is uncomfortable, Abduqahhor believes they are finally free. When Ramadan arrives, the mother prepares barley soup one morning, and the family quietly gathers, locking the door. Suddenly, men burst in and seize Abduqahhor and Kulala. So’fi storms in, accusing them of breaking the fast. The soup is poured into a jug, hung around their necks, and they are paraded through the market. Though spared a beating, they are fined heavily, and Abduqahhor sells all his forge tools to pay.

Muhammadjon Qori The family is delighted with their new home in Oqqo’rg’on, a cozy house surrounded by fig trees and a small flower garden. Abduqahhor learns of a new *Jadid* school (combining traditional and modern education) run by Muhammadjon Qori, who also serves at the local mosque, and takes Abdulla there. Inside, boys sit quietly at their desks, writing their lessons. Unlike Valihon So’fi’s noisy madrasa, where only Quranic suras were recited, Abdulla instantly loves this place. He quickly learns to read and write, and the teacher, impressed by his talent, plans to teach him geography and other subjects in autumn.

Envy and Closure But soon, two envious madrasah teachers slander the *Jadid* teacher, accusing him of neglecting prayer, confusing prayer times, and other such faults. One day, a *ponsod* (a military commander of 500 men) arrives, announces the school’s closure, orders the boys to smash their desks, and drives Muhammadjon Qori out of the mosque.

Mourning the Lost Abdulla’s younger brother falls gravely ill, deeply alarming their parents, who have already lost many children. In desperation, the father summons a mullah, who recites prayers and advises sacrificing a calf; later, a woman performs shamanic rituals, but nothing helps. Abduqahhor calls a doctor, who recommends preparing shashlik. Kulala brings some meat and, after cooking it, the father begins feeding it to the boy. For a brief moment, they think he is recovering – but their hope quickly turns to horror as the child suddenly stiffens mid-bite. The boy is dead. Overcome with grief, the parents mourn their loss in anguish.

The Move to Kokand Abdulla returns to school and finds it relocated to a former stable. The teacher teaches only the Quran, and every Friday the children go to the mosque for prayer. He punishes students harshly, and one day, Abdulla is slapped for mispronouncing a word. In spring, Abduqahhor announces that the family must move to Kokand, warning of an imminent war between the Reds and *Ergash Qo’rboshi* (Ergash, 1882–1921, was a leader of the Basmachi independence movement in the Fergana Valley). The family hurriedly relocates. Later, Abdulla learns the truth: Ergash’s men had ordered Abduqahhor to forge weapons for them, and fearing the consequences of refusal, he chose to flee under the pretext of war.

In Kokand When the family arrives in Kokand, Abdulla’s mother refuses to go to her mother-in-law’s house. Instead, they decide to stay with their aunt. The mother feels uneasy, worried they might become a burden, but the father reassures her that he will soon find work. The aunt welcomes them warmly.

Kulala’s Departure The father can’t find work, and the mother insists that his apprentice, Kulala, also get a job, since the four of them are living off their aunt’s husband. At that moment, Kulala’s brother suddenly appears. He wants to take Kulala back to their home village. Abduqahhor gives him his last money, along with his blacksmith’s tools. They all accompany him to the station. Kulala is overjoyed – it is his first time riding a train. But as the train pulls away, tears well in his eyes, and Abdulla begins to cry too.

Mistaken Orphan The father found a new house, and the family moved. He would leave early, bring food at lunchtime, and return late. Abdulla, unsure what to do, spent time with his cousin G’afforjon. One day, while they were digging chalk among the ruins, a man with a pistol approached. “Red Guard”, G’afforjon

said, and kept working. The man, noticing Abdulla's tattered clothes, mistook him for an orphan and took him to an orphanage. Abdulla resisted, but G'afforjon had already left. That evening, Abdulla escaped, returned home, and his parents laughed about it.

A New Friend Abdulla makes a new friend, Mamajon, whose father is also a Red Guard. Mamajon knows a place where free corn is distributed, so he and several boys, including G'afforjon, go there together. When they return, G'afforjon suddenly announces that he has a wife. The boys laugh in disbelief, but he insists he is telling the truth.

