

## **Book Club and Classroom Discussion Guide**

The following questions, written by a team of educators, can be used to guide classroom or book club discussions of *The Unforgiving Minute: A Soldier's Education*. Consider using *The Unforgiving Minute* for your book club or course and sign up [here](#) for an opportunity to have Craig join your book club or classroom by phone or video chat.

### **Note** □

*This is an evolving set of questions. If you or your group has suggestions for additional questions to include, please email [craig@craigmmullaney.com](mailto:craig@craigmmullaney.com) with the subject line: [Discussion Questions].*

### **Student**

1. Discuss Mullaney's experiences at West Point, Ranger School, and Oxford. How does each of these institutions influence his development as a student, soldier, and leader? To what extent is the man Mullaney becomes a mixture or personification of these distinct institutions?
2. Who emerge as Mullaney's most influential educators, both in and out of the classroom? How or why are these educators able to teach him so effectively? How do they impact Mullaney's maturation? What lessons do they impart?
3. Discuss the role of travel and multiculturalism in Mullaney's education. How do his travels through Europe, Asia, and the Middle East affect his worldview? How do his cross-cultural experiences with Meena and her family further encourage his growth?
4. How does the study of literature and history inform Mullaney's education? What roles do language and the thorough examination of the past play in his emerging sense of what it means to be a soldier, leader, and public servant?

### **Soldier**

1. To what extent does Mullaney's formal education prepare him for the sobering realities of war in Afghanistan? How do the lessons of West Point, Ranger School, and Oxford influence Mullaney on the battlefield? What are the wartime challenges that his formal education does not prepare him for? What are the lessons Mullaney could only have learned on the battlefield?
2. Discuss some of the leadership challenges that Mullaney faces in Afghanistan. How is he ultimately able to gain the respect of his men and superior officers in the face of these challenges? Are his leadership skills acquired and learned or are they an inherent and intrinsic part of his character?

3. In the midst the chaos, death, and uncertainty of the war in Afghanistan, how does Mullaney maintain his sanity and humanity? To what extent are old familiars such as family, friends, literature, and the study of history able to sustain him in Afghanistan?
4. Though *The Unforgiving Minute* chronicles Mullaney's own education as a soldier, what can U.S. military leaders and foreign policymakers learn from his experience in Afghanistan?

### ***Veteran***

1. How does Mullaney's theme of being an outsider manifest when he returns from Afghanistan? Where does this theme also appear in his home life, at West Point, in Ranger School, with his relationship with Meena, and in Afghanistan? Why does Mullaney keep coming back to this theme?
2. By the end of the book, what has Mullaney learned about leadership and authority? How do his men, his family, his teachers, and his superiors teach him these lessons? What are examples of positive and negative role models for Mullaney, and how does he learn from each?
3. How does communication—what is said and not said, what can be expressed verbally as opposed to through the written word, what can be expressed in English as opposed to a foreign language—affect Mullaney's growth over the course of the book? When he returns from Afghanistan, what role does communication play in Mullaney's transition from soldier to veteran? In what ways does Mullaney adopt a new lexicon or language to fit each place he inhabits?
4. What are the most important lessons Mullaney learns in West Point, Ranger School, Oxford, Afghanistan, and upon his return? How do these lessons build on each other? How do they conflict with each other? How does Mullaney reconcile these conflicts in order to emerge as a veteran with an intact and unified sense of himself?

### ***General***

1. Why did Mullaney originally join the military? At West Point, in Afghanistan, and at the Naval Academy, did he find what he was looking for?
2. To whom did Mullaney feel he had duties? When did these duties collide? Was Mullaney able to resolve these conflicts? How?
3. "The closer you look, the less you understand." How did this apply to challenges Mullaney faced in Afghanistan and elsewhere? What were the characteristics Mullaney possessed that allowed him to survive and succeed in the diverse challenges he faced?

4. The book is titled "The Unforgiving Minute." Over the course of the book, people offer and withhold forgiveness, to and from one another, and to and from themselves. What were the terms of the forgivenesses that were granted? What were the circumstances of the things that went unforgiven?