

1 The Almohad Coffee Shop

Get Started

Discuss in groups:

1. Where is this building situated?
2. Why is it famous?
3. The country where this building is located is in a desert. Are all cities in deserts as modern as this one?
4. List the names of some deserts which are not in Asia.



My friend and I were on a tour to Morocco. It was our dream to see this fascinating African country. First we landed in Rabat, its capital. Before coming here, we had read a little about the country. It is situated at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea. Though it is not far from Europe, its look is more Eastern. The high mountains here are capped with snow in winter. Its coastline is green and beautiful. It is also a part of the biggest desert in the world, the Sahara Desert. We were struck by the beauty of the city.

fascinating interesting, beautiful | coastline land along the coast | struck impressed

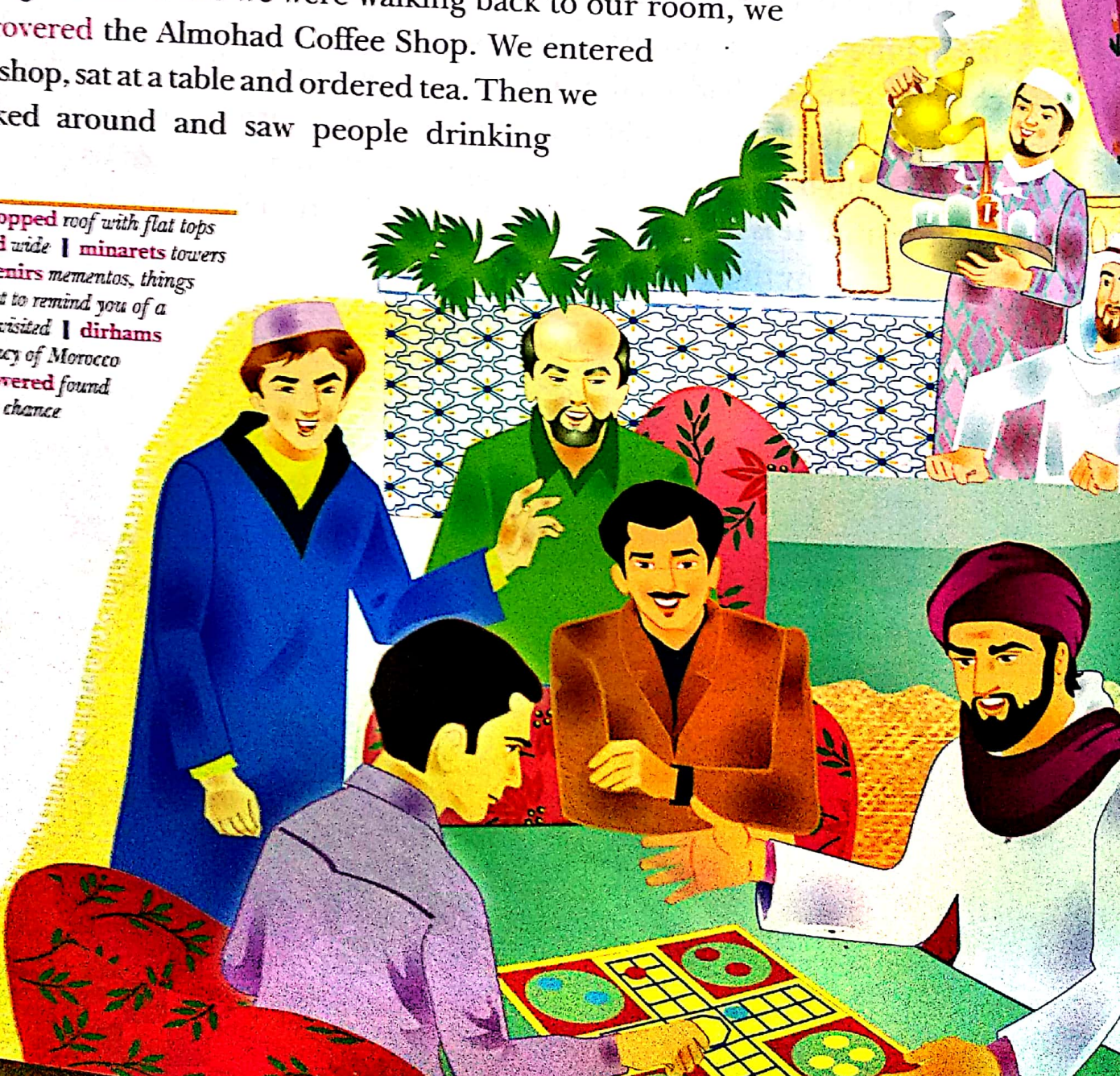


After spending two days in the capital, we came to Tangier. This city is built on the slopes of chalky limestone hills. It is an important port. It has high-rise buildings, **flat-topped** white houses and **broad** roads. There are also many domes and **minarets**. In some parts of the city, the roads are very narrow. Here, it is difficult for a foreigner to find friendly people more easily than in Rabat. Everything here looked strange.

We found most of the men wearing hoods and long flowing gowns. Women wore veils that covered their faces. In many parts of the city, the *souks* (markets) were crowded with people. On both sides of the streets, there were tiny shops selling trinkets, **souvenirs** or expensive carpets.

