

# TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE WRITINGS OF ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ

## *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*

**SPIRITUAL QUALITIES RELEVANT TO THIS TOPIC:  
PRAYERFULNESS, EXCELLENCE, TACT, SCHOLARSHIP**

He does not ask us to follow Him blindly; as He says in one of His Tablets, God has endowed man with a mind to operate as a torchlight and guide him to the truth. Read His Words, consider His teachings and measure their value in the light of contemporary problems and the truth will surely be revealed to you. Read books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions, Nabil’s Narrative, and you will appreciate the truth of His mission, as well as the true spirit He creates in whosoever follows His ways.

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 26, 1933:  
*Lights of Guidance*, p. 1563

By holding study classes where the Word is read and understood and obtaining a thorough knowledge of the spirit that animated the early believers we can make sure that these newcomers are grounded in the teachings and made into real and devoted believers. Books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions, the Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, Nabil’s Narrative and Dr. Esselmont’s book should be read and read over again by every soul who desires to serve the Movement or considers himself an active member of the group.

From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 9, 1932:  
*Lights of Guidance*, p. 1919

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



### KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES

- To know the circumstances under which *Some Answered Questions* was written
- To know the kinds of questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered in this book

### SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Demonstrate how to find answers to one’s questions.
- Share the circumstances under which the text for *Some Answered Questions* was written.
- Learn about the five sections of the book and the major topics illuminated in each section.
- Review the specific topics listed in the Table of Contents.
- Develop matching games to match questions with answers.
- Memorize short statements or passages as responses to some of the questions.



### WISDOM OBJECTIVE

- To understand that *Some Answered Questions* offers the Bahá’í perspective on some of the most important and fundamental questions and concerns of humankind

### SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Read selected questions from the book and brainstorm a possible Bahá’í perspective on that question. Then share the answers given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
- Brainstorm a list of topics learners would like to know more about, and research this book and other Bahá’í Writings for information on those topics.
- Think about questions learners would like to have been able to ask ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, then research answers by investigating the Bahá’í Writings and literature, and by referencing other resources in the Bahá’í community.
- Prepare questions and invite an Auxiliary Board member to help find the answers and then make a personal book of questions and answers.



## SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION OBJECTIVE

- To realize that *Some Answered Questions* is an important tool for teaching the Faith

### SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Discuss how learning the Bahá'í perspective on issues is important to one's well-being.
- Share experiences when friends have asked questions about the Faith.
- Use secular sources, including illustrations, to develop an understanding of topics in *Some Answered Questions* that are relevant and meaningful to one's life and interests. Develop one's own project.
- Prepare presentations: talks, arts, performances on the topics of *Some Answered Questions*.



## ELOQUENT SPEECH OBJECTIVES

- To read *Some Answered Questions* to gain the Bahá'í perspective of these fundamental questions and concerns
- To use the knowledge and truth in *Some Answered Questions* when teaching the Faith

### SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Think about how one may apply the knowledge in *Some Answered Questions* when teaching the Faith to others.
- Share with classmates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation of at least one topic addressed in this book.
- Read and study a section from *Some Answered Questions* on a regular basis and keep notes on what one reads and how it relates to one's own life.
- Plan a series of firesides on the topics of this book given personally and/or combined with a presentation by the Institution of the Counselors.

## TOPIC: *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*

### Sample Activities

#### ACTIVITY: READER’S THEATRE, PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK AND ASSIGNMENT

**KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES:** To know the circumstances under which *Some Answered Questions* was written; To know the kinds of questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered in this book

