

## Ep. 113 | Reading Palestine

[00:00:12] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sumaiyya Naseem. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about books around this month's theme, which is Reading Palestine.

[00:00:26] **Sumaiyya** You can find a complete transcript of this episode on our website, [readingwomenpodcast.com](http://readingwomenpodcast.com). And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:36] **Kendra** Well, how are you doing, Sumaiyya, this lovely summer day?

[00:00:41] **Sumaiyya** I'm fine, newly vaccinated and doing well.

[00:00:46] **Kendra** That's the best kind of summer—vax girl summer. I'm ready.

[00:00:57] **Sumaiyya** I'm ready to stay indoors at all times.

[00:00:59] **Kendra** Yes, it is too hot to be outside. It is just that sticky time of . . . well, I mean, it's the Lowcountry here, so it's always sticky. But it's like it's super hot and sticky time where you walk outside, and you're immediately just drenched.

[00:01:16] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. I mean, Gatsby and I—Gatsby my cat and I—we just stay indoors in our room at all times with the AC turned on. And I still feel really hot sometimes. It's weird.

[00:01:30] **Kendra** Yeah. That is, that is summer. Dylan—because dogs don't sweat, so they overheat really easily—so Dylan's not really allowed to go outside during the middle of the day at all. And he pouts because he wants to sit on the porch and observe the neighbors. And he's not allowed because it's too hot.

[00:01:45] **Sumaiyya** Oh.

[00:01:45] **Kendra** I know. He suffers so much. And if you're newly listening, Dylan is my corgi. And he's very opinionated. So. Like Gatsby. Gatsby is also opinionated.

[00:02:02] **Sumaiyya** He is absolutely adorable. Yeah, we have a really, really amazing fur family within the team. And Gatsby is always judging everyone.

[00:02:13] **Kendra** It's very true. And she looks good while doing it. So very talented. Very talented cat you have. So aside from the weather being hotter, I guess, than it was last month, we have new merch. And so I'm very excited. A friend of mine from PEI, Canada designed a "Reclaim the Bookshelf. Read the World." design for T-shirts and tank tops and sweatshirts. We have a whole range of things in a wide range of sizes as well. There's a tote bag and a mug. And we wanted to do this design specifically for this year's theme of "Read the World" and trying to focus more on international literature. So I'm very pleased with how it turned out. It looks really cute. And I really love my sweatshirt. I just sit in it because it's cold because the AC now, so I just sit in my sweatshirt.

[00:03:14] **Sumaiyya** I think I would get the mug, like I were you. Like, that's the first thing I would buy. Or a tote bag.

[00:03:22] **Kendra** You know, Jaclyn, the tote-bag queen, I see her love of tote bags as well. I am definitely the mug queen. I have a whole cabinet of mugs that I don't even use on a regular basis because I have that many mugs.

[00:03:37] **Kendra** Well, we're very excited to jump into this month's theme, which is Reading Palestine. And like all of our themes, we planned them at the end of last year and anticipate them, I guess, all year long. So, Sumaiyya, I want to talk with you a little bit about why you chose this theme and some background on that.

[00:04:00] **Sumaiyya** So, you know, every year when I'm thinking of the themes that I'll be introducing to the podcast, I try to look for something that's an important historical event. So, for example, in the past we've talked about the Partition of India and Pakistan. So my theme, Reading Palestine, was actually originally meant to be about the Nakba, or the catastrophe, that happened in 1948 when over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced. And many were massacred when the state of Israel was created. But the fact is that the Nakba is not a historical event, and it's an ongoing ethnic-cleansing project carried out by Israel, which is colonizing the Indigenous Palestinians.

[00:04:46] **Sumaiyya** And we have actually become witness to this thanks to social media and the brave Palestinians who are risking their lives to record what's happening in Gaza and Silwan and other occupied regions of Palestine. Right now, actually as we record this episode, there are forty bulldozers in Silwan where 1,500 Palestinians face ethnic cleansing and displacement. The tragedy is that they were actually told to demolish their own homes by yesterday or face upwards of \$20,000 as fines. And the reason for this is that Israel wants to build a theme park in this region, which actually its presence here is illegal by international law. So that's what's happening as we record this.

