



A READING GROUP GUIDE TO *Amina's Song*

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Ages 8–12

Background/Summary

Amina's Song picks up after *Amina's Voice* leaves off; these books can be read in any order as companion novels. As Amina prepares to enter seventh grade, she becomes more aware of navigating her dual identities as an American and a Pakistani girl. A summer trip to visit her uncle Thaya Jaan and extended family in Pakistan opens her eyes to the rich culture of her family's homeland, sparking a desire to share her culture with her friends and classmates in America and to counter stereotypes. Music provides the answer that she's looking for, but this time around, she won't use her voice to sing a song written by someone else; with the help of her new friend Nico, she will share her own unique song with the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Before you begin reading, brainstorm everything you know or think you know about the country of Pakistan. Next, make a list of things you want to know about Pakistan. After you finish reading, look back at your list. Were the things you believed you knew correct? What did you learn about Pakistan by reading *Amina's Song*? What are you still curious to know?
2. Why was Amina initially nervous about visiting Pakistan? Explain how her experience in Pakistan was different from what she expected.
3. Amina remembers her father explaining the difference between rational and irrational fear. Why is it important to recognize this distinction? How can you tell the difference? Can you give examples from your own experiences or from the novel?
4. Why does Amina want her classmates and friends in America to see Pakistan the way she sees it? Why is she happy when she learns that America is helping to preserve a World Heritage Site in Pakistan?
5. Why do you think Amina is emotional when it comes time for her visit to Pakistan to end? Can you relate to how Amina feels when she says goodbye to her uncle, aunts, and cousins? What experience of your own comes to mind?
6. Amina and her cousin Zohra have very different approaches to bargaining with the street vendors at the market in Pakistan. Describe the differences in the ways they approach their roles as customers. Do you think you would be more like Zohra or Amina in a similar situation?

7. Explain how seeing the little boy asking for money in Pakistan impacts Amina. How does she turn this sense of empathy into action to help others once she returns to America?
8. When she is on the plane returning to the United States, Amina wonders if her brother is “as mixed up as I am, as we travel not only through time zones but also from one part of our lives to another.” Why does leaving Pakistan cause her to feel this way? Do you have a place that is so important to you that it feels like it is a part of you? Explain your answers.
9. Why does Soojin decide to run for student body president? What sets her campaign apart from her competitors? Have you ever considered running for student government? Explain your answers.
10. What does Amina realize about Rabiya’s feelings toward her friendship with Zohra and her trip to Pakistan? What do you think might have happened if Amina had gotten angry with Rabiya instead of considering how Rabiya might be feeling? What actions does she take instead, and how does her response toward Rabiya impact their relationship?
11. Toward the end of the book, Amina reflects, “even if my friends can’t understand everything I’ve been going through lately, they’re trying. And we can support each other while we do different things.” What steps does Amina take to maintain her friendships with Emily and Soojin? Why do you think some friends grow apart while others remain? Can you learn anything from Amina, Soojin, and Emily about how to be a good friend?
12. Why does Amina choose to research Malala for her history project? Explain why sharing her preliminary research makes Amina worry that she’s chosen the wrong person to profile. How does Amina solve this dilemma? Why do you think her teacher calls her decision “brave”?
13. All the seventh-grade students participate in a Living Wax Museum project, where they research, dress as, and present reports on a historical figure. You may have participated in a similar project in the past. If so, whom did you choose as your historical figure? Reflect on your reasons for selecting them and what you learned. If you have never participated in this activity, whom would you select to research and impersonate? Why would you choose them?
14. One of Amina’s strengths is her ability to consider what other people might be thinking or experiencing and how they might feel. Read the last paragraphs of chapter eleven. What can you learn from Amina’s example? How does having and practicing empathy change the way a person interacts with other people?
15. What is the difference between primary sources and secondary research sources? Why is it important to look at a variety of different sources when you are gathering information? What can happen if you only use one source or one type of reference source in your research?
16. Amina is frustrated by her friends’ and family’s assumptions that she is romantically interested in Nico. She reflects, “But maybe I want to be friends with a boy without everyone assuming he’s my boyfriend.” Have you ever been in a situation like Amina? Do you think that it’s harder for boys and girls to be friends as they get older? Explain your answers.
17. Describe the special bond that Amina has with her uncle, Thaya Jaan. Do you have a family member whom you feel particularly close to? What interests or activities brought you together?

