

DISCUSSION GUIDE

In the Time of Our History

- *In the Time of Our History* tells the story of a secular and educated immigrant family, most of whose members have resettled in the United States because of a revolution that gave rise to a brutal regime in Iran. Can you imagine yourself in a similar situation? How do you think you would cope with exile and migration to a foreign country? Many of the Jahanis cling to old traditions to retain a sense of belonging. Which beliefs and norms would you try to preserve?
- How does the novel explore the theme of culture clashes within an Iranian American family? How do the characters navigate these conflicts and what do they learn from them?
- How do the roles imposed on women within the Iranian culture affect the female characters in the novel? How do they push against or conform to these expectations?
- Mitra and Anahita are first-generation Americans, while the rest of the Jahanis are immigrants. What are some of the ways the sisters are different from the others? Do you think the presence of the extended family in their lives influenced their personalities and choices?
- Mitra and Anahita's childhood relationship was strained, as many sibling relationships are. As adults, however, they have a strong and loving bond. Do you think this would have been the case if Mitra had not discovered Kareem molesting Anahita?
- Revelation and growth are themes for many of this novel's characters. Could you relate to Shireen's journey away from stalwart wife toward independent woman? If Anahita and the children hadn't died, do you think Shireen would have taken this path?
- In the novel, one of the characters says patriarchy cannot exist without the collusion of women. What do you think is meant by this?
- What is the significance of the setting in the late 1990s, both in terms of the historical context and the way it shapes the characters' experiences?



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- How do the relationships between characters evolve throughout the course of the novel? How do they change and what causes these changes?
- How does the novel explore the concept of creating a home in the world? How do the characters define and strive for a sense of home, and what happens when their expectations are not met?
- The romance between Mitra and Julian is complex. While their devotion to each other may run true and deep, there are obstacles that stand in the way of a future for them together. Do you think these obstacles could have been overcome?
- Yusef is depicted mostly as a ruthless and narcissistic patriarch, not to mention a cold and unfaithful husband, yet he also has a traumatic history. Did this history of trauma excuse any of his behavior? Does he achieve some redemption in your mind in the end?
- Both Salimeh and Zoya are refugees. How are they similar? How are they different? If they wound up on your doorstep, would you help one or both or neither?
- Do you think Kareem was let off too easily? If so, how do you think he should have paid for his actions?
- What was your reaction to this sentence at the beginning of Part 3? “He understood that in all but a few earthly societies, rebellion in women is the same as insanity.”
- In what ways do you think Anahita’s trauma played a role in her decision to pursue a relationship with Aden? How do you think the story would have been different if Anahita hadn’t kept so many secrets from Mitra?
- Did reading *In the Time of Our History* alter your view of Iran and/or Iranians?