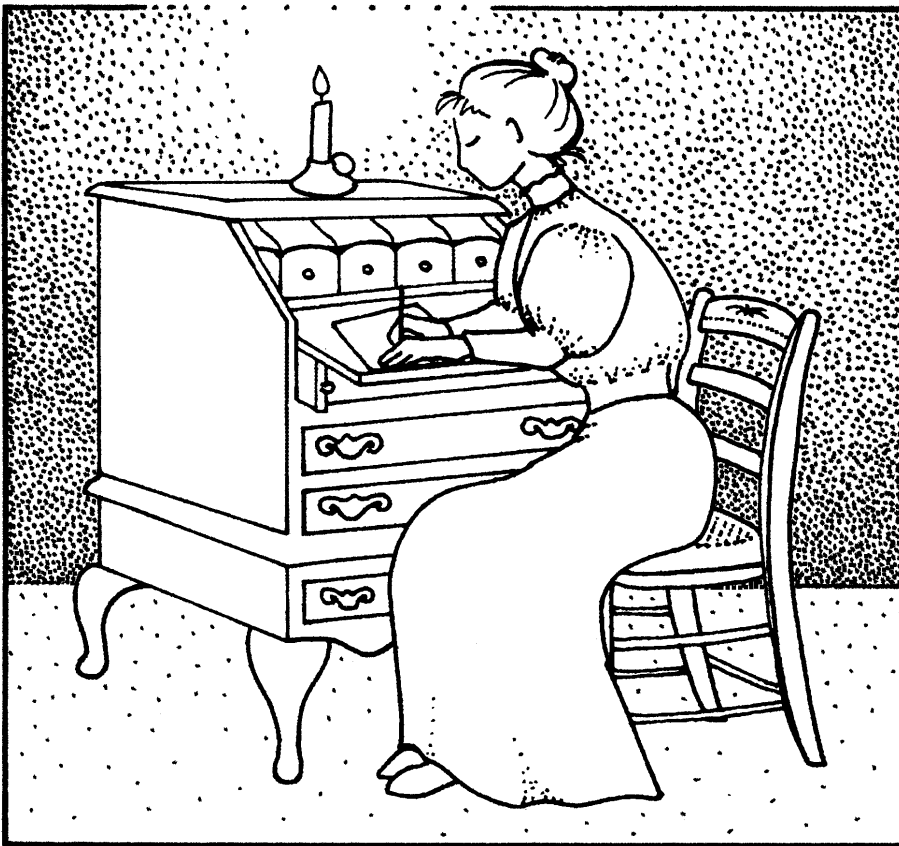
**WISDOM OBJECTIVE:** To understand that *Some Answered Questions* offers a Bahá’í perspective on some of the fundamental questions and concerns of humankind

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND LEARNING TOOLS:** Education directed towards God; Use of drama; Use of research

SUGGESTED TIME FOR ACTIVITY: 1 HR.

**Materials Needed:**

- gift copies of *Some Answered Questions*, if possible. If necessary, borrow copies for students to use to complete this activity.
- one male and two female volunteers to portray Laura Clifford Barney and the secretary
- card stock and felt markers to create bookmarks
- chair draped with beautiful cloth and one tall candle
- photocopies of the script, pages 77-78, Lesson Planning Guide
- map of the Ottoman Empire and/or ‘Akká in the 1900s, if available
- photocopies of Chapter Homework Forms, page 79, Lesson Planning Guide



1. Darken the room before students enter, and assist them to take their seats quietly. Without saying a word, arrange the reader’s theatre set and actors in their places (see pp. 77-78, Lesson Planning Guide).
2. Proceed with the reader’s theatre, which is a discussion between Laura Clifford Barney, the compiler of *Some Answered Questions*, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretary.

**TOPIC: *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS***

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3. After the presentation, engage students in a discussion about the time period and how the talks in *Some Answered Questions* came to be written.
4. If possible, formally present a copy of *Some Answered Questions* to each student. Point out that, just as a candle can serve as a guide in darkness, the contents of *Some Answered Questions* offer guidance for many concerns of humankind and particularly to issues and concerns of those who live in a Christian-oriented society.
5. Invite students to leaf through their new copy of *Some Answered Questions*. Point out that the publisher’s forward and the preface describe the circumstances surrounding the writing of the book. These sections served as the basis for the reader’s theatre.
6. Invite the students to turn to the Table of Contents and scan through it. Request that they identify the titles of Sections Three and Five. Then ask the students, “How many main sections are there?”
7. Encourage the students to look through the Contents and choose a specific topic that interests them. Provide card stock, markers and other art materials and invite them to make a bookmark to mark the place of their chosen topic.
8. Invite the students to become experts on their chosen topic and ask them to prepare to teach the rest of the class about it in two weeks’ time (or other time span which works for your schedule).
9. Distribute copies of p. 79, the Chapter Homework Form. Ask students to write their name, topic, and chapter on the Form. Point out the sections for noting Key Points and Vocabulary Words, and ask them to find the meaning of new words used in their selected chapter. Remind them to bring this form and their copy of *Some Answered Questions* to the next class session.
10. Challenge the students to read one paragraph of this chapter each night with an adult. If it is not possible for the students to read at home at night, provide class time for this study.
11. Record the topic each student has chosen to study. Remember to check in with the students about their study each week and provide support as needed so that each student is successful.