The Boast and the Fight To prove himself, G'afforjon brags that he can even beat his wife and show them how. Curious, the boys peek over a fence as he enters a yard where his stepmother's daughter is preparing to wash her hair. G'afforjon slaps her on the head; confused, she scratches his face. When he tries to kick her, she seizes him and throws him down, sparking a "fierce fight". Frightened, the boys scatter. Later, when Abdulla tells his mother, she laughs but warns it is inappropriate. It turns out G'afforjon's father, after remarrying, intends for him to wed his stepmother's daughter in the future.

The Red Guard Father One day, the boy's father returns disguised as a Red Guard. It turns out he has enlisted in the Red Army. His mother weeps and begs his uncle to persuade her husband to return to his old job, but persuasion fails. Soon after, Abduqahhor arranges for her to work at a silk-weaving factory, and Abdulla begins attending Urfon School. One day, gunshots ring out, classes are canceled, and all the teachers, armed, rush toward the noise. Afterward, Abdulla's parents transfer him to another school.

In the Istiqbol Abdulla begins studying at the Istiqbol School, where secular subjects are taught. The most respected teacher, Hakimjon, a former student of the renowned Abduvahob Domla, also serves as principal. Four Tatar teachers in military uniform work alongside him. One day, local elders demand the inclusion of religious instruction. To avoid conflict, the teachers add Quran lessons, emphasizing interpretation rather than rote memorization.

Abdulla's First Mission At school, the children take part in community service: after classes, they go to public places to collect *iona* – money for charity to help the hungry. Soon, Abdulla joins the youth union Ishtirokiyun. Their task is to identify and list young men working as servants for the rich, as well as dens and girls forced into marriage. Among all the groups, only Abdulla's team succeeds in uncovering the dens.

Under the New Principal Istiqbol is transformed into a boarding school. Hakimjon Domla is transferred to another position, and his former mentor, Abduvahob Domla, is appointed as the new director. He imposes strict discipline: the children wear uniforms, are not allowed to leave the school grounds, and, after classes, they study, attend lectures, and consult with their teachers. They no longer collect money for famine relief or carry out assignments for the Ishtirokiyun. Students are permitted to visit their families only on Thursdays.

A Day of Joy and Reproach On Thursday, Abdulla returns home to joyful news from his mother: his father has been discharged from military service, and the government has granted him a blacksmith shop and a house of their own. Overjoyed, Abdulla and his mother spend the entire day moving in. She insists he stay the night, cherishing the moment of stability. The next morning, Abdulla returns to school – only to be slapped by Abduvahob Domla for arriving late.

From Revolution to Betrayal At school, children join a fine arts club and perform at the city's Muslim theater. After speeches praising "Revolution" and "Enlightenment", Abduvahob Domla is denounced as a traitor. Rumors spread, chaos erupts in the dormitory, students declare themselves anarchists, and the teachers cannot restore order. Abduvahob Domla soon resigns.

The Red Guard's Son Po'lathon Domla becomes the temporary principal. Discipline at the school declines, students consider themselves "free", and one student begins arguing with the teacher over spelling and other issues. Summer passes. One fall, Abdulla returns home, finds a pistol, a bullet, and discovers his father is serving in the Red Guard again. His mother is displeased but gradually adjusts. His father often leaves to fight the *Basmachi* rebels.

The Hammer and the Rumors One Thursday, Abdulla returns home, and his mother greets him with shocking news: Ergash has been killed. She tells an implausible story – that an old woman, hiding a kitchen hammer under her burqa, struck him down. Abdulla doesn't believe it, but his mother calms down and no

longer fears for her Red Guard husband. Later, conflicting rumors spread about the *Basmachi*: sometimes they are said to be defeated, other times to be on the attack. It is also rumored that Enver Pasha (a former Ottoman military officer and key leader of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution) has arrived in Eastern Bukhara.

Kommuna and the Dream of May Day In spring, Istiqbol becomes the Kommuna School under Tatar director Bisirov. Relocated to a wealthy man's house, students clean, plant a garden. Soon, a club opens where children learn new marches. On International Workers' Day, May 1, the students, dressed in new uniforms, march to the main square of the city park to the sound of marching music. Suddenly, the students of Dorilmuallimin (the Teacher's School) arrive, singing and marching. The entire square is filled with delight at the sight. Abdulla and his friends dream of becoming like them.

