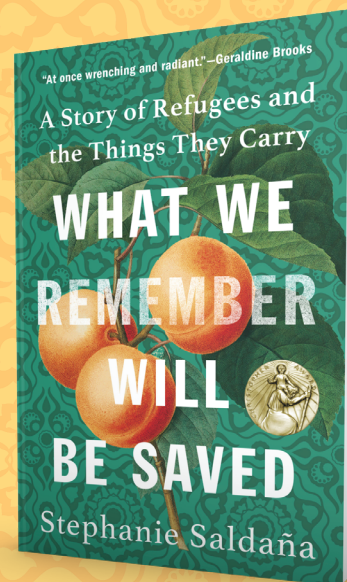


*What We Remember Will Be Saved:
A Story of Refugees and the Things They Carry*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

by Stephanie Saldaña



INTRODUCTION

Before Stephanie Saldaña even begins her book, she notes her reluctance to use the word *refugee*. Why do you think she hesitates? How can the words we use to describe people who are displaced minimize the totality of who they are as human beings?

PROLOGUE

The book begins, “There are always hidden historians among the survivors of war.” How do these words resonate with you? Why is it important to hear history told in the voices of “hidden historians”?

PART 1: HANA’S DRESS

1. In chapter 3, Hana shows the author a dress on which she has sewn the story of Qaraqosh, the town she was forced to escape. Spend a few moments imagining the dress, with its churches, languages, colors. What is included in it? What does it tell us about the totality of what Hana was forced to leave behind?
2. Hana and her family speak Aramaic, an endangered language. How is history carried in the languages we speak? What is at stake when a language dies?
3. Why do you think Hana decided to sew her city into a dress when she knew she was going to leave her home forever? What did she save by doing this?

PART 2: FERHAD’S SONG

1. Ferhad’s city of al-Hassakeh was extremely diverse, full of people who spoke different languages. What does that tell you about diversity in the Middle East?
2. Saldaña writes that “Ferhad understood that his life was not only his own life, but that it existed in a chain of lives and a chain of stories.” What does that mean? How does being part of a “chain of lives” affect the way Ferhad understands the purpose of his own life?
3. Ferhad describes children’s experience of learning their Kurdish history through songs so

they could one day pass that history down. How are the children a “living library”? What does this tell us about the power of storytelling in keeping communities together?

4. Ferhad describes Hozan as his soul friend. What is the importance of friendship in this story? How do Ferhad and Hozan become themselves in relation to one another?
5. What happens to Ferhad after the death of Evin? Why is it “his turn to remember”?
6. When Saldaña interviewed Ferhad, she believed he was saving music. In time, he taught her that he was saving Kurdish history. Yet eventually, he concluded that he and Hozan were “saving joy.” What do *you* think Ferhad saves?
7. When Ferhad is tempted to give up, he reminds himself that “the distance for going back is the same as for going forward.” What do you think gives Ferhad the strength to continue in the face of tragedy? What can we learn from his journey?

PART 3: MUNIR’S LIGHT

1. In this section of the book, the author travels to the island of Lesbos, where she meets refugees who have fled some of the most violent wars in the world, risking their lives on the sea journey to Europe. Expecting to find humanity in Europe, they are thrown into a camp and left in the cold. Were you shocked to discover the horrible ways people are being treated? How did it make you feel?
2. Munir decided, during the war in Iraq, that he would “be a candle” for his sisters and help them to study. What of himself does he hold onto as everything around him is destroyed? How does he save his humanity in the face of violence?
3. The author writes that “It is only the small gestures that make Moria bearable.” What are some of the small gestures she witnesses? How do little things become important in times of despair?
4. The section ends as the author visits the cemetery of Kato Tritos, where some of those who died at sea are buried. The taxi driver asks her, “Were you looking for someone you know?” How does this question remind us that these tragedies could have happened to us or those we love? How does that change the way we see people forced to flee?

PART 4: GHADIR AND ADNAN’S PHARMACY

1. Adnan breaks societal tradition by choosing to rent a house and buy a pharmacy in Aleppo. What is at stake in buying a pharmacy? What does the pharmacy symbolize for Adnan and Ghadir? Why is losing it so devastating?
2. When Adnan and Ghadir discuss rebuilding their destroyed pharmacy in a garage, Adnan hesitates. But Ghadir insists, “We live during the war.” What do you think she means by this?
3. As they struggle to find the materials to build their pharmacy, Ghadir discovers that she has the “eyes of creation.” What does that mean? What does her way of seeing through the ruins make possible?
4. As they rebuild their pharmacy, Adnan and Ghadir put together a statement of their values (p. 187). Read their rules out loud. What does this statement say about who they are and what they have to offer their community? With their pharmacy in the garage, what are they trying to save?
5. In time, people come to the pharmacy from great distances in the middle of the war, just

to have someone to talk to. They need the “medicine of compassion.” What do Adnan and Ghadir teach us about the importance of listening and being compassionate in times of difficulty?

PART 5: QASSEM’S FAMILY

1. When Qassem meets the author, he says, “I have heard that you’re a storyteller.” Why do you think he tells her the story of what happened? What is the importance of storytelling in Yazidi tradition?
2. Qassem’s grandfather tells him that nothing is as important as family. What does family mean to Qassem? How does the importance of keeping his family together impact the choices he makes, both on the mountain and afterward?
3. What did you learn about Yazidi life and culture from Qassem’s story? Did you know about the genocide on Mt. Sinjar? How did learning about it change you?
4. When Qassem and his sister arrive in Germany, they are finally given refuge by a community of nuns, who are determined not to make the same mistakes as in World War II. What does this tell us about how we can learn from the past? How does it inspire you, as an individual or a community, to help those in need?
5. Having read their stories, what do you think of these hidden historians now? Is there one story that you related to more than others? Why?