



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MEHNDI BOY

by Zain Bandali

illustrated by Jani Balakumar

Discussion questions by Sheniz Janmohamad

GENRE: chapter book, middle-grade fiction

THEMES: self-esteem, Indo East-African, Ismaili Muslim, LGBT, creativity, family, gender

SUITABLE FOR: Grades 1–6, Ages 6–11

GUIDED READING LEVEL: Fountas and Pinnell K

LEXILE: 790L

COMMON CORE STANDARDS: RL.2.2.1,2,3,4,5,6,7
W.2.1,3,5,6
SL.2.1,1a,1b,1c,2,3,4,5,6
L.2.2,3,4,4a,4b,4c,4d,4e,5,5a,5b,6

SUMMARY:

An artistic, fashion-loving boy unlocks a new talent—and learns to stand up for it.

Tehzeeb drew curvy clouds, grand galaxies, squirmy squiggles, and delicate dots. He made charming checkerboards and even perfected paisleys. His practice was finally paying off!

The first time Tehzeeb tries mehndi, his passion for the art form blossoms. Soon, he's creating designs for all his friends and family, and dreams of becoming the most in-demand mehndi artist in town. So Tez is hurt and confused when his favorite uncle tells him mehndi isn't for boys. His art brings people joy. How could it be wrong? Tehzeeb doesn't want to disappoint his uncle. But when a crisis before his cousin's wedding puts his talents to the test, Tehzeeb must find the courage to be his true creative self.

Jani Balakumar's expressive, vibrant illustrations bring Tehzeeb's designs—and his community—to life. This charming, affirming story by Zain Bandali will have you celebrating creativity, artistic expression, and being unapologetically yourself.

Please remember that the suggested questions are meant to serve as a starting point. Educators are encouraged to select questions that work best for their style of teaching and will help them meet their goals when covering the topics in this book. Questions and prompts should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Navroz and how do Tezheeb and his family celebrate it?
 - Do you have a special way of welcoming spring? How do you celebrate its arrival?
2. Tezheeb greets his mom in the morning by saying “Ya Ali Madad” (May Ali help you). Phrases in languages like Swahili, Arabic, Kutchi, Gujarati, and Hindi are used throughout the story.
 - Do you speak another language? Which languages do you speak?
 - How do you greet your family members in your language?
3. When Tezheeb first started doing mehndi, he was disappointed that his designs weren’t perfect. He recalled Ayaz Uncle’s words: “Practice makes progress.”
 - Do you practice an art, a sport, or another activity? What is it?
 - Take a moment to remember what it was like when you first started.
 - How have things changed? How might you apply “Practice makes progress” to your activity?
4. What are some of the wedding traditions in Tezheeb’s family?
 - What are some wedding traditions in your family or culture?
5. Ayaz Uncle tells Tehzeeb, “mehndi is for girls and ladies. Boys don’t wear mehndi. It’s just . . . it’s just . . . wrong.”
 - Why do you think Ayaz Uncle feels it’s wrong for boys to wear mehndi?
 - Have you ever been told that you can’t do something because of your gender?
 - What happened? How did you deal with it?
6. Have you been in a situation where you had to confront your fear, like Tezheeb did in the limo on Rahima’s wedding day?
 - What happened, and what did you do?

7. Tezheeb looks up to Rahima, Ayaz Uncle, and Jenny Bai in different ways. In what ways did Tezheeb look up to each of these people differently?
 - Do you have an older family member or family friend whom you look up to?
 - What inspires you about them?

8. “Tezheeb dove into the sherwani. It glimmered like a ruby in the rays of the afternoon sun shining into his bedroom.”
 - Do you have a favorite outfit? Describe it in detail.
 - How does it make you feel when you put it on?

9. What is mehndi and when is it used?
 - Have you ever tried mehndi? If you could, what kinds of designs and patterns would you like?

10. What are you still curious about after finishing the book?

