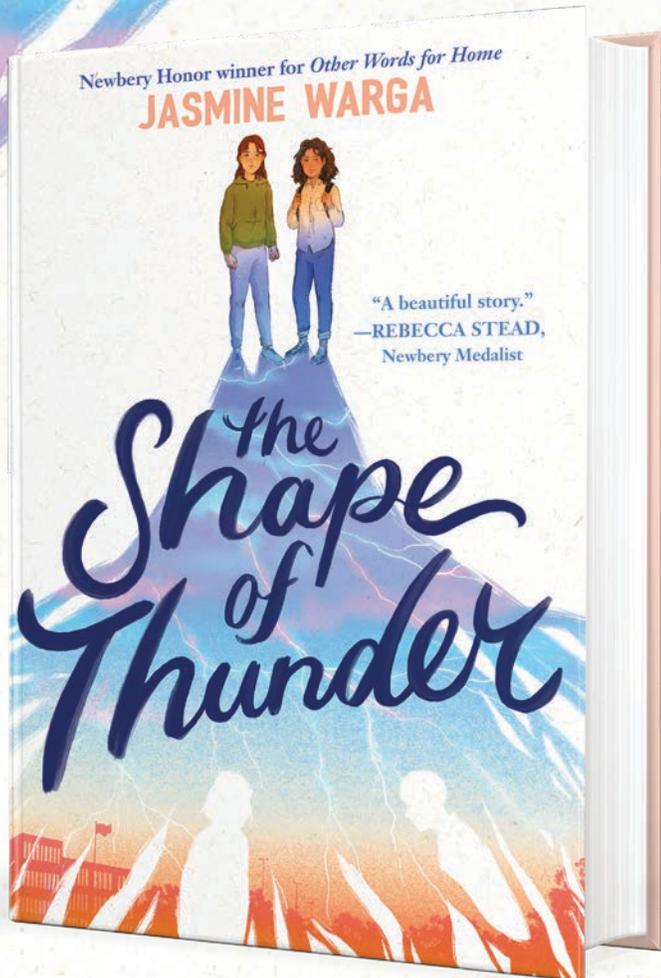


Discussion Guide for JASMINE WARGA'S



Includes discussion questions and behind-the-book features for reading and discussing Jasmine Warga's work with young readers

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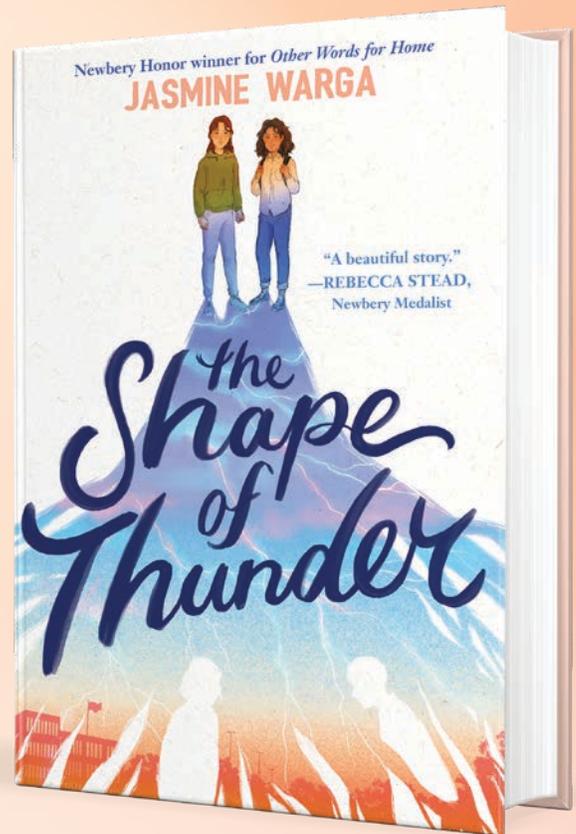
the Shape of Thunder