## TOPIC: *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*

### ACTIVITY: PRESENTING LEARNINGS ABOUT *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*

**KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVE:** To know the kinds of questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered in His book, *Some Answered Questions*

**WISDOM OBJECTIVE:** To understand that *Some Answered Questions* offers a Bahá’í perspective on some of the most fundamental questions and concerns of humankind

**SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION OBJECTIVE:** To realize that *Some Answered Questions* is an important tool for teaching the Faith

**ELOQUENT SPEECH OBJECTIVES:** To read *Some Answered Questions* to gain a Bahá’í perspective of these fundamental questions and concerns; To be able to employ the knowledge and truth in *Some Answered Questions* when teaching the Faith

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND LEARNING TOOLS:** Education directed towards God; Use of research; Cooperative learning; Use of art; Use of drama

SUGGESTED TIME FOR ACTIVITY: 30 MIN. OR LONGER IF PROJECT IS COMPLETED ENTIRELY AT CLASS

**Materials Needed:**

- photocopies of Guidelines for Good Presentations, page 80, Lesson Planning Guide
- chart paper or chalkboard
- paper, pencils
- copies of *Some Answered Questions*
- students’ Chapter Homework Forms
- poster board, art supplies
- costumes and cassette tape recorder, if desired

1. Ask each student to share three vocabulary words identified from her or his assigned reading in *Some Answered Questions*. Chart these as they are shared aloud. Choose two or three of these words to discuss as a group. Ask the students to identify the advantages of learning the meaning of these words.
2. Divide the class into pairs. Ask the students in each pair to share with their partner, one speaking while the other listens carefully, what they have learned of their topic in *Some Answered Questions*. Then ask the speakers and listeners to switch roles.
3. Give each pair a copy of “Guidelines for Good Presentations,” p. 84, Lesson Planning Guide. Ask the pairs to brainstorm creative ways that each student could use to present their topic to the entire class, noting ideas down on the back of the Guidelines. Note that partners can assist each other during presentations.
4. Encourage the students to choose their best ideas and begin to work on them and also ask that they make a list of supplies needed.
5. If some students have not completed their reading, they can listen while their partner shares and help them to brainstorm, but may read their own section as others begin work on presentations. Provide the necessary encouragement and support for each student to achieve success with this project.
6. Assign the completion of their reading and preparation of their presentation as homework for the next class session. To facilitate consultation, make sure that students working together as partners have each other’s phone numbers or e-mail addresses.
7. Alternately, you may choose to provide class time for the entire project.

ACTIVITY: TEACHING A LESSON TO PEERS

**KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVE:** To know the kinds of questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers in His book *Some Answered Questions*

**WISDOM OBJECTIVE:** To understand that *Some Answered Questions* offers a Bahá’í perspective on some of the most fundamental questions and concerns of humankind

**SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION OBJECTIVE:** To realize that *Some Answered Questions* is an important tool for teaching the Faith

**ELOQUENT SPEECH OBJECTIVES:** To be able to employ the knowledge and truth in *Some Answered Questions* when teaching the Faith

**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND LEARNING TOOLS:** Education directed towards God; Use of research; Peer involvement; Use of multimedia

SUGGESTED TIME FOR ACTIVITY: 1 HOUR

**Materials Needed:**

- notepaper, pencils
- copies of Feedback and Self-Evaluation Forms, page 81, Lesson Planning Guide
- support equipment as needed (i.e., TV & VCR, cassette tape recorder, etc.)
- video camera, if available

1. Hand out and explain the Feedback Forms, emphasizing that this form is designed to help us build upon our strengths. Invite each student, or pair of students, to give the presentation prepared in the preceding activity to the class. Allow time after each presentation for students to complete the Feedback Forms. Collect these forms and distribute them to their owners after all presentations have been made.

2. If possible, videotape students’ presentations, to enable students to view themselves for self-evaluation, improvement and encouragement.

3. Facilitate a follow-up discussion, encouraging students to share their experiences. Ask:

- What did you enjoy about your presentation?
- What did you find challenging? How did you address your challenges?
- What did you learn about making presentations?
- What did you learn from others’ presentations?



4. Distribute Self-Evaluation Forms for students to complete in a quiet, reflective environment. Students may be allowed, but not required, to share their reflections with the class.