[00:05:38] **Kendra** Yeah, we're going to talk about some books today written by Palestinians talking about different aspects of Palestinian history and what is going on currently. So we thought it would be good to go over some language today of the terms that were going to be using and different things like that as an introduction to our discussion today.

[00:05:57] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and I think using the correct language is really important because language, as readers know, is very powerful. What's happening is not a conflict. Israel is a settler-colonial project. And Palestinians are the Indigenous people who are being massacred and displaced from their homeland. If you look at the living conditions in Israel, it's very clearly an apartheid that favors settlers. And what's happening in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood is not a real-estate dispute, as an example. It's forced displacement, state-sanctioned violence carried out by settlers against Palestinians. And again, it's settler colonialism. So those are some important terms that I think we should be aware of. And also the fact that this is not a clash. This is very disproportionate violence that is being carried out by Israel against Palestine.

[00:06:47] **Sumaiyya** And so, Kendra, being American, you've learned a lot about the funding that the US government does for Israel. So I was wondering if you could share some action items with our listeners today and what they can do to help Palestinians in their struggle.

[00:07:03] **Kendra** Yes. So one of the things that has been really important to understand—in my research for this theme and just as a better way to educate myself on these issues—is to listen and to read Palestinian writers, to watch documentaries, listen to

podcasts. Whatever your format, there's something out there for you. And if you have questions, just to listen. And like all of our themes, this is really just a starting place. This is just a sampling of Palestinian voices. And so you can take this after you've listened to these episodes. Read these books. There are more there are more resources out there for you so you can educate yourself. And you can also contact your elected representatives. And we will include links in the show notes for more information on that. So you can go check that out.

[00:07:56] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and I think it's also important that we use our own voices and the capacities that we have to amplify what's happening in Palestine in support of Palestinians. So for me, being in the book industry, I consider it my responsibility to amplify the work that's being done by Palestinian fighters and activists, which is why we're doing this theme. And so I do hope that our Reading Palestine episodes will give our listeners a place to start to educate themselves, like you said, and also educate their communities and children and hopefully find ways to stand in solidarity with Palestinians. So for this theme, we're going to be covering a range of books across genres by Palestinian women writers.

[00:08:43] **Kendra** All right, so for our first pick, Sumaiyya, you have that one.

[00:08:48] **Sumaiyya** So my first pick is WE ARE NOT HERE TO BE BYSTANDERS by Linda Sarsour. This was published by 37 INK, an imprint of Simon and Schuster. It's available across all formats. And the audiobook is narrated by Linda Sarsour herself. So Linda Sarsour is an internationally known activist, was famously part of the team of organizers who led the Women's March on Washington. In her memoir, Linda writes about how growing up in Brooklyn, as the eldest daughter of Palestinian immigrants and being a Muslim and Arab American, shaped her journey into becoming an intersectional activist. And she also writes about some of the key moments in her life, including the moment when she decided to wear the hijab and how it made her feel whole and helped her embrace her Muslim identity. So Linda talks about how growing up in a feminist Palestinian household and her childhood trips to Palestine also connected her to her Palestinian identity.

[00:09:48] **Sumaiyya** And I think one of the important aspects of her experience. . . . She is from Brooklyn. And she went to a public school where they had police presence that criminalized Black youth and children from other marginalized communities. I think this made her an intersectional activist who fiercely stands against injustice and inequality faced by marginalized people and communities in America. What I love about her memoir is the way that she shows you how you can contribute to your community and actually make a difference in the world, how simple interactions between people can create ripples of change. I think everyone needs to read Linda's memoir, but especially people who are interested in activism because she details her own journey and lessons that she's learned in the past to becoming a community organizer.