ABOUT THE BOOK

Cora and Quinn used to be best friends. That changed last year, when they each lost a sibling in a school shooting and found themselves in separate worlds of grief and regret. Now Quinn believes there's a way to travel to the past to prevent the tragedy, and Cora is the best person to help make it happen. If she can get Cora to believe, and to work with her, can they make magic together and fix their broken families, and perhaps even their friendship? This sensitive story of loss and healing explores the power of friendship to restore and redeem in the wake of unthinkable tragedy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Cora is frustrated that people try to remember her sister as a perfect person, which she wasn't. Cora wants to remember Mabel as she was (p. 5). Why do people sometimes change their memories of those who have passed on? Do you think it is healthier to think of the departed as perfect, or to honor their flaws as well? Why?
2. Quinn has a difficult time performing in class. On page 8, she says, "I lose track of my thoughts a lot. I have so many of them that by the time it comes to write them down, it ends up coming out all wrong, and my teachers start to think I don't have any thoughts at all." Do you think there should be a way for young people who think differently to earn credit for their abundant, often creative thoughts? What might that look like if schools were run differently?
3. Quinn says, "My brother does not deserve to be saved after what he did, but I can't help wanting to save him anyway" (p. 28). Do you agree that he does not deserve to be saved? Why or why not?
4. Quinn has to think about when her brother became the new person capable of such a horrible crime, and how far in time she would have to go back in order to save him. Do you think there was a point at which she could have saved him? When would it be, and what would she have to do? How can reading this story help someone who is watching a loved one go down a dangerous path?
5. Quinn blames herself for what happened, since she didn't stop her brother when she saw warning signs. Cora also says "I think you should've stopped him" (p. 120). Do you believe Quinn is to blame? How does feeling responsible affect her? How can she change when she lets go of that feeling?
6. Quinn says several times that she and her brother were not allowed to cry. How do you think holding in their emotions affected each of them? Dr. Randall "doesn't make a big deal about it" when Cora cries during therapy sessions (p. 80). Do you think crying is important? Why or why not?
7. Discuss Cora's visit with Dr. Randall (pp. 77-81). How is Dr. Randall different from other people? Why do you think his behaviors help Cora speak about and heal from her trauma? How do you think therapy differs from speaking with a family member or friend who cares about you?
8. Cora and Quinn argue a bit over whether they're seeking science or magic. They settle on "science that feels magical" (p. 127). Do you think time travel would be magic, science, both, or something else? Reread Cora's talk with her dad from the bottom of page 251 to the top of page 253. Do you see parallels between magic, emotions, and science?
9. In her last letter to her brother, Quinn writes what Cora's Gram said, that "the dead belong to the living. ... it's the people who are alive who create the memory of the dead person" (p. 271). She decides she can love Parker without excusing or forgiving what he did. How does this final letter show Quinn's growth?
10. As a book of realistic fiction, how many ways could their time travel quest have ended? How did it feel going through this journey with them? Did you hope they would succeed? How did the end make you feel? What do you think the author was trying to show? How would the story feel different if the author had chosen to write it as magical realism? Which would you prefer for this story?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The Shape of Time Travel. Do your own research into the topic of time travel. What have experts in science most recently theorized about the possibility of time travel? Can you envision how it could work? Create a piece of artwork—a drawing, painting, poem, song, short story, etc.—representing your understanding of how time travel could work.

The Human Cost of Time Travel. Quinn and Cora assume that going back in time to change what happened would make everything better. If time travel were real and available to anyone, how would it change the way we live? What decisions might people make differently? Make a short video clip, PowerPoint presentation, or simply a five-minute speech, in which you try to convince your audience that time travel would be a positive development for humanity or a negative development.

A True Friend . . . Cora and Quinn's friendship has been tested in an extreme way, but in the end, it is a part of both of their healing. Write about the power of friendship in ordinary and extraordinary times.

Redemption. Quinn wants to redeem herself, or free herself from blame, by going back in time, but she ends up redeeming herself by saving her friend. With a small group, discuss what it means to redeem oneself. When is it necessary? How is it possible? Who decides when and whether a person has been redeemed? Write a set of guiding principles that can lead a guilty person to redemption.



A LETTER FROM JASMINE WARGA

DEAR READER,

When I was young, I would turn to books to help me explore the things about the world I didn't understand. Things that made me sad or that scared me.

Now that's part of the reason why I write books. I believe in the power of books as conversation starters, as spaces through which young people can build an emotional vocabulary to voice their concerns, their questions, and their opinions.

This book started the day I watched elementary students participate in an active shooter drill. At the time, my oldest daughter was three. It occurred to me that in a couple of years, I would have to talk to my daughter about why her school had active shooter drills. I didn't know what I would say.

What I remember most about the drill was the look on the students' faces—there was fear, but also determination. They looked like they thought it was their responsibility to rise to the occasion. To fix the problem. This broke my heart. I felt like I, and every other grown-up, had failed them.

Soon after, I read an article about time travel. I've always been interested in the link between science and magic—scientific facts often leave me with a feeling of wonder and awe. The scientist in the article was talking about how at an actual physics level, time travel is possible.

Possible. My brain whirled. If we could time-travel, could we change the fate of all the kids we have lost in this country to gun violence? I thought again of the looks on those students' faces who were participating in the active shooter drill. I thought of how much responsibility they seemed to hold on their shoulders. My two main characters, Quinn and Cora, were born out of that. How young people feel this pressure to fix a problem that shouldn't be theirs.