## TOPIC: *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS*

### ACTIVITY: ROLE-PLAY USING *SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS* TO TEACH PEERS

**KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVE:** To know the kinds of questions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers in His book *Some Answered Questions*

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**INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND LEARNING TOOLS:** Education directed towards God; Use of research; Use of stories; Use of questioning and peer teaching

SUGGESTED TIME FOR ACTIVITY: 1 HOUR

**Materials Needed:**

- copies of *Some Answered Questions*
- questions on colored strips of paper: one color for questions taken from the chapters studied by the students; another color for questions from other chapters – at least one question on each color for each student
- music or songs about teaching the Faith
- story about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá teaching the Faith, p. 82 of this Lesson Planning Guide

1. Open with an inspirational song about teaching the Faith; then read or tell the teaching story, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Listener,” on p. 82 of this Lesson Planning Guide.
2. Explain that there are many souls who are seeking the answers the Faith provides. Some of these are our schoolmates and teachers. This activity will assist us to develop the confidence to reach out to these souls and the ability to answer their questions clearly.
3. Ask each student to select one strip of each color of paper. Ask them to read the questions but not to show them to anyone else.
4. Invite the students to work in pairs to play the roles of the teacher and the seeker, in turn. Ask the students to pose one of the questions on their strip of paper when playing the role of the seeker. Each person takes the role of teacher and of seeker twice, once for each of the questions provided.
5. If the teachers don’t already know the Master’s answer to the question, encourage them to suggest that both the seeker and the teacher look together in *Some Answered Questions* to find the answer. Remind them that both seekers and our fellow Bahá’ís are very attracted to this humble attitude of learning together.
6. Encourage the pairs to alternate being teacher and seeker. Ask that they choose one of their four scenes for presentation to the whole class.
7. After the role-plays are presented, discuss the questions: What did we learn from this experience? What was enjoyable? What was challenging? Mention other options for finding answers to questions about the Faith, including reference books, computer search programs, web sites, deepened Bahá’ís, etc.
8. Invite the students to reflect on the conversations they have with their friends. Who do they know that might be interested in one of the topics studied in *Some Answered Questions*? How could they begin such a conversation? Invite the students to make a plan to share their view on one of these topics with a friend this week. Remember to ask them to describe their experience during the next class.



Resource Pages

*Some Answered Questions*  
READER’S THEATRE

CHARACTERS:

- **Laura Clifford Barney (in the present),**
- **Laura Clifford Barney (in the past),** a Western woman in clothes circa early-1900s
- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s **secretary,** a Persian man

PROPS NEEDED:

- Writing desk (old-fashioned)
- Pens & paper
- Dining table with tablecloth
- Three wooden chairs, one draped with a beautiful cloth on which a candle is placed
- Table place settings for 3
- Copy of *Some Answered Questions*

STAGE SETTING:

Writing desk is downstage right. Upon it are papers and pens. Dining table is downstage left. Upon it are simple place settings for three.

THE PLAY

**Laura of the past** sits at dining table with **secretary**, downstage left. They sit quietly, as though listening.

**Present-day Laura** sits at a desk (Downstage Right) with pen & paper. She starts to write, saying aloud:

“The talks all take place during those difficult years of 1904-1906 when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was confined to the city of ‘Akká by the Turkish government and permitted to receive only a few visitors. I was fortunate to visit Him several times. One of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretaries or His son-in-law would be present to insure accuracy in recording His replies. Later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá read the transcriptions, sometimes changing a word or a line with His reed pen. I then translated them into English...”

She stands and walks to table area, standing upstage of scene, as if looking at a memory. As she walks, she continues to talk...

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“The book presents only certain aspects of the Bahá’í Faith, which is universal in its message and has for each questioner the answer suited to his special development and needs.

“In my case the teachings were made simple, and are therefore in no way complete and exhaustive.”

“I asked Him questions that were of interest to me.”

Both the **secretary** and **Past Laura** sit with their attention directed towards the empty chair. **Past Laura** can be seen nodding her head. Then she asks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*Will you explain the subject of the Return?*”

**Present-day Laura** speaks as Past Laura and Secretary listen and write:

“These answers were written down in Persian while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke. Later they were translated into English by the interpreter, or, when I had acquired a slight knowledge of Persian, adapted to my limited vocabulary.”

