



Summary

Widower Mukesh lives a quiet life in Wembley, in West London after losing his beloved wife. He shops every Wednesday, goes to Temple, and worries about his granddaughter, Priya, who hides in her room reading while he spends his evenings watching nature documentaries. Aleisha is a bright but anxious teenager working at the local library for the summer when she discovers a crumpled-up piece of paper in the back of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's a list of novels that she's never heard of before. Intrigued, and a little bored with her slow job at the checkout desk, she impulsively decides to read every book on the list, one after the other. As each story gives up its magic, the books transport Aleisha from the painful realities she's facing at home. When Mukesh arrives at the library, desperate to forge a connection with his bookworm granddaughter, Aleisha passes along the reading list hoping that it will be a lifeline for him too. Slowly, the shared books create a connection between two lonely souls, as fiction helps them escape their grief and everyday troubles and find joy again.



About the Author

Sara Nisha Adams is a writer and editor. She lives in London and was born in Hertfordshire to Indian and English parents. Her debut novel *The Reading List* is partly inspired by her grandfather, who lived in Wembley and immediately found a connection with his granddaughter through books.

Discussion Questions

1. Which books on the reading list had you read? Were any of them particular favorites of yours? Were there any titles that were new to you?
2. When he picks up *The Time Traveler's Wife*, Mukesh reflects that "this book felt like one little glimpse into Naina's soul, into their marriage, their life together." Is there a single book that would offer that same insight into your soul or your life? How does the experience of reading these books help Mukesh process his grief and loneliness after Naina's death?
3. Part of the reason Mukesh is compelled to begin reading is because his granddaughter, Priya, is an avid reader. The author, Sara Nisha Adams, says that this novel was partly inspired by the way she bonded with her own grandfather through their shared love of books. Are there people in your life who you share the world of books with?
4. Aleisha's mother, Leilah, is often barely functional because of mental illness, and Aleisha always craves a connection with her. "She believed the book...and the list...they might bring her mother back to her." Does Leilah draw closer to Aleisha? What does reading do for their fractured mother-daughter relationship?
5. Aleisha blames herself for Aiden's suicide: "I missed so much. I just had my head stuck in those books." Was Aiden's death a surprise to you as well? Is Alisha being unfair to herself?
6. Mukesh later consoles Aleisha by saying: "Please try to remember that books aren't always an escape; sometimes books teach us things. They show us the world; they don't hide it." What did books teach or reveal to the different characters in this novel? Which books have had that effect in your own life?
7. Even though reading is a solitary activity, in this book it helps bring people together. How does the list affect the larger community where Aleisha and Mukesh live?

Discussion Questions

8. Aleisha tells Mukesh: “No one can ever really understand what other people have gone through. But people should try.” Do books help foster that empathy? Do the different people in this book come out at the end having greater understanding of one another because they’ve really tried? What about Mukesh and his daughters? Aleisha and Leilah?
9. How does the experience of reading help push Mukesh towards Nilakshi? Is that what Naina would have wanted for him? How does her letter at the end confirm that?
10. If you could compose your own reading list, which books would be on it and why?

Review

Although Sara Nisha Adams makes her authorial debut with *The Reading List*, her connection to the world of books is not new. She has worked as a book editor and attributes her passion for reading to her early childhood, when she bonded with her grandfather over their shared love of literature. Not only did this relationship cultivate a lifelong case of bibliophilia, but it also served as the inspiration for *The Reading List*, a story about two lonely individuals whose initial common ground is, ironically, that neither has any interest in reading.

We first meet Mukesh, a widower who is grieving the passing of his beloved wife (who was a voracious reader) and finds himself increasingly alienated from the rest of his family. Desperate to form a connection with his bookish granddaughter, Mukesh heads to the local library to try to better understand her. There he meets Aleisha, a teenager who dreams of becoming a lawyer and views her summer position at the library with disdain. Following a disastrous first meeting with Mukesh, Aleisha stumbles upon a mysterious list of book titles, which she decides she will recommend to Mukesh and read alongside him as a means of making amends.

What begins as a whim soon transforms into a deeply enriching and gratifying experience. The books act as a lifeline for Mukesh and Aleisha as the two new friends navigate their personal tribulations. Reading is so often viewed as a solitary pursuit, but *The Reading List* turns that idea on its head, illustrating the ways one book can touch many lives and act as a shared point of empathy, uniting disparate individuals into a community.

In Adams' gentle novel, there is no sorrow or trouble so great that a good book—and a supportive friend—cannot help, and it is never too late to become a reader. As an uplifting and tenderhearted celebration of libraries and the transformative power of books, *The Reading List* is particularly perfect for book clubs and sure to brighten any reader's day.