

THE HENNA WARS

Adiba Jaigirdar

Hodder Children's Books
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Themes

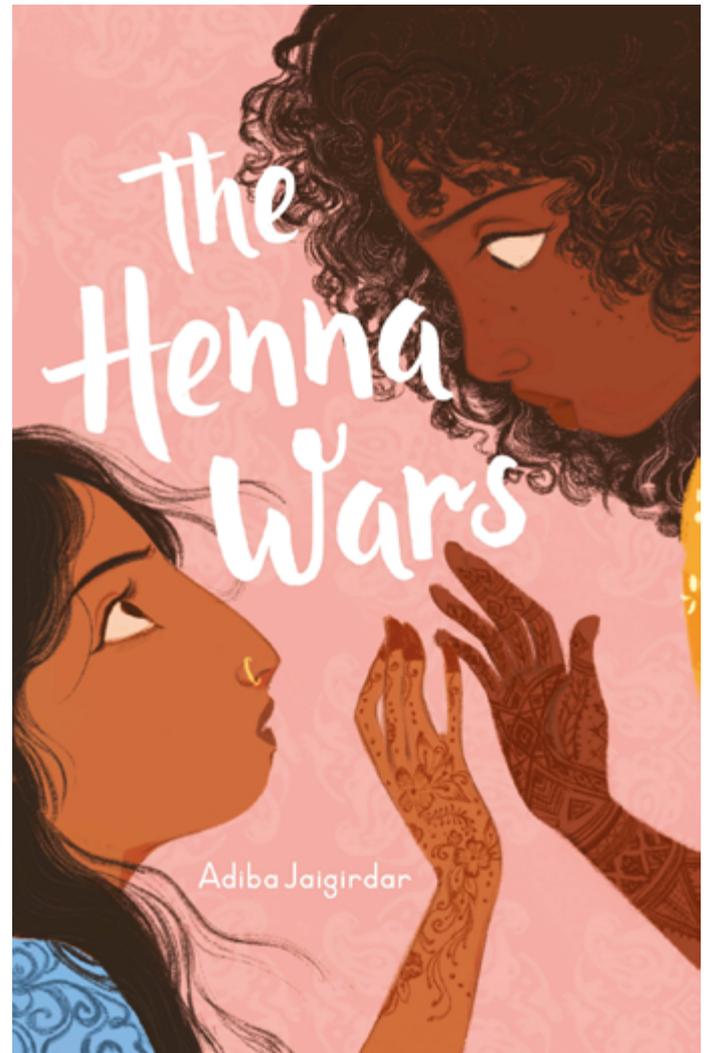
- Family relationships
- Friendship
- Coming out
- Homophobia
- Racism
- Bullying
- Migration
- Cultural appropriation
- Identity

Summary Nishat's parents say she can be anyone she wants – as long as she isn't a lesbian. She doesn't want to lose her family, but she also doesn't want to hide who she is, which only gets harder once Flávia walks into her life. Beautiful and charismatic, Flávia takes Nishat's breath away. But as their lives become tangled, they're caught up in a rivalry that gets in the way of any feelings they might have for each other. Can Nishat find a way to be true to herself ... and find love too?

Judges' Comments Bangladeshi-Irish teenager Nishat decides to tell her parents that she is a lesbian, but things don't really turn out as she'd hoped. When she begins to fall for her classmate and then (Transition Year) business rival Flávia, life becomes even more complicated, and she must figure out who she is and what she ultimately desires. Jaigirdar's wonderfully written and original text is an important story of first love that also explores issues of religion, race, sexuality, cultural appropriation and identity formation in contemporary Irish society.

About the Author

Adiba Jaigirdar is a critically acclaimed, bestselling author. A Bangladeshi-Irish writer and teacher, she has an MA in postcolonial studies from the University of Kent, England, and a BA in English and history from University College Dublin, Ireland. All of her writing is aided by tea and a healthy dose of Janelle Monáe and Hayley Kiyoko. When not writing, she is probably ranting about the ills of colonialism, playing video games or expanding her overflowing lipstick collection.



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What is your first impression when you see the cover?
2. What do you think this book is going to be about?
3. Where and when do you think the book is set?
4. Does the cover remind you of any other book covers?
5. Who is the target audience of this book, in your opinion?
6. If you saw this book in a bookshop or library, would you pick it up?
7. What usually appeals to you in a book cover?