One Step Closer to Dorilmuallimin Summer passes, and the new school year begins. News spreads that Dorilmuallimin will select twenty students from the Kommuna school. The rumor proves true: Hakimjon Domla brings fifty students, including some from other schools. It is said that Dorilmuallimin's renowned teacher, Qori Niyoziy, selects pupils by their eyes – and indeed, the young, European-dressed Qori Niyoziy chooses Abdulla as the third. In total, fifty-two students are admitted to Dorilmuallimin's new model school. For Abdulla, this marks one step closer to his dream of studying there.

Rumors of Anvarbek Abdulla hurries to share the news with his parents, but his mother greets him absentmindedly. They have heard nothing from his father for four days, since he left to fight with the Red Army. On Friday, he finally returns – irritated and missing a tooth. He explains that the *Basmachi* are receiving aid from the city and even from the Ottoman Caliphate. He adds that Anvarbek – none other than Enver Pasha, the Ottoman general – has joined the Eastern Bukharans, though the Red Army later killed him. Abdulla's mother refuses to believe it, and Abdulla himself is astonished.

Stories at School At school, Abdulla hears things that confirm his father's words. His geography teacher, Subhiy Efendi, a former soldier and prisoner of war in World War I, teaches the boys a military march. He speaks of Turkish commanders and recalls Enver Pasha, killed by the Russians. Another teacher tells of a guest he once met who looked European, but whose face shone with faith, so he immediately knew the man was Muslim. One of the boys adds that Subhiy Efendi's friend, Ishak Efendi, who once fought with the *Basmachi*, sometimes comes to visit him in secret.

Secrets and Suspicions Abdulla tells his mother what he knows. She replies that she has enough trouble worrying about his father and doesn't need to hear about school as well. On Sunday, the students are given warm vests, and the housekeeping supervisor, finding one that fits Abdulla, says, "What did you tell your father? You shouldn't be reporting home about what happens at school". Abdulla is stunned. His heart sinks: "So Mama told Papa what I said? When did Papa come to school? Whom did he speak to? What will happen now?"

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ABDULLA

At the beginning of the story, Abdulla is a quiet and inquisitive boy of six or seven. Over the years, he grows into a twelve-year-old who has experienced poverty, loss, and human cruelty. As a child, he witnesses major social and political upheavals and gradually begins to perceive the injustices and contradictions of the world around him, though he still struggles to understand them fully.

Honest From an early age, Abdulla demonstrates honesty and a strong sense of responsibility, helping with household chores, caring for his younger siblings, and assisting his father in the forge. He is both surprised and repelled by the irresponsibility and selfishness of his spoiled cousin G'afforjon, who avoids work and disregards others' expectations. At school, Abdulla remains a disciplined and conscientious student, always completing his assignments with care. Guided by his moral conscience, he is able to critically perceive the hypocrisy and dishonesty of adults, even those closest to him.

Compassionate Abdulla is deeply sensitive to the grief and suffering of others. He is moved by the plight of his cousin Savriniso, who is forced to marry a man she does not love, and he is devastated when she is later killed by her father. He also feels profound sorrow over the deaths of his sister and brother. Even toward his spoiled cousin G'afforjon, Abdulla shows compassion: after G'afforjon loses his mother and is

harshly scolded by his grandmother for asking for water at night, Abdulla, almost his age, brings him a drink, explaining that he did so out of “pity for the orphan”.

Withdrawn Frequent relocations make Abdulla increasingly withdrawn and introspective. Branded an “outsider”, he experiences social alienation that forces him to retreat inward and conceal his emotions, even from those closest to him. Yet this solitude seems to awaken his imagination and creative sensitivity. His quiet lament – “Nobody accepts me; they call me an outsider” – encapsulates both his sense of exclusion and his emerging self-awareness. Consequently, he grows up without close companionship. Although he later establishes connections at school, the underlying sense of loneliness and detachment continues to shape his personality.

ABDUQAHHOR

Abduqahhor, Abdulla’s father, is portrayed with both warmth and realism. His energy and diligence make him an engaging figure, yet his occasional moral compromises reveal the pressures of poverty and survival rather than personal weakness. Through him, the author exposes the moral complexity of ordinary people struggling to maintain integrity amid social and economic hardship in early twentieth-century Turkestan. Abduqahhor thus represents a generation shaped more by circumstance than by choice.