As soon as we reached Tangier, we rented a room for a few **dirhams** and went out to find something to eat. Everywhere people gave us strange looks. While we were walking back to our room, we **discovered** the Almohad Coffee Shop. We entered the shop, sat at a table and ordered tea. Then we looked around and saw people drinking

flat-topped roof with flat tops
broad wide | **minarets** towers
souvenirs mementos, things
bought to remind you of a
place visited | **dirhams**
currency of Morocco
discovered found
out by chance



Turkish coffee or sweet mint tea in glasses. We saw nearly all the customers, men only, playing Ludo.

We liked the place and started going there very often to drink coffee or mint tea. After a few days, the customers stopped **looking strangely** at us, though they never spoke to us and always continued playing. Two weeks later, a huge man came up to our table and said something in Arabic. At once, I called the waiter and enquired, "What is this gentleman saying?" He talked to him and said, "He is asking you to play the game of **Pachisi** with him." "What's that?" I asked him. I guessed **Pachisi** must be a word for shooting or fencing in Arabic. "That game," he said pointing at the Ludo board.

I always thought Ludo was the game for children. I immediately nodded. My friend and I stood up to join the huge man and his friend at their table. So did everyone in the coffee shop. We sat at one side of the table and the Moroccan and his friend **occupied** the other two seats. The rest of the people stood around us to watch the game. Some even stood on chairs so that they could see the board properly.

We won the first game (It was a game of the best of three.) They won the second. The third game was very important for both the teams. After some time, I was one place from home. I could feel the **tension**. Every time I rolled the dice, the audience **yelled** three or two in Arabic. I threw three several times, one after the other. Each time the audience yelled 'three', we yelled 'one'. My **opponents** were also one throw away. But they were not lucky yet. When my turn came, I tossed the dice and my **buddy** and I yelled 'one'. The dice **spun** around and stood on its side and fell. It was 'one'! The **audience** was wild with joy. They lifted us onto their shoulders and took us around the coffee shop and then into the *souk*. They were yelling all the time, but the only word we could understand was *Pachisi*.

We spent another week in Tangier. After the event, people became very friendly with us and invited us for meals. In the streets, kids **waggled** their thumbs in the air and shouted *Pachisi*. After all we were the winners. We had defeated a **bully**.

(Adapted from 'Strong Mind, Strong People' by Don Pinnock, *Reader's Digest*, December 2002)

looking strangely looking with surprise | **Pachisi** an ancient game like ludo | **occupied** sat on | **tension** pressure
yelled shouted | **opponents** people playing against in the game | **buddy** close friend | **spun** moved | **audience** people
watching the game | **waggled** moved from side to side | **bully** a person who frightens weak people



Respond and Reflect

A. Tick (✓) the correct answer.

- Morocco is in
(a) Asia (b) Africa (c) Europe
- The writer went to Morocco with his
(a) friend (b) wife (c) brother
- Tangier is situated
(a) on the top of a mountain
(b) in a valley
(c) on the slopes of hills
- The writer and his friend often went to the Almohad Coffee Shop to
(a) eat dinner (b) have snacks (c) drink tea or coffee
- People were happy because the writer had
(a) lost the game (b) defeated a bully (c) become their friend

B. Answer the questions briefly.

- What did people do when the writer and his friend win the game?
- Did the writer know Arabic? How do you know?

C. Do you think playing games in public places is right? Why/Why not?



Learn New Words

A. Find the words in the story that mean:

- Amazing
- A person from some other country
- A tall tower, specially of a mosque
- Opposite of 'cheap'
- Cheap decoration pieces or pieces of jewellery
- Belonging to Turkey
- A person who frightens weak persons

The Slimy Rattlesnake

A desert is full of animals, reptiles, birds and insects. The poem describes some of them. The poem is more like a picture you see on the screen.

Look! The camel **lean** and tall,
Munching leaves near us all.

Look! A slimy rattlesnake on the ground,
Wriggling over the stones we found.

Look! A big vulture **soaring** high,
Spreading its wings across the sky.

Look! A hedgehog **prickly** and small,
Rolling himself into a ball.

Look! A spider colourful and grand,
Treading so lightly on the sand.

Look! A lizard lifting its head,
Isn't he **shiny** and well fed?

lean thin | **slimy** (here) slippery | **wriggling** moving by turning and twisting | **soaring** flying high quickly and smoothly | **prickly** sharpened, pointed
treading walking with careful steps
shiny dazzling

Understand and Enjoy

A. Tick (✓) the correct answers.

1. The camel is

- (a) squashing insects
- (b) eating leaves
- (c) looking at the leaves

2. The rattlesnake is

- (a) moving over the stones
- (b) hiding under a stone
- (c) hissing at us

3. The vulture is

- (a) sitting on a tree
- (b) flying high in the sky
- (c) singing near the oasis

4. The hedgehog is

- (a) running on the sand
- (b) sniffing the air
- (c) forming into a ball

5. The spider is

- (a) rolling on the sand dune
- (b) weaving its web
- (c) walking on the sand

6. The lizard is

- (a) raising its head
- (b) eating insects
- (c) chasing insects