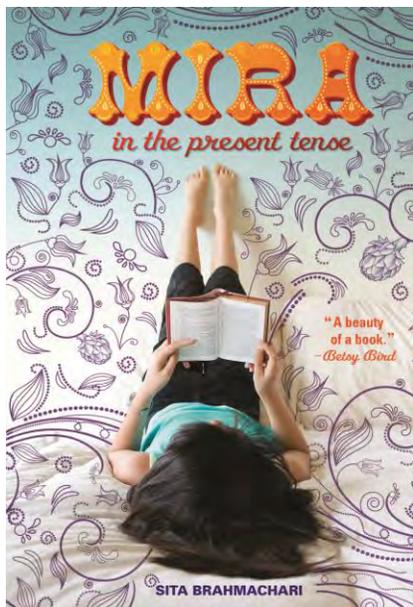


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Discussion Guide for Mira in the Present Tense by Sita Brahmachari



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Ages: 9-13, Grades: 4-7

Twelve-year-old Mira comes from a chaotic, artistic, and outspoken family in which it's not always easy to be heard. As her beloved Nana Josie's health declines, Mira begins to discover the secrets of those around her and also starts to keep some of her own. She is drawn to mysterious Jide, a boy who is clearly hiding a troubled past. As Mira is experiencing grief for the first time, she is also discovering the wondrous and often mystical world around her. An incredibly insightful, honest novel exploring the delicate balance—and often injustice—of life and death. But at its heart, it's a celebration of friendship, culture—and life.

Winner of the 2011 Waterstone's Children's Book Award in the UK (as *Artichoke Hearts*)

Reviews

“Puberty, first-love and a grandparent's death figure in this gentle coming-of-age debut from the U.K., winner of Waterstone's Children's Book Prize in 2011. . . .Movingly portrayed in realistic detail, (Nana Josie's) looming death and Mira's sorrow are the novel's strong suit.—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Like a 21st century version of Margaret Simon (*Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret?*), Mira is a likeable, endearing, and poignant character who will have readers laughing, crying, and loving.”—Jeanette Larson, blogger for *ReaderKidZ* and ALSC

“Heart and hope are applied in equal portions in Brahmachari's quiet treatise on growing up and apart from the ones you love. A beauty of a book.”—Betsy Bird, blogger and librarian, New York Public Library

Common Core State Standards

CCR-RL.6-12.1,2,3,4,5,6,10

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Mira keep her first period a secret? Why does she keep her growing relationship with Jide a secret?
2. Mira writes: “When I read something in the present tense, I can disappear into it, like I do when I'm painting. It's as if I don't exist anymore; I just get lost somewhere in there among the characters...” Does reading a story written in the present tense seem more interesting than the one written in the past tense?

3. Hearts and heart imagery are a major theme throughout the story – Nana’s pendant, Millie’s family history, and Nana’s “necessary heartbreak” theory for example. How do these images tie Mira to each of the other characters in the book?
4. Another major theme of the book is time – how it moves, when and how slowly, the dates in the diary, aging and growing up; even Ben’s claim that nothing ever happens to him is a comment on how time moves for him. Discuss one of Mira’s observations on the passage of time and how it relates to her own personal growth in the story.
5. Have you ever noticed how the passage of time affects things in your own life? For instance, how some days seem to last forever and others zoom past or how an hour spent with friends seems so much shorter than an hour spent on chores. Discuss how this affects your experience in situations that move faster or slower than usual.
6. After speaking at Nana’s funeral, Mira thinks to herself, “I know that I will never piece it all together, her like, because only the pieces I have belong to me.” What does she mean? Do you agree? Use a specific example from your own life.

Writing prompts from the book

1. Write in a diary or journal every day for one month.
2. “Names hold histories, so get digging.” Research the derivation and personal history of both your first and last names.
3. Use a prompt word, like “heart,” write as many words you can think of in fifteen seconds. Exchange your list with another student and discuss one of the words you have in common.
4. Instant writing—Think of person you know and write down the following things about them:
Favorite Color
Personality
What I’ve noticed
What I know
5. Instant writing—Think of a character, and try to imagine:
What animal would he/she most be like?
Vegetable or fruit?
Color?
Place?
6. Pathetic Fallacy: bring an inanimate object to life.

About the Author



Sita Brahmachari was more in England to a Indian doctor and an English nurse. She has a BA in English Literature and an MA in Arts Education. Her many projects and writing commissions have been produced in theaters, universities, schools, and community groups throughout Britain and America. She lives and works in North London with her husband and three children. This is her first book. www.sitabrahmachari.com