AS YOU READ

Chapters 1–5

1. We learn a lot about Nishat's family background in the first couple of pages. Do you see any parallels with your own family? Has anyone in your family moved to or from another country?
2. How do you feel about Nishat's parents' reaction when she comes out to them?
3. Have you ever been to a wedding? Were there similarities with the wedding described in chapters 2 and 3?
4. Why does Priti react the way she does when she first meets Flávia, do you think?
5. Nishat and Flávia are preparing to go back to school at the end of the summer holidays. How do you usually feel when summer is over?

Chapters 6–10

1. Nishat remembers a painful incident with Flávia's cousin, Chyna, a few years previously. Why was Nishat upset by Chyna's actions?
2. What impresses Nishat about Ms Montgomery's teaching methods? Have you had any exceptional teachers? What made them exceptional?
3. Nishat and Flávia discuss diversity in their school and in Dublin in general. Do you live in a diverse area and is there much diversity in your school?
4. How does Nishat feel after her conversation with her grandmother?
5. Priti is very proud of her Instagram following. Do you use any social media platforms? What do you post on them?

Chapters 11–14

1. Why does Chyna mispronounce Nishat's name? How do you think this makes Nishat feel?
2. Flávia asks Nishat what her type of party is. What's your type of party?
3. Why is henna so important to Nishat? And why doesn't Flávia understand why Nishat is upset?

Chapters 15–18

1. Nishat and Priti are very close. Can you think of other books and films that show strong sibling relationships?
2. The book contains descriptions of several houses: Nishat's, Chyna's, Flávia's. Why does the author include these descriptions?
3. Why is the relationship between Flávia and Chyna complicated?
4. Nishat and Priti use Skype to keep in touch with their grandmother. If you have relatives far away, how do you stay in touch?
5. Do you agree with Nishat's not wanting to tell the school principal when a text is sent to the whole school outing her?

Chapters 19–26

1. How do you think Nishat's parents feel when they are called in by the principal?
2. What do you think of Nishat's decision to steal the henna tubes from Flávia's locker?
3. How does Nishat feel after her conversation with Flávia during French class?
4. How does Nishat's visit to Flávia's house help her to understand Flávia better?
5. How do you think Priti feels when Nishat finds out that Ali sent the text?
6. Why is Nishat so happy that her classmates like her henna?

Chapters 27–34

1. Nishat and Flávia finally kiss after a few interrupted attempts. This often happens in book or film rom-coms. Are there any other features of rom-coms that you've noticed in this book?
2. Why is Flávia reluctant to tell Chyna about her sexuality?
3. When Nishat is doing henna, she forgets about the world around her. Do you have any interests or hobbies that you can lose yourself in?

4. Why is Nishat so angry when Chyna says that henna is trendy?
5. How do Nishat's mother's experiences with her own parents influence how she feels about Nishat coming out?
6. How do Nishat's parents show they are beginning to feel differently about Nishat's sexuality?
7. What do you think of the ending of the book?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. What were your overall impressions of the book? Did you enjoy it? Would you recommend it to your friends?
2. Did it remind you of any other books you have read or films you have seen?
3. What scenes stand out?
4. If the book was made into a film or TV show, what songs or music would you use as the soundtrack?

ACTIVITIES

- Fast forward ten years. What sort of lives do you think Nishat and Flávia will be living, and what will the relationship between them be?
- Interview someone you know who has moved to or from another country. Ask them about their experiences of settling in to a new place.
- Imagine you were invited to take part in a transition-year business competition. Put a business plan together.
- Are there any aspects of your culture that you think are special, like Nishat feels about henna?
- It is unusual to get a Bangladeshi-Irish perspective in a young adult book. What other voices are not heard enough in YA books in your opinion?
- Try telling the story from the point of view of one of the other characters – for example, Chyna or Ali.
- Bollywood movies are mentioned several times in this book. If you have never seen a Bollywood movie, find one and watch it.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Check out *The Henna Wars* discussion questions on the Hachette Schools website: <https://www.hachetteschools.co.uk/hachette-schools-posts/2021/01/12/the-henna-wars-discussion-questions/>
- Find a list of some Bengali books on Adiba Jaigirdar's website: <https://adibajaigirdar.com/bengali-books>
- For a selection of eighty-four LGBTQ+ inclusive books for young readers, celebrating love, acceptance and family, see Children's Books Ireland's Rainbow Reads: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/rainbow-reads>
- Check out Children's Books Ireland *Free To Be Me* reading guide, which highlights books that celebrate diversity, representation and inclusion for children and young people aged 0–18: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/free-be-me-reading-guide-2021>
- BeLonG To offers support and advice to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people in Ireland: www.belongto.org