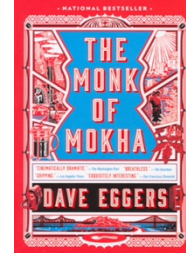




FRIENDS OF THE  
SANTA CRUZ  
PUBLIC LIBRARIES



**January 24 - Wednesday - 11 a.m.**

## **Book Discussion**

- A group of readers met to talk about our 2024 selection and discuss major themes in depth.
- Casey Coonerty Protti, owner of Bookshop Santa Cruz, facilitated the conversation.
- Sandwiches were provided by Aegis Living Aptos.
- Location: The Loft Coffee Shop

See below discussion topics:

- 1) Mokhtar overcame many obstacles, from a childhood in the Tenderloin in San Francisco, to trying to find a way to bring sustainable farming practices and increased wages to farmers and workers, all during the adversity of a war in Yemen. To what do you attribute his commitment to making a better life for others and his personal success?
- 2) “Before embarking on this project,” Eggers wrote, “I was a casual coffee drinker and a great skeptic of specialty coffee. I thought it was too expensive, and that anyone who cared so much about how coffee was brewed, or where it came from, or waited in line for certain coffees made certain ways, was pretentious and a fool.” What factors helped Eggers change his views about specialty coffee?
- 3) This book brought up an interesting discussion about what we know about what we consume in terms of food and drink. What did you already know about coffee before you read this book? How did this book revise your view of coffee? What did this book teach us about how we can/should learn more about the origins of our food/drink?

- 4) Some commentators describe Mokhtar as the “ideal immigrant,” a trope to illustrate the universality of the American Dream. What do you think of this characterization of Mokhtar? Does this description diminish Mokhtar’s accomplishments?
- 5) Discuss the idea of the “American dream” and its cultural import in today’s world. How does Mokhtar’s story adhere to this narrative? How does it differ? What was the defining moment of his success?
- 6) On page 332, the book discusses the issue of “code-switching.” Mokhtar was seen as “not American enough,” yet “not Yemeni enough.” Have you experienced this in your own life or observed it with people you know with hyphenated identities? How does Mokhtar adapt his behavior to different social settings?
- 7) On pages 18–19, the reader learns that despite his general apathy toward school, Mokhtar loves books. Describe how Mokhtar’s “library” acts as a means of escape for him. How do books open up his worldview? How does his love of learning follow him throughout his life and shape his career? Does this remind you of other people that you’ve read about in other books?
- 8) On page 75, Mokhtar is asked by Ghassan: “Are you a businessman or are you an activist? For now, at least, you have to pick one.” Does he? How does his interest in social justice affect his plans for business development?
- 9) Discuss the role of family in Mokhtar’s personal and professional life. What expectations are laid upon him as the son of Yemeni immigrants? What values do Mokhtar’s parents instill in him? How does his family aid him in his journey to create his business?
- 10) Some critics have raised the question about whether Dave Eggers was the right person to tell this story. What do you think? Would this story have been told otherwise? Did you agree with his depiction of Yemen and the politics involved? How would this story be told differently in 2024 vs. when this book was published?