Hardworking Abduqahhor performs his demanding physical labor with dedication and skill. Throughout the novel, he is portrayed as tirelessly industrious – working from dawn until night, undeterred by cold, wind, or hunger. His craftsmanship and perseverance earn him the respect of local farmers, and his work consistently surpasses that of other blacksmiths. Through Abduqahhor, the author emphasizes the dignity of honest labor and the quiet resilience and family responsibility of the working class in a time of hardship.

Neophilic Abduqahhor exhibits a natural inclination toward innovation and progress. He is among the first in his village to purchase a bicycle and to own a Singer sewing machine – symbols of modernity and change. His openness to new ideas is also reflected in his decision to take his pregnant wife to the hospital, an uncommon act that challenges traditional customs. However, his progressive mindset often places him at odds with the prevailing social norms of his community, leaving him in a difficult and misunderstood position.

Pragmatic Abdulla, a loving and perceptive child, recognizes his father’s flaws and portrays them with gentle humor. Abduqahhor never misses an opportunity to earn extra income; when rumors spread about his supposed gift for healing through prayer, he offers only faint denial before embracing the role for its financial benefit. Yet, driven by circumstance and the pressures of survival, Abduqahhor occasionally acts impulsively, as when he joins the Red Guards and fights against his own compatriots simply to provide for his family. In these moments, the author presents a man molded by hardship – resourceful, ironic, and morally conflicted, navigating the blurred boundaries between necessity and conscience.

Rebellious Abduqahhor often challenges established social norms and authority. When the *yuzboshi* demands that he personally deliver the tools he made himself, Abduqahhor boldly replies that the *yuzboshi*’s servant can bring them instead, which incurs the official’s hostility. His defiance becomes even more evident when, during Ramadan, he eats secretly, contrary to social expectations, claiming that his heavy physical labor is exhausting. For this violation of custom, he is publicly humiliated and fined. Abduqahhor’s rebellious and impulsive nature often leads to conflict with social norms and has serious consequences.

MOTHER

Abdulla’s mother is a modest woman who married young and is fully devoted to household responsibilities. Having endured the loss of ten children, she demonstrates profound care and affection for him. Despite a life marked by hardship, she retains her aspirations and desire for a better future. While she consistently supports her husband, she also asserts herself when necessary – offering criticism, intervening in his decisions, and defending her perspective. Collectively, these actions underscore her central and influential role within the family structure.

Life-Loving The mother, a naturally cheerful and life-loving woman, was deeply wounded by the repeated loss of her children, yet she managed to preserve her joyful disposition. Despite frequent relocations, she quickly formed close relationships with neighboring women. She enjoyed socializing and being part of a

lively community. When the neighbors celebrated the birth of her daughter, the cheerful young women organized a party, and she laughed heartily – so much so that young Abdulla later remarked he had never seen his mother laugh like that.

Simple-Minded The mother's simplicity arises from her lack of education and limited awareness of the world beyond her home. In a society where women are confined to domestic life, she is not expected to know more than household duties. Her perception of the outside world is therefore naïve and occasionally comical. When a Russian woman photographs her during pregnancy, she mistakes the camera for binoculars, believing the woman has seen the baby inside her and confirmed its health – after all, a *barynya* (lady) must surely be someone important.

Cunning Despite her simplicity, Abdulla's mother occasionally employs subtle cunning. When a woman, misled by a false rumor, requests that she persuade her husband to pray and lift a purported curse, Abdulla's mother feigns the ability to convince him while appearing hesitant. The woman persists, ultimately securing his agreement, and that same evening, Abdulla's mother skillfully prompts her husband to comply. Similarly, in recounting her experience at the maternity hospital, she presents an embellished narrative, attributing the delivery to one machine, her bathing to another, and the preparation of her food to yet another device. These harmless deceptions, free of malice, reveal her ingenuity without diminishing her dignity or moral integrity.

TO'RAQUL VOFURUSH

To'raqul Vofurush, a middle-aged wholesaler, embodies the materialistic and self-serving values of his time. His every action is driven by personal gain and profit, achieved not through his own labor but through the exploitation of others. When faced with resistance, he does not withdraw; instead, he resorts to increasingly deceitful and unscrupulous tactics to silence opposition. Beneath his outwardly weak and at times comical demeanor, To'raqul conceals a calculating and potentially dangerous nature that emerges when his interests are at risk.

