

# Questions for A Place for Us by Fatima Farheen Mirza

written by Heather Caliendo October 11, 2018

We read the story from multiple perspectives and it jumps back and forth in time. What did you think about this writing style and how did it help serve the story?

- We really get to know the characters in this read. Let's focus on Amar, Hadia, Layla and Rafiq for a bit. What were your initial impressions of them and did that change at all as the book went on? Why do you think the author chose not to focus much on Huda, the middle child?
- Amar never felt like he fit in. What are some events that happen to him that made him feel this way? What role did his parents and sister have in it?
- The story is split between four different parts. Which part stood out to you the most? Which one the least?
- Rafiq is quite complicated, we mostly see him as a very strict, traditional parent. But then, in part four, we get to know him and his perspective. Did you sympathize with him at all during that section?
- Amar and Amira fall in love but their relationship is doomed from the start. Would it have been different if Amar was more traditional? In your opinion, why did Layla seek to stop the relationship, what was she afraid of? How would Amar's story been different if he could have been with Amira?
- Why did Amar run away? Why did he never come back? Did you understand why he left the family or do you think he was wrong? Do you think his family should have done more to find him?
- Let's talk about Rafiq's father's watch. What was the symbolism of him giving the watch to Hadia? How did it impact Amar?
- Much of the novel is focused on the conflict between tradition and rebellion. Did you relate to that in any way?
- What do you think the title, *A Place For Us*, represents?

<https://bookclubchat.com/books/book-club-questions-for-a-place-for-us-by-fatima-farheen-mirza/>

## Discussion Questions from the publisher, Penguin Random House:

1. How did you interpret the title of *A Place for Us*? Does this "place" refer to family, culture, community, or religion?
2. Through the nuances of her writing, Fatima Farheen Mirza depicts complex, multidimensional characters. How were different sides to her characters' personalities revealed? How do you reconcile Amar's behavior with Amira with the anger and resentment he holds toward his family?
3. Did your opinion of Rafiq change or develop as the narrative progressed? Did you become more sympathetic or understanding of the father portrayed early on in the novel when, in the final section, the novel switches to his first-person perspective?

4. Layla at one stage advises Hadia to be mindful of the ways she treats and teases Amar, for his childhood experiences will impact the rest of his life. Layla warns, "One day the joke will not be funny. If you always leave him out, if you always tease him and hurt his feelings, soon you will not know how to be any other way with him, and it will affect his personality. Your relationship. For his whole life, and the rest of yours." Can you recall any moments from Amar's early years that affected his personality or the course of his adult life?
5. From a young age, Amar fears that he has a "black stain" on his soul. What do you think was the root cause of this fear? Why do you think he questions his own inherent goodness, and how does self-doubt affect his behavior?
6. Hadia comes to see the watch she received from Rafiq, an heirloom that was her grandfather's, as a symbol of the competition between herself and Amar. How might the watch also be symbolic of their complex relationships with their father?
7. How did you interpret other recurring images or symbols in *A Place for Us*, for instance, the moon, Layla's garden, or the black box that Amar received as a birthday gift?
8. In his late teenage years, Amar strives to prove himself as a worthy partner for Amira Ali, deserving of her parents' approval. Where else did you see characters behave in certain ways, compromising their desires and making major life decisions, to please their family and community? How did this affect their personal happiness?
9. When her children speak English instead of Urdu, Layla fears that they will gradually lose touch with their heritage. As they moved toward adulthood, how did Hadia and Huda depart from certain aspects of their culture? What others did they uphold? You might consider rituals, customs, or gender roles.
10. At Hadia's wedding, Amira mentions that her brother, Abbas, had been a "moral compass" for her parents. What lessons did you see children teach their parents (and grandparents) in *A Place for Us*?
11. Toward the end of the novel, Rafiq admits with regret that, as a result of his rigid religious practice and strict adherence to rules, he had failed to impart to his family an understanding of God's kindness and mercy. How do you think his relationship with Amar would have changed or improved if he had come to this realization when his children were young?
12. Were you angry with Amar for leaving his parents and sisters, or were his actions justified? Did you blame Rafiq, Layla, or even Hadia, for contributing to Amar's decision to move away from home and cut off communication with the family?
13. In the final section, Rafiq expresses his fear that his grandchildren will experience the effects of racist hate and violence, which Amar had been exposed to in school. Do you think that *A Place for Us*, depicting the personal lives of a Muslim family in America, has an important social message?

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/564304/a-place-for-us-by-fatima-farheen-mirza/9781524763558/readers-guide/>