[00:10:38] **Sumaiyya** One of the most essential messages in this book is that we have this need for intersectionality in our activism because our struggles are shared. The Palestinian and Black communities stand united because of the fact that they both face brutality at the hands of the state, and that is a state that is built to discriminate against them. And so they recognize the injustice and fight for each other. I think what colonial states like Israel don't want people to realize is that our struggles are related. Whether you're fighting for women's rights, disabled people's rights, or basic human rights, our paths freedom will be easier when you show up for each other in solidarity. And this is kind of the message that

Linda shares with us in her memoir. So that was **WE ARE NOT HERE TO BE BYSTANDERS** by Linda Sarsour, published by 37 INK, an imprint of Simon and Schuster. So Kendra, you have our next selection for this episode.

[00:11:39] **Kendra** All right. So my first pick is **BADDAWI** by Leila Abdelrazaq. And this is a graphic novel or sort of like a graphic biography from Just World Books. The author is writing about her father's experience of being a Palestinian refugee. And so she wrote this from a child's perspective. And that's really illustrated in the art. A lot of the adults and certain elements of violence that happen are depicted in these vague silhouettes. So you have like soldiers in these silhouettes and then you have people who may have been killed in the silhouettes. And there's a lot of figurative . . . I was about to say "figurative language," but I guess figurative imagery that illustrates the sweeping violence that happens to his family and his community.

[00:12:35] **Kendra** Baddawi is a refugee, kind of, camp where that kind of grew into this city-like atmosphere from, unfortunately, being there for so long. And that's something that the author covers, is that culture around being a Palestinian refugee in a group of refugees and how they thought that they would be going home. And I think that was one of the most impactful things, is that throughout the book, all of them thought that they would be going home soon. But then after 1967, that did not . . . definitely did not happen. And so some of them started moving to other cities like Beirut. And that is what happened to the author's father. And so it was really impactful to read that.

[00:13:25] **Kendra** A book we're going to talk about later covers the time period in Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel. And it kind of . . . it connected the dots, I guess, as far as the timeline for me to read something from different parts of Palestinian history in that way. And I think this is a great book to start a conversation with young people. While there are depictions of violence, again, it's vague and from a child's perspective. So there's not a lot of graphic detail. A lot of the adults in general are in silhouette. And I thought that was a great way to handle the way that a child sees violence and experiences life. And as the author's father gets older throughout the graphic novel, more things come into focus, which is really interesting to see that art style throughout the book.

[00:14:20] **Sumaiyya** That sounds like an incredible graphic novel, and I hope that I'll be able to find a copy soon.

[00:14:25] **Kendra** Yeah, definitely. And I am not sure what countries this is available in, but I did see that it is on things like Book Depository. So if you're in countries that Book Depository reaches, you could get it that way. But it's definitely one that I hadn't heard of until I was doing research. And I think definitely more people should pick it up for sure. So that is **BADDAWI** by Leila Abdulrazaq and is out from Just World Books. And Sumaiyya, you have our first discussion pick.

[00:14:58] **Sumaiyya** So the book that I selected for our discussion is **AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD** by Susan Abulhawa. This was published by Bloomsbury in India. And this book is available across all formats. And the audiobook is narrated by the author herself. Susan Abulhawa is actually one of the best living Palestinian writers in the diaspora. I've been a huge fan of her work for over a decade. And her books have never disappointed me because they are just so impactful in the way that she brings her characters to life and also the way that she writes about Palestine. And I think for anyone who wants to read Palestinian literature, Susan Abulhawa is the perfect author to begin

with because her novels not only documents the experiences of people in Palestine, but also the experiences within the diaspora.

