



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR I WAS THEIR AMERICAN DREAM BY MALAKA GHARIB

1. What is the significance of the title? What does the American dream mean to you? What does it mean to other members of your family—parents, siblings, grandparents?
2. What is Malaka’s family like? What are their values? What kind of environment have each of Malaka’s parents tried to create for her and her siblings? From where do you think they draw their strength?
3. What do you think of the graphic memoir format? Do you think the illustrations and interactive elements (the paper dolls, mini-zine, microaggressions bingo, and Tagalog flashcards) enhance or detract from Malaka’s story? Why or why not?
4. As a first-generation Filipino-Egyptian-American living in California, Malaka often felt as if she didn’t belong. As an American visiting her Egyptian family in Cairo, she felt like an outsider, too. How do you think Malaka’s relationship to belonging affected her sense of self?
5. By the time she reaches high school, Malaka has been influenced greatly by the pop culture of the late ’90s and early 2000s. As a young woman of color, one of the things she grapples with is the glorification of whiteness. Did pop culture influence you to act or look a certain way when you were a teenager? Do you remember any positive representation of people of color in the media? How does representation affect the way teenagers think about themselves and the world?
6. In high school, Malaka and her classmates used specific labels to get to know one another. Words like *whitewashed*, *poser*, *banana*, *twinkie*, and *FOB*, each have their own distinct meaning. What do you think of labels—are they helpful? Offensive? Unifying? Divisive?
7. Fill out your own microaggressions bingo. If you had to create your own bingo board, what would be on it?
8. One of the most shareable items from a particular culture is food. What role does food play in Malaka’s story? How does her relationship with food reflect her relationship with her heritage? Does it change over time?
9. Describe the writer’s voice. Which aspects of Malaka’s character do you identify with or like the most, the least?



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10. In the first chapter, Malaka’s mom implores, “You have to be better than us.” What does this mean to you? Has Malaka’s story reflected an answer to her mother’s plea? How? Do you think you are “better” than your parents?

Discussion questions provided by the publisher.



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