
*Overview:* In *Stones into Schools*, Greg Mortenson travels to some of the world’s most forbidding areas in an attempt to tackle the biggest roadblock to stability in the region – the absence of secular, gender neutral, schools. Mortenson spends months in the most remote regions of Taliban country to provide children, especially girls, with an education they would otherwise go without. Some argue his schools indoctrinate children with Western ideals, but Mortenson argues that the presence of secular education gives the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan the tools to help themselves. His thesis that an educated Afghan population can combat all societal issues on their own stands in contrast to the policies of Islamic sects and the administrations of recent U.S. Presidents.

Picking up where his 2006 memoir, *Three Cups of Tea*, left off, Mortenson shifts his focus from Northern Pakistan to war-torn Afghanistan, after a chance encounter with nomadic horsemen who were seeking his skills. Though *Stones into Schools* is not as captivating as its prequel, probably because Mortenson writes it without the assistance of journalist David Oliver Relin, the story is by no means lost. Mortenson traverses Afghanistan to find suitable sites and then to oversee the construction and integrity of his schools. On a personal level, he shows that our foreign policy should be to slow down, share a cup of tea, and get to know the people we want to work with because friendship cultivates trust. The support of members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the militaries ongoing approval of Mortenson’s work are a testament to his sensibility.

The memoir shifts back to Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake in the contested region of Northeast Pakistan known as Kashmir, which is the site of Mortenson’s
previous work. Mortenson comes to realize his fame has made him more valuable as a fundraiser, causing him to question the amount of time he spends as a project manager. To avoid military and political influence Mortenson relies on private donations. Mortenson finally returns to Afghanistan to do the work we love to hear about, but runs into a string of roadblocks. His acknowledgment of personal failures and inadequacies give the memoir authenticity that its sensationalized counterpart, *Three Cups of Tea*, lacks. Each word and story seems more carefully chosen which adds weight to the message he conveys.

*Stones into Schools* illustrates the challenges of working with the people and governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but its true potency lies in its indictment of how the average American views these people. Not every Afghan is a member of the Taliban, not every Muslim is a terrorist, and not every American policy is the right policy. In fact, many similarities exist between the average American and Pakistani in terms of morals, values, needs, and wants. Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, states in the foreward, “Greg’s philosophy is…that the conflict in Afghanistan will be won with notebooks, pencils, and other tools of socioeconomic well-being.”

*How this work can be applied to American Studies:* The curriculum of American Studies addresses race and ethnicity as well as the United States’ role in the world. What is more pertinent today than the way we act towards and view Muslims? We are fighting two wars in the region and now have an increasing stake in the happenings of Libya. Mortenson’s work provides a new and refreshing way to look at these conflicts and our relationships with the Islamic populations of Africa and Asia. America’s ability to work
with Islamic nations is already important and is sure to become more crucial in coming years. For this reason the American Studies curriculum should contain *Stones into Schools* because Mortenson’s logic to drop books, not bombs, is catching on.