[00:15:48] **Sumaiyya** AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD was actually one of my favorite books last year. And I was surprised that somehow I appreciated it even more when I read it for the second time. Our protagonist is Nahr. She is one of the fiercest and strongest women that we have in contemporary literature. So Nahr is born in Kuwait to Palestinian refugees. And we see her struggle against various systems of oppression, including patriarchy, misogyny, and colonial violence. But despite what she faces, she actually refuses to be a victim and is defiant throughout the narrative. An important aspect of her journey is how she is unwittingly tricked into becoming a sex worker in Kuwait and how her circumstances eventually compel her to take up sex work willingly. Nahr is an unstoppable character. And we see her grow from being in that place where she's vulnerable and taken advantage of to becoming someone who builds her life and becomes a revolutionary fighting against Israel's colonization of Palestine.

[00:16:57] **Sumaiyya** We see her journey from Kuwait to Jordan and then her repatriation to Palestine. And this in itself is a part of the novel that documents the displacement of Palestinians and the trauma that is inherent in that condition when you're in forced exile and you cannot return. The first prime minister of Israel actually said that the old will die and the young will forget. But this novel shows you that the new generation of Palestinians are just as passionate about Palestine and about reclaiming their ancestral land as the older generations. And I think what Israel did not count on is the fact that displaced Palestinians in the diaspora will continue to document and fight for Palestine. And this book is one of the perfect examples of that because Susan Abulhawa documents the injustices faced by Palestinians and also their unwavering spirit in the face of ethnic cleansing and colonization. So that was my discussion pick.

[00:18:01] **Kendra** And it is one of the most beautiful books that I have ever read. And so I'm very excited we're discussing it next episode. So I will save the discussion for then, I guess. But it is so beautiful. And I cannot wait to read more of her books.

[00:18:16] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I'm really looking forward to our discussion episode because there's so much we have to unpack in this book. And it's just brilliantly done. So that was AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD by Susan Abulhawa, published by Bloomsbury in India. And so, Kendra, you have our discussion pick, the second one.

[00:18:37] **Kendra** So my discussion pick is THE PARISIAN by Isabella Hammad. And this is out from Grove in the US, but it's available in multiple countries. I particularly love the UK cover. It's my favorite cover. No offense to Grove or anything, but I do love a good cover.

[00:18:54] **Sumaiyya** The UK cover is the blue one, right?

[00:18:56] **Kendra** Yes! Yes.

[00:18:59] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, that's the one I have.

[00:18:59] **Kendra** Yeah, it's gorgeous. This book is a sweeping historical fiction novel. It is the most wonderful long story that I really love to read, particularly in the summer. And I really love what Isabella Hammad does with this story. We follow a young man named Midhat. And he goes to Paris before World War One. And he goes to Paris to study to be a

doctor. His dad sells textiles, so like cloth, et cetera. And so he is going there to get an education. And the plan. It's for him to come back and to help his family out back in Palestine. So he goes to Paris and really falls in love with a Parisian culture and really just finds a whole new world there that he is completely fascinated with.

[00:19:56] **Kendra** But then World War One happens. And eventually he does have to return home. And he finds the Palestine that he knew totally different as the British have taken over. And colonization is actively happening on an everyday basis. And everything is different. And so when he comes back, he has a reputation as the Parisian. And that's where the title of the book comes from. And one of the things I loved about this book is that Hammad is taking these events that happened in the early twentieth century and laying them out in the story format. And I—particularly when researching books for this theme—I wanted to do something that looked at the history of Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel so that, you know, Palestinians have a unique culture and history. And that's really overshadowed and unfortunately not talked about enough.

[00:21:00] **Kendra** And so I really wanted to be able to take a look at that and what was going on during this time period that the novel was set. So that's what she does. And she gives you like a little timeline in the back of the book so you can check out what happened in history. It was just really a really great resource as well as a great story. And so I really appreciated what Hammad did with the book. So did a bunch of prizes because the book won a lot . . . won a lot of things. And it was shortlisted for a lot of things. Like, it won the Palestine Book Award for fiction and was nominated on the Desmond Elliott Prize longlist. And it won the Plimpton Prize and was shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize. So it's a fantastic, fantastic book. I love it to pieces.

[00:21:47] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And I quickly want to mention that *AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD* also won the Palestine Book Award in 2020. So I love that both of our selections for the discussion episode are actually winners of the Palestine Book Award. Such an amazing coincidence.