Cunning To'raqul embodies calculated deceit. At first glance, he seems kind and sincere, skillfully gaining trust through polite and considerate behavior. Yet once that trust is secured, his true nature emerges. During his first meeting with Abduqahhor, To'raqul offers money under the guise of help, saying it can be repaid later with sickles. Soon after, he demands double the amount, exploiting Abduqahhor's goodwill and leaving him in a vulnerable financial position.

Manipulative To'raqul Vofurush, unable to manage his victim, often lashes out yet still gets his way. When he beats his wife, the neighbors rush in to calm him, but upon seeing Abduqahhor among them, he suddenly lashes out, accusing him of bringing people to attack him. Although everyone knows this isn't true, no one can silence him. When one of the men, unable to bear it any longer, seizes him by the waist and throws him out, To'raqul screams even louder and runs to complain to the authorities.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Gender At first glance, the issue of gender seems to have little direct connection to Abdulla and his family. His mother's position in the household is relatively respectable. Yet, through the young boy's eyes, Qahhor exposes the broader oppression of women in early twentieth-century society. Abdulla becomes a silent witness to the cruelty and injustice that define their lives: his cousin is murdered by her own father simply for refusing an arranged marriage; a young girl, barely past childhood, is forced to marry the elderly To'raqul Vofurush; and another girl is promised to his cousin from infancy. These events reflect a society where violence and coercion against women are normalized, and silence becomes a form of complicity.

Illustrative moment: Abdulla picks a few unripe apricots in an abandoned orchard and eats them while sitting on a bridge over a ditch. He dozes off, and upon waking, meets an older boy who kindly shares his cherries. They walk together and quickly become friends. The boy carries a large branch of ripe cherries and, upon reaching Vofurush's house, throws it into the ditch, saying that Hayri will pick it up. Hayri, Vofurush's wife, is someone Abdulla has never seen. Later, lingering near the house, Abdulla hears the sound of a bouncing ball and the jingling of tiny bells. Climbing a tree, he spies a small girl dressed like a grown woman, adorned

with pendants and jewelry, playing with a ball. That evening, screams erupt from Vofurush's home. The reason soon becomes clear: he has beaten his young wife brutally – an image exposing the cruelty of forced marriage, female subjugation, and unchecked domestic violence.

Education In *Stories from the Past*, Qahhar presents education as both a personal journey and a mirror of societal change. The narrative unfolds during a complex period marked by the clash of old and new, power struggles, and competing ideologies. Abdulla experiences diverse educational environments: a traditional madrasa with rote memorization led by an inadequate teacher, and modern Jadid and secular schools emphasizing literacy, critical thinking, and civic engagement. The teachers, as members of the intelligentsia, hold differing political views, and this tension leaves a lasting mark on the future writer's worldview.

Illustrative moment: A fine arts club is created at the school, where the children learn new songs and recitations. One day, the students perform at a concert in the city's Muslim theater, presenting various numbers. Afterward, local officials give speeches: first, Akhmadonov repeatedly utters the words "revolution" and "freedom of the East", and then Khakimjon Domla, interweaving "enlightenment" and "revolution" into his speech, denounces the teacher, Abduvahob Domla, as a traitor. By the time the students return to the dormitory, rumors of Abduvahob's betrayal have already spread. Chaos ensues: students fight and argue, the word "anarchist" is on everyone's lips. Everyone declares themselves anarchists and acts on their impulses. The teachers are unable to restore order, and soon Abduvahob Domla resigns.

Ignorance One of the central themes of the novel is the pervasive ignorance that shapes the lives of ordinary people in early 20th-century Turkestan. Abdulla Qahhar portrays a society mired in illiteracy, superstition, and stagnation, where, as he metaphorically observes, individuals are "fruits of their time". The oppressive legacy of the former khanates, compounded by Russian colonial domination, leaves the region impoverished and backward. The outbreak of World War I and the Tsarist decree on forced labor only deepen the suffering, trapping the population in poverty, hunger, and despair amid political and social upheaval.

