

# UNDER THIS FORGETFUL SKY



An Educator's Guide

Discussion & Reflection Questions

Essay Topics & Creative Writing Prompts

*Young Adult Fiction – Speculative – Latine – Coming of Age*

Atheneum Books for Young Readers | Hardcover, 416 pages | July 2023 | \$19.99|

ISBN:9781665913799 | Ages 14+ | Grades 9 and up

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Two teens journey across near-future Chile seeking a cure for a deadly virus in this star-crossed coming-of-age love story. One of them needs the cure to save his father; the other is working in secret for the very same rebels who infected his father in the first place. With powerful forces putting them at odds, can the two learn to trust in each other—enough to imagine a different world?

*Content Warnings: violence, coercion, prescription drug misuse, strong language (in English and Spanish).*

## KEY TOPICS

Inequality

Cultural Identity/Heritage

Mental Health

Individual vs. Greater Good

Environmentalism(s)

Rebellion

Climate Change

Disability

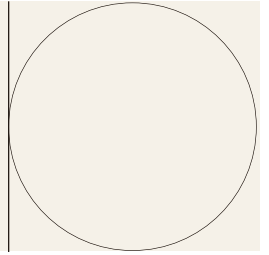
Diaspora

Dystopia

Survivalism

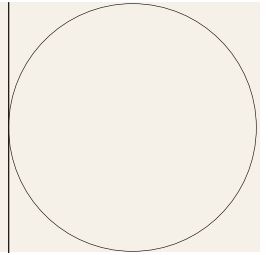
Technology

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Why do you think this novel is told from multiple perspectives? How would your experience of the novel change if you only had Rumi's or Paz's point of view? Did you prefer one character's point of view over the other? Why?
2. How does Rumi's perception of Lower City change over the course of the novel? What factors influence this change?
3. Let's talk about symbols. A symbol is defined as an object, character, image, or other motif that has a literal meaning in the story while also standing in for other, bigger ideas. What do you think the well in the Storyteller's tale symbolizes? Name two other important symbols in the novel and explore what you think they represent.
4. What do you think of Rumi's decision to leave Upper City at the beginning of the novel? How is that decision different from his choice to leave again at the end of the novel?
5. Dramatic irony occurs in a work of literature when you as the reader know more about an event or situation in the story than the characters do. Identify one place in the novel where dramatic irony plays a significant role in your experience of the story.
6. Identify one scene in the novel when Paz's feelings about Rumi change. What are the causes of this change?
7. Consider these words from Paz on page 116: "*Las Oscuras kills without caring for their own kind. They're martyrs, you could say—they kill ready to die. If everybody in their ranks got killed but the walls of Upper City toppled, Las Oscuras would call it a victory.*" Does Paz continue to believe this sentiment throughout the book? If not, what makes her change her mind?
8. The Library elders argue that they are helping the people of Lower City by working with the Upper City government. Do you agree? Why or why not?
9. How would you identify the antagonist of *Under This Forgetful Sky*? Is it a character or characters? A force? An idea?
10. What is the Storyteller's role in the novel? Why are the stories she tells significant? How does she change over the course of the novel, and what causes this change?
11. What do you think happens at the end of the novel? Does the Storyteller really help Paz and Auralee escape? What makes you think this?

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS



1. By the end of the novel, Rumi comes to strongly disagree with his father on the issue of Lower City. Do you and your family disagree about anything when it comes to big issues in the world? What issues, and why do you think you disagree? Do you ever discuss issues about which you strongly disagree? Why or why not?
2. On page 346, Rumi's father says, "*Upper Cities everywhere are reaching their energy capacity. We have no choice but to expand... The invisible hand of the market doesn't negotiate, Rumi. Its demands must be met.*" Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?  
  