[00:22:04] **Kendra** Right? It wasn't even planned. We were just like, "What book do you want to talk about?" "What book do you want to talk about?" And here we are. Both books are so excellent. And I love how they're so different. The styles are so different. But they share a lot of similar themes. And I really enjoyed both of them. And I actually took all of our books that we were reading and read them in chronological order. So I read *THE PARISIAN* and then *BADDAWI* and then *AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD*. So I got the whole timeline of the twentieth century, which is just a nerdy fact. But if you're interested, I would recommend that order.

[00:22:41] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, that actually sounds amazing, and I wish I'd done the same. But I did jump around a bit, which in itself gave me some food for thought when I was going from one book to the other. But, yeah, that's amazing. That's actually a really good idea for anyone who wants to follow along with the episodes that we're doing. And actually, before we move on to our next segment, which is going to be very unique, I quickly wanted to point out the Palestine Book Award has actually announced their shortlist for 2021. And it includes Linda Sarsour's book, the one that I mentioned earlier, *WE ARE NOT HERE TO BE BYSTANDERS*. And it also mentions one of your favorite books, Kendra, the one by Sahar Mustafah.

[00:23:22] **Kendra** Yes. *THE BEAUTY OF YOUR FACE*. I really thought it was a solid debut and there was so much going on. And it was one of those books that I enjoyed and

then was like, wow, if this is the author's first book, then I mean, they have an excellent career ahead of them. So I'm very excited for Sahar Mustafah's career and all sorts of things because it's just . . . there's just something . . . a special spark that her writing has that I really love.

[00:23:49] **Sumaiyya** Yeah. And I quickly want to give a shout out to Sawad Hussain was one of my favorite translators for Arabic. And she is actually one of the judges for the Palestine Book Awards. So it's been amazing to see her work over the years. And I'm just so excited that she got this opportunity.

[00:24:08] **Kendra** So much going on. So we will link that in the show notes. So you can go check out the Palestine Book Awards as well. So that is THE PARISIAN by Isabella Hammad, and that is out from Grove here in the US.

[00:24:20] **Kendra** So our next segment is something a little different. We are both huge fans of Hala Alyan. And I interviewed her earlier this year. And then Sumaiyya did a Q&A with her a few years ago for her debut novel. But Hala is also a poet. And so we thought it would be really cool to discuss one of her poems. And if you are in the US, you can get the poetry collection on audio, which she reads, which is really cool. I'd never read any of her poetry before. But I really, really loved this collection.

[00:24:58] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, I've only read a few of the poems, but I cannot wait to explore the rest of it. She writes beautifully. There's so much strength and power in her words. And I loved the poems that I read. And so today we will be discussing one poem in particular.

[00:25:17] **Kendra** Yes. So we're going to be talking about "Armadillo," which is from the poetry collection, THE TWENTY-NINTH YEAR. She has two other poetry collections, which I have not read. But I'm assuming they're just as fabulous as this one. And so "Armadillo" is about her family and kind of looks at this inside joke that they have about an armadillo. And that kind of is the springboard into other ideas and themes in the poem.

[00:25:45] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and it's done really beautifully because. . . . I actually when I was reading it, I read it several times because there's just so much to unpack in this poem. And then I came back to the first sentence where she says . . . to the first line where she says, or rather the speaker says, "I know there was a boat." And that kind of made me think of all of the other places that she's mentioned in this poem. And it's almost like this documentation of the different places that they've been as a family. And so it begins with a boat. And then she's talking about these different places. And at one point in the poem, she says—or the speaker says—"What do we do with heartache? Tow it." And that made me think it's so beautiful in the way that she is documenting her family's story but through the travels that they've done. At least, that is kind of the way that I unpacked the poem in my mind.