Illustrative moment: A young woman has been attacked by a rabid dog. Her husband Babar, a teahouse servant, rushes to help. The old neighbor women advise him to take his wife to the sacred site of Teshiktosh (Stone with a Hole), believing that passing through its stones will cure her. Babar saves money, quits his job, and lives with his aunt, selling dairy to villagers. One day, he is falsely accused of theft. Arrested and helpless, he pleads for release only to care for his ailing wife. During interrogation, his innocence is proven, but the guard forgets to seek *amin's* permission. When *amin* is later informed by the guard, he rushes to release Babar, finding him shivering in the cold cell. To hide his negligence, *amin* scolds Babar, claiming he could have left earlier – the door was open. Babar replies he cannot leave without official permission. He is released but found frozen to death by morning on the street. Soon after, Abdulla's father hears that Babar's wife, driven mad by grief, has also died – the messenger never knew she had been bitten by a dog. This episode illustrates how ignorance can lead to tragedy for an ordinary person – someone unable to comprehend his circumstances, deprived of access to modern medicine, and unaware of his basic rights.

Beliefs and Superstitions In *Stories from the Past*, Qahhar explores how ignorance, poverty, and hopelessness give rise to superstition and belief in magic. Unable to control harsh realities, people turn to spells, prayers, and self-proclaimed healers for solace and hope. With subtle irony, the author recounts how Abduqahhor, a humble blacksmith, becomes a spiritual healer when villagers begin to see him as possessing mystical powers. Ignorance and helplessness in the face of adversity sometimes lead to absurd acts – such as giving Valikhon So'fi a donkey's brain in the belief that he will turn into one. Qahhar shows how superstition replaces reason and how faith, distorted by despair, blurs the line between belief, deception, and survival in a society ruled by ignorance.

Illustrative moment: Valikhon So'fi becomes Abduqahhor's enemy after the latter withdraws his son from school, exposing the teacher's incompetence. Enraged, Valikhon begins spreading rumors, calling Abduqahhor godless and neglectful of prayer. To defend their friend and teach Valikhon a lesson, Abduqahhor's companions devise a prank. They claim that eating a donkey's brain will make him lose his mind. Abduqahhor and a friend slaughter a lame donkey, take its brain, and ask his mother to make samosas filled with the mixture of brains and greens. One of the friends serves them to Valikhon So'fi, who eats them eagerly. Everyone waits outside the mosque, expecting him to bray like a donkey – but nothing happens. He calmly finishes his prayers and calls others to join.

POLITICS

Repression The novel reflects the bloody events that unfolded in Kokand in 1918. The Kokand Autonomy, established in November 1917 by Muslim reformers (Jadids) and modernizers of Turkestan, represented a brief but significant attempt to create a self-governing state within revolutionary Russia. It sought to reconcile Islamic values with modern democratic ideals. Despite the council's inclusive composition – with seats even reserved for Russians – the Bolshevik-controlled Tashkent Soviet regarded it as a threat. In February 1918, Soviet forces attacked Kokand, massacring thousands and destroying the city. The fall of the Autonomy ended Central Asia's first experiment in self-rule and shattered the Jadids' early hopes for national and cultural renewal. Although the writer never explicitly names the Kokand Autonomy – censorship forbade it – he powerfully conveys the devastating aftermath of the brutal reprisals.

Illustrative moment: Abdulla's family arrives in Kokand early in the morning. As they drive through the city, they see ruins everywhere – houses and shops burned to the ground. The once-bustling central square lies in ashes, with nothing remaining of the shops. Near the mosque, a few people sell junk goods, and there are many beggars. They stop at an aunt's house and are served horsemeat soup. Later, Abdulla and his aunt's daughters venture out to explore, but soon grow afraid – the city is devastated, and clashes between the Basmachi and the Red Guards are frequent. They then visit a place where food is distributed to the hungry. The courtyard is crowded with elderly people and emaciated children in rags. An old, grumpy man counts them and pours porridge into a bowl, from which Abdulla and his sisters take turns eating. Through this scene, the author reveals the tragic consequences of the Kokand autonomy.

War In *Stories from the Past*, Qahhar portrays World War I through the immediate suffering of rural communities rather than distant battlefields. Forced conscription, extortion, and poverty plunge families into fear and hardship, while peasants lose their savings, tools, and independence. Rumors of injuries, deaths, and unrest spread panic, and local authorities exploit the crisis for personal gain, fueling resentment and occasional uprisings. Qahhar vividly depicts famine, plague, and despair, highlighting how the war disrupts social order, undermines trust in authority, and exposes both the vulnerability and resilience of rural communities under imperial and military pressures.

