

# THREE SUMMERS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Three Summers* is the story of five cousins who grow closer than sisters as ethnic tensions escalate over three summers in 1980s Bosnia. They navigate the joys and pitfalls of adolescence on their family's little island in the middle of the Una River. When finally confronted with the harsh truths of the adult world around them, their bond gives them the resilience to discover and hold fast to their true selves.

With incredible warmth and tenderness, Amra Sabic-El-Rayess takes readers on a journey that will break their hearts and put them back together again. This is perfect for fans of other true stories for middle graders, like *Free Lunch*, *When Stars Are Scattered*, and *Hey, Kiddo*.



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



AMRA SABIC-EL-RAYESS grew up in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Currently she is a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College working on understanding how and why societies fall apart and what role education can play in rebuilding decimated countries. She is also the author of the critically acclaimed memoir *The Cat I Never Named*. [sabicelrayess.org](http://sabicelrayess.org)



LAURA L. SULLIVAN is a former newspaper editor, biologist, social worker, and deputy sheriff who writes because storytelling is the easiest way to do everything in the world. She lives on the Florida coast.



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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning of the book, Amra's mom is described as practical, someone who doesn't believe in magic. Despite this, she allows the fortune-teller to read her palm. Why do you think she doesn't pull her hand away?
2. Amra states that she always expects anyone who is different to get picked on. Why do you think differences are often pointed out negatively? How do you think this mindset could be changed?
3. Aida introduces herself to Amra's family as Dida, but Amra continues to call her both Aida and Dida. Why doesn't Amra choose one name to call her?
4. In Bosnia, drinking coffee is an important part of socializing and bonding. Do you have anything in your life that you use as a way to bond with others?
5. Sado and Azra are especially cruel to Amra and other family members, yet they are incredibly concerned with appearances. Why do you think they are like this?
6. Amra often has the sense that something terrible is about to happen because of what she's been through. What effect does that have on her relationship with her family and how she makes new relationships?
7. Žana's mother speaks in two different dialects: the Serbian dialect *ekavica* and the Bosnian *ijekavica* dialect. Amra says that both dialects sound fake coming from Aida. Why do you think that is?
8. Soon after Amra forms her connection with Žana, she is able to become friends with Mersia and Hana. How has Žana changed Amra's outlook, and how do these other friendships shape Amra?
9. After spending time with her aunt Dika, Amra asks herself, "How do we define ourselves, and how do we let others define us?". What role does this question play in the book and how would you answer this question?
10. Within the story, Amra consistently believes that you can't judge someone based on their decisions if you don't know what path they've walked in life. This is being brought up often in the case of her friend Hana. How did Amra develop this worldview? Do you agree with it?
11. What lessons have you learned from the characters in this story that are relevant to your own experiences?
12. Why are bonds with our peers, like Amra's sisterhood with her cousins, so vital in defining who we become?