Extension Activities

1. This book is a companion novel to *Amina’s Voice*. Read both books and consider how Amina’s character develops throughout. Identify events in the first book that are significant to her character’s development, and discuss how these events impact her in the second book. For example, in the first book, Amina’s mosque is vandalized, an event that is alluded to several times in *Amina’s Song*. How does this continue to impact the way Amina feels and responds to others?
2. Children like Amina, who grow up in between two cultures, are sometimes referred to as “Third-Culture Kids” or TCK, a term that recognizes the impact of growing up in a culture different from a parent’s culture. Amina describes this sensation when she says, “I can’t help feeling like an impostor or a shapeshifter who appears to be a regular

Pakistani girl on the outside but doesn't know how to act like one." Research the concept of third-culture kids, and think about Amina's experiences in the book. Then write an essay considering the following questions: What unique challenges might TCKs face? What are the benefits of being a TCK? Alternatively, if you identify as a TCK, write an essay sharing and reflecting on some of your experiences. Then participate in a class or small group discussion about what most surprised you or what you felt were the most important conclusions in your essay. What can you do to make your classroom or community more welcoming or inclusive? What kinds of things would you like to learn about your classmates?

3. Amina documents her trip to Pakistan by taking photos and videos. Journaling gives her another way to preserve her memories, and she is eventually able to create a song and video about her trip. Look back at photos and videos of a special day or memorable trip and then write down your memories and reflections about what the experience meant to you; if you don't have these items, consider talking to the people who were with you to remember some of your favorite parts about the experience. As Amina says, "All the memories, funny moments, and unforgettable scenes living inside me, things I've been thinking about and writing about in my notebook, are parts of me." Use your memories to create a song, collage, video, webpage, slideshow, poem, podcast, or even a narrative essay to document and share this part of your life with others.
4. Amina finds herself drawn to the music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, a musician who performed in a traditional Pakistani style known as Qawwali. Research this style of music and explain the cultural significance of Qawwali. Choose one Qawwali song and analyze the lyrics. Can you think of any Western songs that have similar themes or messages? Why do you think this music resonates so strongly with Amina?
5. Soojin's cousin inspires her to run for student government by telling her, "we can't afford to sit on the sidelines because we're the next generation of leaders." Work with a small group to discuss a local, national, or global problem that you would like to help tackle, and brainstorm ways to make a difference through community service.
6. When Amina is anxious or upset, she often gets a stomachache. Research the different ways anxiety can impact physical well-being, and find strategies to help deal with it. Present your findings in an informational poster or flyer to help raise awareness about best practices for managing and talking about mental health.
7. Amina describes her feelings by saying, "It's like a piece of me was left in Pakistan, and I wonder when I'll be whole again." When she shares this with her friends, she finds out that Soojin hasn't visited Korea in years, and her friend Emily misses her summer camp. Write a descriptive essay about a place that is important or meaningful to you. Try to describe it with the same level of detail that author Hena Khan uses to describe Pakistan, making sure to use imagery or words that appeal to each of the five senses to help your reader picture the place you describe.
8. Amina's family works with their faith community to help refugees get settled in America. How do different members of the community contribute? Why is it important to make people feel welcome? Choose one of the following projects:

Research local or national organizations that help refugees, and share ways your classmates can help.

Develop a plan for ways that your school can formally welcome transfer students, help them make friends, and adjust to a new school.

9. Nico teaches himself and then Amina how to use music-editing software on his laptop. Most computers, phones, and tablets have access to programs for music composition and editing. Using a photo or group of pictures as inspiration, try composing a short piece of music about your memory. Consider the way that different sounds, beats, and melodies can reflect emotions. You can choose to include lyrics in your song, or you can make it instrumental.