I do not think young people should have to solve this problem of gun violence, and the adjacent problem of toxic masculinity. But I also believe so much in the power of young people to change our world for the better. My goal is to write a book that holds space for a discussion of these topics, these tough things that we grown-ups often create silence around because they make us uncomfortable. I don't have all the answers, but I believe that our kids do. And we can't move forward if we shroud our kids in silence.

Thank you for reading this book. I hope you'll have this conversation with me. Let's ask big questions. Let's listen to our young people. I think it's important.

Much love,

JASMINE



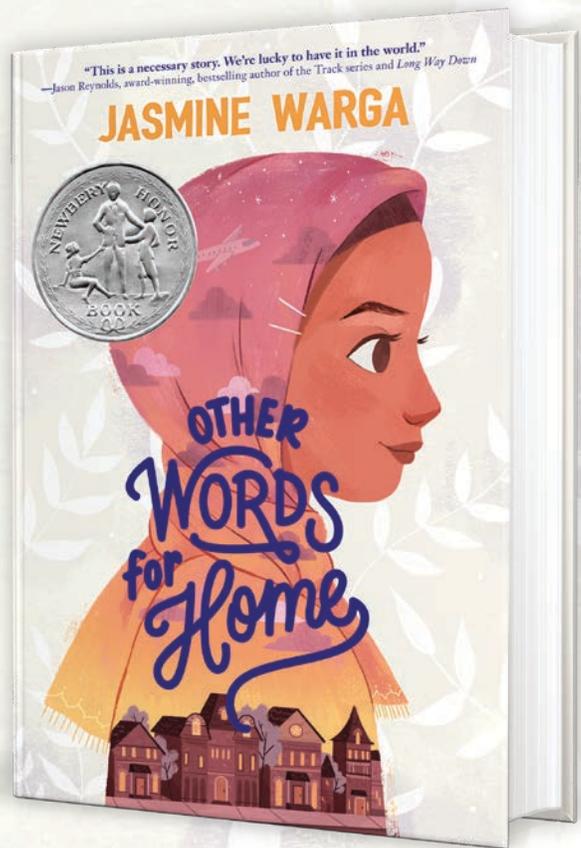
OTHER WORDS for Home

ABOUT THE BOOK

When the civil war comes too close to her hometown in Syria, Jude travels with her mother to stay with an uncle in the United States, leaving her father and brother behind. While worrying about the family and home she's left behind, Jude adjusts to a new society and its labels, a new school, new ways to express herself, and new friends. She may even turn her unwelcoming American cousin into an ally. In lovely lyrical verse that cuts to the heart of how we build barriers and how we break them down, Warga presents a memorable protagonist of inspiring courage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jude's brother and father argue over how the people should handle the revolution, while Jude just wants peace at home (pp. 16-17, pp. 29-33). How does the revolution affect each member of the family differently? Why do you think families become divided over opinions about how their country should be?
2. When they land in the United States, Jude says "It is strange to feel lucky / for something that is making my heart feel so sad" (p. 66). Describe her mix of emotions about leaving home, and how her struggle evolves (pp. 168, 170). Have you heard or read about similar mixed feelings in other refugees' stories? How do you decide whether you are lucky or unlucky when your feelings are mixed?
3. Jude's mom tells her, "Americans don't have much history / so they like things that are old" (p. 74). Did you ever consider the United States as being young compared to other countries? In poem IX on p. 80, and in XIII on p. 91, Jude describes some first impressions and closer observations of America. How do her descriptions affect your view of the United States?
4. From the time they arrive in the United States, both Jude and her mom struggle with the idea of loyalty to home. Jude doesn't want to seem too impressed by her uncle's house (p. 76), and her mom resists forgetting home (pp. 88, 90, 96). How do their ideas of what home means change as they grow accustomed to living in the United States? Who and what help Jude see that she doesn't have to choose only one?
5. How does Jude's friendship with Layla change Jude's feelings about belonging in America? What is Layla's biggest struggle as a daughter of immigrants?
6. Jude thinks of Arabic proverbs to explain puzzling behavior she sees in other people. Discuss the proverb "He cannot give what he does not have" (p. 180). How does this help her understand her cousin and her uncle? What does this proverb mean to you?
7. When Jude begins wearing hijab, many people look at her differently, and even her aunt suspects that she has been forced or pressured to wear it. How is this reception different than what she would have received in Syria? What do you think of her decision to wear hijab even though people don't understand it?
8. Why do you think Jude is able to befriend people as different as her cousin Sarah, Layla, and Miles? Do you think it is unusual for people to have such different friends? Are your friends all similar, or different? What are some benefits of having relationships with different kinds of people with different interests?
9. After an attack in a city far away, Layla tells Jude that now she will learn what it means to be Muslim in America. What does she mean? What does Jude discover? What are some acts of kindness that help her and Layla's family get through this difficult time?
10. Discuss the titles given to the parts of the book: Changing, Arriving, Staying, Hoping, Growing, and Living. How do these words reflect Jude's journey from the beginning to the end of the book? Does she change? Do you think her changes are positive?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

From the Outside In. Think about a time when you have joined a new group or environment. It could be a new school, moving to a new city or neighborhood, joining a new sports team or activity, or something else. Try to remember the details you noticed about how people interacted and what the “rules” of the environment were. Write a poem about that environment, or any environment, from the perspective of a newcomer.