Reading from a piece of paper, **Secretary** says,

“The Master said, ‘Bahá’u’lláh has explained this subject fully and clearly in the ‘Iqán. Read it and the truth of this subject shall become apparent. But since you have asked about it, I will explain it briefly. We will begin to elucidate it from the Gospel...”

Both the **secretary** and **Past Laura** continue to appear to listen and take notes.

**Present-day Laura** speaks as she walks back to her desk:

“Occasionally he was able to speak at length; but often, even though the subject might require more time, he would be called away after a few moments. ‘I have given to you my tired moments,’ were the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he rose from the table after answering one of my questions. Between the hours of work, his fatigue would find relief in renewed activity.”

She sits at her desk and continues to speak:

“Sometimes days and even weeks would pass, in which he had no opportunity of instructing me. But I could well be patient, for I had always before me the greater lesson – the lesson of His personal life.”

By the time she concludes, she should be sitting again at the desk, writing. Have her sign her name as she says aloud,

*“Laura Clifford Barney”*

THE END.

**CHAPTER HOMEWORK FORM**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

This student has read at least one paragraph per day,  
with the assistance of an adult.

CHAPTER: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE

NUMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_

**Key Points for Each Paragraph:**

**Vocabulary Words and Definitions:**

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1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

**GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRESENTATIONS**

(Use the back of this paper to list your brainstorm ideas)

**PREPARING YOUR PRESENTATION**

Does your presentation have a clear beginning, middle and end?

Do you use creative ways to convey your topic?

Examples include art, games, songs, drama, video, etc.

Do you clearly explain the key points of your topic?

How will you engage your audience’s interest right away?

How will you bring your presentation to a strong conclusion?

**PRESENTING**

Have you practiced giving your presentation more than once?

When you present, how many times do you make eye contact with the audience?

Eye contact should be frequent.

Is your voice loud enough to be heard in the back of the room?

Are you speaking slowly and enunciating every syllable?

Remember, this is the first time your audience has heard this.

Are you focusing your attention on sharing your topic with your audience?

When you reach out to the audience and speak directly to them (instead of worrying about yourself), they will sense this and be more receptive to you. Also, you automatically present better because your energy is directed outward, not inward. So, always remember to present as though you are offering a wonderful gift – which you are!

Show your nobility and HAVE FUN!

**FEEDBACK FORM**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

You engaged my interest by:

One thing I learned from your presentation that I didn't know previously is:

I could hear everything you said: YES 1 2 3 4 5 NO

Some positive qualities you demonstrated which helped your presentation:

**SELF-EVALUATION FORM**

How often did you rehearse your presentation?

List the two best things that you did in your presentation:

What were the two top challenges you encountered in preparing or presenting your topic?

Think about the positive qualities you used to address these challenges. List five:

What two things would you like to improve the next time you do a presentation?

Congratulations on all your hard work and on completing this evaluation!

Bahá'u'lláh tells us, "...bring thyself to account each day..." and

*"Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday."*

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, THE LISTENER

In the world of social and intellectual intercourse to which I was accustomed silence was almost unforgivable. From the collegiate with his, or her, “line,” to the lawyer, doctor, minister, statesman—a ready answer, a witty bon mot, a wise remark, a knowing smile was stock-in-trade. They all had their “line,” and it was upon their readiness or unreadiness to meet every occasion verbally that their reputation largely rested.

How differently ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met the questioner, the conversationalist, the occasion. To the questioner He responded first with silence—an outward silence. His encouragement always was that the other should speak and He listen. There was never that eager tenseness, that restlessness so often met showing most plainly that the listener has the pat answer ready the moment he should have a chance to utter it...

And when, under His encouraging sympathy, the interviewer became emptied of his words, there followed a brief interval of silence. There was no instant and complete outpouring of explanation and advice. He sometimes closed His eyes a moment as if He sought guidance from above himself; sometimes sat and searched the questioner’s soul with a loving, comprehending smile that melted the heart.

And when He finally spoke, and that modulated, resonant voice of music came, the words were so unexpected, often, so seemingly foreign to the subject, that the questioner was at first somewhat bewildered, but always, with me at least, this was followed by a calmness, an understanding which went much deeper than the mind.

Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, pp. 194-6

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

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**Stories & Articles:**

*Some Answered Questions*

*‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 82-84

**Music:**

*We Want to Grow Up*, “The Soul is the Sun”

**List of other favorite resources:**

If you find any additional resources, please notify the National Teacher Training Center, or submit your findings to the Educational Materials web site.

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Page for NOTES