[00:26:51] **Kendra** Yeah. Yeah. I love what you mentioned about the different places because the poem is separated into these different sections with page breaks and each one is like a different place that they're in, including everywhere from New Orleans to Maine to Kuwait to . . . there's Paris in here. So it's really fascinating. Yeah.

[00:27:13] **Sumaiyya** Oh.

[00:27:14] **Kendra** Wow.

[00:27:16] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, and she writes about all of these different moments that are very emotional moments. And I think in a way it's about, you know, like, you may travel. You may go to different places. But you always carry what you have in your heart. And as a family, that experience is kind of, I guess, goes across people because you don't just carry your own heartache. In a way, you also carry what you witness in your family members. At one point, for example, the speaker writes about, you know, "My mother is sitting in the basement of our main house. There is a blizzard. And I've just learned the word for 'shelter' in French. She's pregnant and crying." So there are all these moments where you become witness to not just your own sadness, but also the sadness that is in your family. But then by the end of the poem, there's this profound sense of love in the way that she's also witnessed the love between her parents that I found really beautifully done.

[00:28:19] **Kendra** Yeah, and she has that skill of taking the different sections. . . . And they're almost like you're flipping through a photo album of snapshots from her family's life. And she has these, like, distinct details that create these very crisp images in your mind. Like in the first section, when she talks about her mother's tangled hair, and it gives this image of that. And she has such a skill with those tiny details to help flesh out a bigger idea in each section.

[00:28:54] **Sumaiyya** Yeah, it's honestly like one of the most beautiful poems that I've ever read. And I feel like I haven't fully grasped the extent of what she's trying to convey here, to be very honest. I feel like I need to go back and read this a few more times to really unpack what she's trying to say. It's so layered and really emotional as well.

[00:29:17] **Kendra** So you can find "Armadillo" and other poems in the poetry collection, THE TWENTY-NINTH YEAR by Hala Alyan. And that is out from Mariner. And again, we will link the Q&A and the interview that we have with her in our show notes.

[00:29:31] **Sumaiyya** So next up, we have a very special guest, Yara, who is a Bookstagrammer from Palestine and currently lives in Cairo. So she will be sharing her pick for the Reading Palestine theme.

[00:29:46] **Yara** Hey, everybody. I'm Yara (@yara\_reads). I'm a Palestinian based in Cairo. And today I'll be recommending you a book by a Palestinian writer. The book I'm talking about today is MORNINGS IN JENIN by the Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa. It's actually a book I constantly recommend to everybody. So it's definitely worth a read. It's the story of the Palestinian family over four generations, but mostly focusing on Amal, the daughter who's the main character. Now, the book starts from the pre-Nakba days, before 1948, to the occurrence of the Nakba itself, when the family was forcibly driven away from their land and Ein Hod village by Zionist militia that's in the process of creating the state of Israel on stolen land. The book then continues over covering the war of 1967 and then the Lebanon war of 1982, covering the Sabra and Shatila massacre, which was honestly very heartbreaking to read about, and finally concludes with the Israeli bulldozing and massacre at the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002. And so we kind of just witness a life of constant loss and grieving, but at the same time, their never-ending hope of returning to their lands.

[00:31:09] **Yara** Now this book gives you a thorough insight on psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of the Palestinian cause. And you see the trauma of being transformed into refugees because of this Zionist project and having to live through the experience of exile and then having this continuous act of hoping and longing for the homeland. You also get a sense of the ongoing Palestinian struggle that it didn't just start with Nakba in 1948.



It's still ongoing. And everybody is able to witness that now with what's been happening in Palestine. The constant ethnic cleansing and oppression in every inch in Palestine, it hasn't ended. So I believe *MORNINGS IN JENIN* is the perfect example of how fiction has the power to inform us. And that's why I think everyone should read this compelling book.

[00:32:07] **Yara** I choose to talk about this book in particular because it covers such a broad timeline of events. And this book has affected me on so many emotional levels, but I guess even more so because as a Palestinian myself, I imagined with my own family, my own people had to go through. And yet what they still have to go through right now, every single day, and how this whole thing has affected them ever since. There's actually a particular quote from the book I would like to share. It goes like this, "They uprooted Indigenous songs and planted lies in the ground to grow a new story." It just hits you hard, doesn't it?