Illustrative moment: People hear of laborers who lose noses, ears, arms, and legs to the cold, of bodies abandoned for wild animals, of unbearable suffering. One winter day, women fill the village market, shouting at the *mingboshi* (a local military or administrative officer, roughly equivalent to a commander of a hundred households) for the return of their husbands and sons. He appears, but the cries only grow louder. A woman pushes forward, lays a child at his feet, and shouts, "Take him, raise him yourself!" Others follow. Children cry, the crowd roars. The *mingboshi* calms them with a warning: remember *Dukchi Eshon's rebellion* (Muhammad Ali Madali, a Naqshbandi Sufi leader who led the 1898 Andijan revolt against Russian rule), when eleven were hanged before all. The memory frightens the people into silence.

CRIME

Injustice and Corruption Crimes in the novel illustrate Abdulla Qahhor's critique of social injustice and moral decay in early 20th-century Turkestan. Abdulla's uncle murders his own daughter, yet the family's reaction reflects a society numbed by ignorance and patriarchy: the grandmother merely reproaches him for being too harsh, while Abduqahhor turns away in silent protest. The crime is quickly concealed, and no punishment follows – because no one dares to seek justice. Another episode exposes corruption within local authority: Yuzboshi extorts money from villagers under the pretext of avoiding conscription, pocketing the excess for himself. When the villagers revolt and kill him in anger, the authorities respond with brutal repression. These events expose a corrupt system in which the law safeguards power rather than serves justice.

Illustrative moment: When Savriniso's body was washed and wrapped in a shroud, the women preparing it noticed bruises along her side. Some saw them, while others pretended not to. Everyone remained silent. Soon after, her uncle fell ill. Savriniso's mother, bedridden and terminally weak, could barely express her grief when the news of her daughter's death arrived: a single tear glistened on her eyelashes as she faintly licked her dry lips. Rumors soon spread, eventually reaching the police. Friends and relatives gathered to decide what to do. The grandmother insisted there was no need to complain, saying her son had no enemies. After a brief discussion, a man from the neighborhood, knowledgeable in the law, assured them

that no case would be opened without an official complaint. No one filed one, and the uncle went unpunished. This episode illustrates how, in the patriarchal society of the early twentieth century, such crimes were met with silence and acceptance.

RELATIONSHIP

Family In *Stories from the Past*, Qahhar portrays family as a source of both worry and conflict, shaping the emotional and moral lives of its members. Through the eyes of young Abdulla, he depicts the flaws of those close to him – his father’s cunning, his uncle’s ruthlessness, his grandmother’s strictness and selfishness, and his cousin’s spoiled behavior – while maintaining loyalty and respect for them. Family provides both support and tension, illustrating how familial ties influence resilience, emotional development, and personal growth amid adversity and social pressures.

Illustrative moment: After Savriniso’s death, the family moves to another house. Abdulla feels a strange relief, as he fears even the eyes, hands, beard, and shoes of his uncle – the man who killed his own daughter. Soon, his grandmother and the uncle’s son move in with them. The grandmother is capricious and cruel, constantly provoking quarrels and humiliating Abdulla’s mother. One snowy day, Abdulla finds his mother crying in the kitchen as his grandmother angrily orders her to clear the snow. When his mother quietly answers, “I’ll do it when it stops snowing”, the old woman calls her *arvak* – “exhausted and sick”. Abdulla sees her pale, fragile, and utterly broken. This episode reveals the child’s awakening to injustice, deepening his empathy and shaping his moral consciousness – a theme Qahhar often returns to in his portrayal of childhood and family suffering.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you find the reality portrayed in the novel convincingly grim, or does the author exaggerate the hardships of the past?
2. How would you describe Abdulla Qahhor’s political stance? Does he appear to support Bolshevik ideology?
3. What is the significance of the episode depicting the Destruction of Kokand? Why do you think the author chose to include it?
4. How should we evaluate the actions of Abdulla’s father, who joined the Red Guard? Is he deserving of criticism or sympathy?
5. What message is conveyed when Abdulla learns of his father’s denunciation in the final episode?