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# The Reading List

by Sara Nisha Adams

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## About the Book

**An unforgettable and heartwarming debut about how a chance encounter with a list of library books helps forge an unlikely friendship between two very different people in a London suburb.**

Widower Mukesh lives a quiet life in Wembley in West London after losing his beloved wife. He shops every Wednesday, goes to Temple, and worries about his granddaughter, Priya, who hides in her room reading while he spends his evenings watching nature documentaries.

Aleisha is a bright but anxious teenager working at the local library for the summer when she discovers a crumpled-up piece of paper in the back of *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*. It's a list of novels that she's never heard of before. Intrigued, and a little bored with her slow job at the checkout desk, she impulsively decides to read every book on the list, one after the other. As each story gives up its magic, the books transport Aleisha from the painful realities she's facing at home.

When Mukesh arrives at the library, desperate to forge a connection with his bookworm granddaughter, Aleisha passes along the reading list...hoping that it will be a lifeline for him too. Slowly, the shared books create a connection between two lonely souls, as fiction helps them escape their grief and everyday troubles and find joy again.

## Discussion Guide

1. Which books on the reading list had you read? Were any of them particular favorites of yours? Were there any titles that were new to you?
2. When he picks up *THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE*, Mukesh reflects that "this book felt like one little glimpse into Naina's soul, into their marriage, their life together." Is there a single book that would offer that same insight into your

soul or your life? How does the experience of reading these books help Mukesh process his grief and loneliness after Naina's death?

3. Part of the reason Mukesh is compelled to begin reading is because his granddaughter, Priya, is an avid reader. The author, Sara Nisha Adams, says that this novel was partly inspired by the way she bonded with her own grandfather through their shared love of books. Are there people in your life who you share the world of books with?

4. Aleisha's mother, Leilah, is often barely functional because of mental illness, and Aleisha always craves a connection with her. "She believed the book...and the list...they might bring her mother back to her." Does Leilah draw closer to Aleisha? What does reading do for their fractured mother-daughter relationship?

5. Aleisha blames herself for Aiden's suicide: "I missed so much. I just had my head stuck in those books." Was Aiden's death a surprise to you as well? Is Aleisha being unfair to herself?

6. In her despair after losing her brother, Aleisha thinks: "But what good were books now? The characters she loved in them were fake, they'd never be able to fix anything. They'd never live beyond the page. But the person she'd loved who had existed in the real world --- he was now gone." Is this fair?

7. Mukesh later consoles Aleisha by saying: "Please try to remember that books aren't always an escape; sometimes books teach us things. They show us the world; they don't hide it." What did books teach or reveal to the different characters in this novel? Which books have had that effect in your own life?

8. Even though reading is a solitary activity, in this book it helps bring people together. How does the list affect the larger community where Aleisha and Mukesh live?

9. Aleisha tells Mukesh: "No one can ever really understand what other people have gone through. But people should try." Do books help foster that empathy? Do the different people in this book come out at the end having greater understanding of one another because they've really tried? What about Mukesh and his daughters? Aleisha and Leilah?

10. How does the experience of reading help push Mukesh towards Nilakshi? Is that what Naina would have wanted for him? How does her letter at the end confirm that?

11. What do you think will become of these characters in the years after this book ends? What sort of future do you envision for them?

12. If you could compose your own reading list, which books would be on it, and why?

## Author Bio

Sara Nisha Adams is a writer and editor. She lives in London and was born in Hertfordshire to Indian and English parents. She is the author of the novels *THE READING LIST* and *THE TWILIGHT GARDEN*.

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