See the Real Me. Think of something you enjoy, or a habit you have, that some people don't seem to understand. Use art and/or writing (a short story or poem) to express how that thing makes you feel, and how it is different to you than how it appears to others.

The Bravest, Scariest Thing. Take five minutes to think of the bravest thing you have ever done. Write down what you did on a piece of paper in about five lines, including why it took courage or was a little bit scary. Fold up your paper and put all the papers together in a cup or hat. Everyone take turns picking one out and reading it aloud to the group. If you like, try guessing who wrote which story.

Before the War. Choose a region or country that is affected by war or at war. Do some research to find images and descriptions of what that society and culture were like before the war. You may have to go back many years. Create a collage, short video, or presentation using images and words that describe how the place used to look and the kinds of activities locals and tourists used to do there.

Guide prepared by Autumn Allen, EdM, MA-MFA, educator, writer and critic.
Visit her online at AutumnAllenBooks.com



FIVE QUESTIONS WITH JASMINE WARGA

1. Why did you choose to tell Jude's story in verse?

In my first prose drafts, I struggled to find Jude's voice. Then I had a lightbulb moment. Arabic is such a naturally poetic language, and I thought verse might help me overcome my mental block about writing from the perspective of a character who, unlike me, is not a native English speaker. After that, everything clicked into place.

2. Do you think you could move to a new country?

Whenever I daydream about this, I'm aware it's from a place of immense privilege. I would be moving of my own volition, and in my fantasy I'm set up nicely in terms of housing and other necessities. When I was younger, my father told my brother and me that one of his biggest hopes for us was never to have to know the hardship of being an immigrant. I often think about that, especially now that I'm a parent.

3. Did you have a Mrs. Ravenswood, a teacher who made you feel at home?

I had two. My fifth grade language arts teacher, Mrs. Darling, encouraged me to take pride in my love of reading and writing. And it is impossible to overstate the influence of my high school English teacher, Connie Smith, who fed my spirit as a fledging writer by introducing me to books and poems that weren't part of the curriculum but that she somehow knew I needed to read.

4. After publishing two YA novels, what did you have to learn about middle grade?

So much! About voice, structure—you name it. And I'm still learning.

5. Have you ever been The New Kid?

In eighth grade, my family moved to a different suburb of Cincinnati. 9/11 happened in my first month of school, and I decided—having absorbed lots of xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric—that I would hide my cultural background from my classmates. I spent that year mostly keeping to myself and doodling during algebra, which is why to this day I can't solve for x .

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Photo by Braxton Black



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

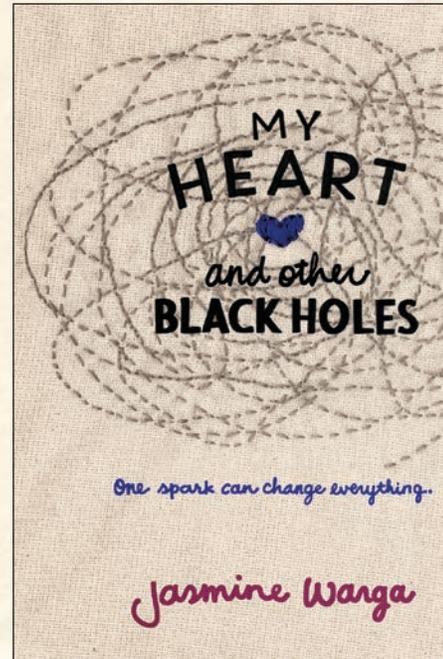
JASMINE WARGA is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Other Words for Home*, a Newbery Honor Book and Walter Honor Book for Younger Readers, and *The Shape of Thunder*. Her teen books, *Here We Are Now* and *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, have been translated into over twenty-five languages. She lives in the Chicago area with her family.

You can visit Jasmine online at www.jasminewarga.com.

FOR TEEN READERS



“A WELL-EXECUTED FAMILY DRAMA of the power of romantic and parental love, secrets, regrets, and new beginnings.”—*Kirkus Reviews*



★ **“At times POIGNANT, BITTER, AND FUNNY,** this narrative captures [a] unique voice that questions what it means to die—and to live.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)