[00:32:53] **Yara** Sure, I'll just mention one more thing about the writer Susan Abulhawa because I think she deserves this. So she has other books that are amazing as well. So there's *AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD*. And then there is *THE BLUE BETWEEN SKY AND WATER*. Both of them are about Palestine as well, but they cover different Palestinian narratives. So I love Susan Abulhawa's writing style because I feel like she's able to capture history and culture and weave them both into this great story in such a beautiful way. She's actually my favorite author. So I would recommend this book absolutely to everybody. Like, if you're human, you should read it. So the book is *MORNINGS IN JENIN* by Susan Abulhawa. Okay, so as a final note, I would like to say that, don't stop talking about Palestine, read more. Learn the history. And free Palestine.

[00:34:02] **Kendra** Thank you so much, Yara, for that recommendation. I found the audio for *MORNINGS IN JENIN* on Audible. So I am very excited to go and to listen to it, especially after reading *AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD*. So those are our picks for this month's theme. Sumaiyya, what are you currently reading?

[00:34:22] **Sumaiyya** So I'm actually in between books. And I was, before recording, I was looking at my shelf. And I decided that I was going to read *THE SHAPE OF THUNDER* by Jasmine Warga. And this is her new book. She's the author of *OTHER WORDS FOR HOME*, which is one of my absolute favorite books, which is about a young Syrian girl who comes to America. Anyway. So *THE SHAPE OF THUNDER* is, I think, about a school shooting that happens. I don't know much about it. I just know that it's by Jasmine Warga, which is why I've decided that I need to read it. So I'm really looking forward to it.

[00:35:03] **Kendra** Yeah, I saw Kirsty was reading that. And I was like, oh, I need to pick, you know, get my copy out now that I'm done reading for the theme and read that one next. So I think that's up on my list as well.

[00:35:14] **Sumaiyya** Yes. But also I'm going to message Kirsty. She's amazing. She's one of my friends and a patron of Reading Women. So I'm going to message her and maybe do a buddy read with her for this book. I think it's going to be the perfect thing. But yeah, that is my selection. What about you, Kendra? And hopefully you'll do a better job of explaining to our listeners what your book is about.

[00:35:36] **Kendra** Well, we'll see. So I'm reading *PURE AMERICA* by Elizabeth Catte, which is about eugenics in the state of Virginia and the forced sterilization of Appalachian people of a wide range of backgrounds and different things. A lot of people don't realize that eugenics played such a huge role in the early twentieth century and continuing into

the twenty-first century, particularly for disabled people. And also people who do use disability as an excuse to sterilize folks in the name of eugenics. And it's somewhat complicated. So far, I really appreciate what Elizabeth Catte is doing in the book and recognizing the different aspects of eugenics that were forced upon Appalachian people there in the state of Virginia. Saying this out loud, I realize this is a very in-depth, dark topic. So I'm also trying to space it in with more, like, escapists fluffy reads. But it's a very short book, but she packs a lot into that, into that book. So I'm reading this for Disability Pride Month, which is all throughout the month of July. And so I wanted to make sure to read some books about disability and topics adjacent to disability for this month. So this is one of my picks for that. All right. Well, Sumaiyya, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:37:03] **Sumaiyya** So I'm primarily on Instagram (@sumaiyya.books). And I've recently joined Clubhouse, where I host rooms about books. My username is @sumaiyya.books as well. And that's it. That's where you can find me.

[00:37:19] **Kendra** And you all can find me (@kdwinchester). And I'm on the various social medias. And that's our show. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester. Our music is by Miki Saito with Isaac Greene.

[00:37:40] **Sumaiyya** Join us next time when we dive into our discussion picks, THE PARISIAN and AGAINST THE LOVELESS WORLD. In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thank you so much for listening.