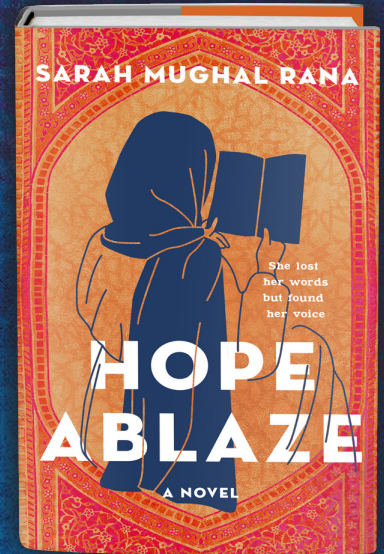


HOPE ABLAZE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Nida's family has a long legacy of poetry letters, most recently with Nida and Mamou using poetry to express themselves—their hopes, their hardships. Why do you believe their family found power through poetry as opposed to another medium? How might the story look if they used a different art form, such as painting or music?
2. The tradition of poetry was a prominent theme in the novel—why can it be important to preserve family traditions and culture?
3. In chapter 7, Jawad claims that the Poet's Block is like a bubble and that someday it will disappear. Do you think this is true? Consider the pros and cons of keeping the Poet's Block secluded and discuss.
4. While Alexis apologizes for wrongfully submitting Nida's poem to the NSPL competition at the end of the story, Nida is unable to forgive her for all of the hurt she has caused. Do you think it is easier to forgive someone for doing the right thing for the wrong reason or for doing the wrong thing for the right reason? Consider Nida and Alexis's situation from both sides and discuss.
5. How does the poetry included in the story influence your understanding of Nida and what she's going through? How would the impact of the story differ if we never saw Nida's poems directly on the page and only heard about them secondhand?
6. Zaynab tells Nina, "You are who you surround yourself with." Do you agree with her? How does Nida's community change as the novel progresses, and how does that in turn change Nida, if at all? What does community mean to you?
7. The story deals with emotions and how they fuel us, and Nida is often fueled by her own anger. Which emotions do you think work as the strongest fuel? Where does hope land on the scale? Discuss your reasoning.
8. The theme of hope plays a large role in the novel—how did hope let Nida and her friends resolve the issues they were facing?
9. The novel depicts the flaws of the prison system. In what ways do you think the system could be improved?
10. During her interview with Michelle for TNS *Fifteen Minutes*, Nida discusses the topics of submission and oppression, detailing how the hijab is a type of personal submission before comparing it to how, in some societies, women are compelled to wear high heels and makeup to work. Do you agree with Nida's approach in this conversation? Can you relate to her reasoning? Explain why or why not? What role does forgiveness play in this evolution?

11. Reflect back on all of the poems throughout the text. Which one had the most impact on you as you were reading? Which was your favorite? Explain why.
12. Nida spends most of the novel looking at the blue ink around her wrists as a curse, but after sharing the Poet's Block with Rayan, she begins to realize it could actually be a blessing. Do you agree with her? What is the line between a blessing and a curse, and is it possible for something to be both?
13. Nida and her amma have a fraught relationship, especially as it surrounds Nida's poetry. As we learn more about Amma's own poetry throughout the story, how did your perception of Amma and Nida's relationship change? How did Nida's perception of her amma change as she learned the same information?