Later, on page 347, Rumi imagines this same invisible hand "*floating over the trash hills. Beneath it, kids were sweating and coughing, searching for scraps. But the hand wasn't flesh and blood. It couldn't be scorched or poisoned. It didn't cough. It didn't hunger. It couldn't be held responsible.*" What do you think Rumi means by this?
3. Which character in the novel do you find you identify with most closely? Reflect on why you feel a strong affinity with this character.
4. Think back to the scene where Paz and Rumi are together at the clock tower. Each must make a decision that will dramatically affect the rest of their lives. Choose one of the two options below and reflect on what you would do in this scenario and, especially, *why*?
  - What would you do in this moment if you were Rumi?
  - What would you do in this moment if you were Paz?
5. Over the course of the novel, Rumi and Paz learn to care for each other deeply, despite their different backgrounds. Are there people in your life who come from different backgrounds than you? In what ways are you different from them (i.e. are your differences primarily cultural, political, economic, religious...)? How do these differences impact your relationship? What have you learned from each other?
6. How is the reality of people from Lower City different from/similar to the realities of marginalized groups around the world today? Think of one similarity or difference to explore in depth with your comparison.
7. Rumi learns about his cultural heritage through his grandfather because his Pakistani heritage has largely been erased in Upper City. Do you have someone in your life who has helped you connect with and learn about your own culture? What is one thing you've learned from them?

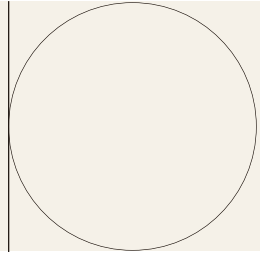
# ESSAY TOPICS

1. Consider the statement *the ends justify the means*. Using examples, reflect on the ways this statement relates to the ideologies of Las Oscuras, the Library elders, and the Governance of Upper City.
2. Consider the statement: *Upper City was justified in building walls*. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer using examples from the text and from at least one of the following: from history, from current events, and/or from your own lived experience.
3. Explore the ways that Rumi and Paz change over the course of the novel. Identify at least three key moments where you notice this change occurring in each of them. What is it about these moments that brings about change in each of their characters?

## **College Prep Essay Topics**

1. Compare and contrast imperialism and colonialism. What similarities exist between these systems of power? What are the differences? How do imperialism and colonialism shape the world depicted in *Under This Forgetful Sky*?
2. In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon describes the conflict between “the tenacity of corporeal memory and the corrosive power, over time and space, of corporate amnesia” (51).
  - a.) Interpret this quote into your own words. What is Nixon saying here about memory and forgetting?
  - b.) Explore the contrast between memory and forgetting in the novel. Which characters in the novel get to (or are forced to) “remember” the past? Which characters get to (or are forced to) “forget” the past? How does this remembering and forgetting play out (physically, emotionally, culturally, intellectually, etc.)

# CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS



1. Choose one character from *Under This Forgetful Sky* and write a chapter from their point of view, picking up their story after the timeline of the book ends.
2. Write a new Storyteller chapter. Base your story on one of the following characters: Rumi, Auralee, Baba, Javi, or Beto.
3. Write a short story from the perspective of someone living during the time of the Breach. In your story, explore your character's perspective on what occurred during the Breach and what it was like to live through that time. Does your character ultimately end up in living Upper City or in Lower City? How do they feel about where they ended up?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Lauren Yero** is a Cuban American writer and teacher living in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She writes speculative, near-future stories of resistance, adventure, and first love that question the structures our world is built upon. Born in Florida, she received her BA from Davidson College and her MA in Literature and Environment from the University of Nevada Reno. Her desire to connect more deeply with her Cuban roots led her to study and work throughout the Spanish-speaking world—including Chile, where she drew inspiration for her debut novel *Under This Forgetful Sky*.

In addition to writing, she teaches at a small farm-and-arts school in the beautiful rural county she calls home. She shares a small homestead with her husband, two kids, two pups, ten chickens, five geese, two ducks, and a couple hundred thousand honeybees.