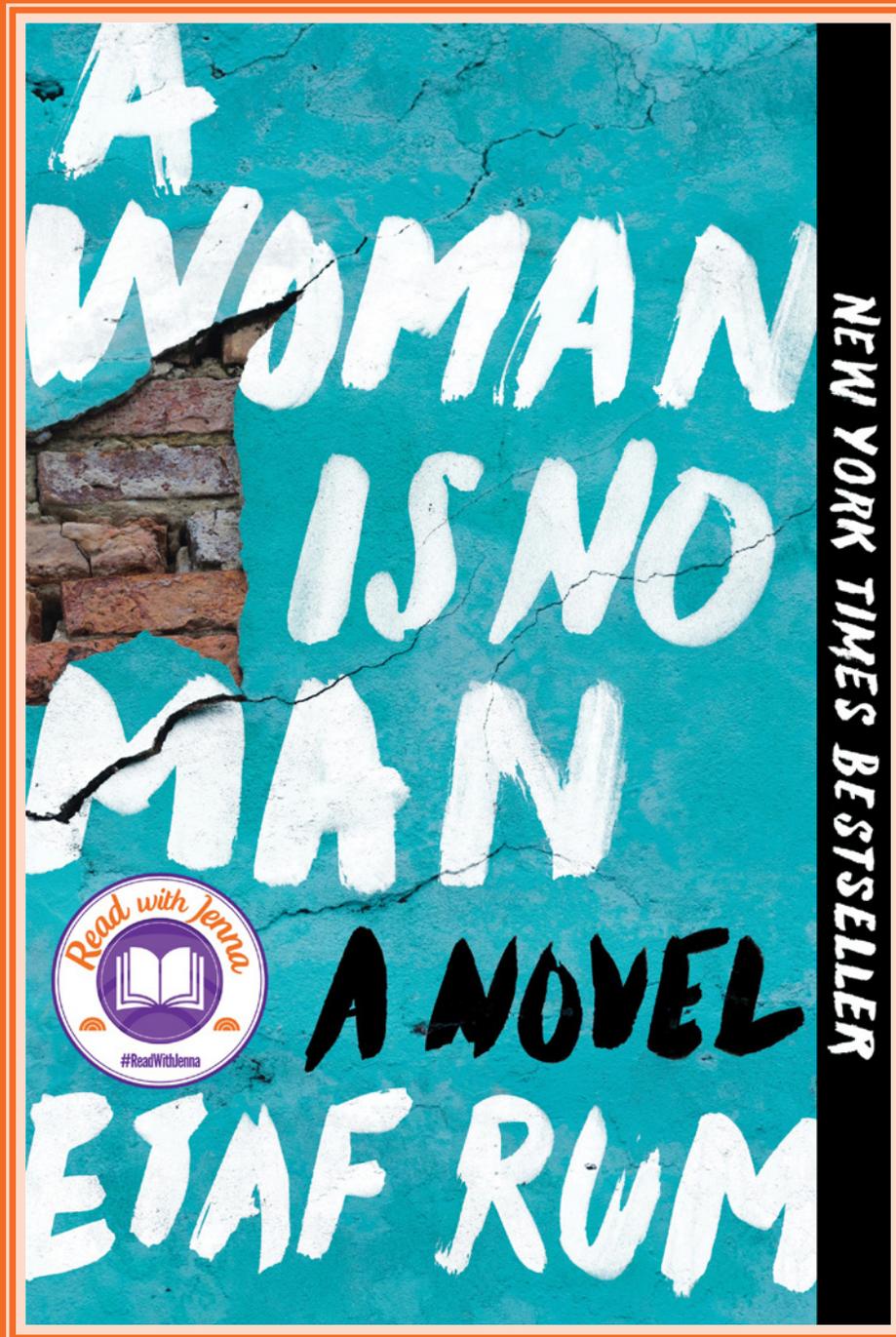


TEACHER'S GUIDE



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About the Book

Palestine, 1990. Seventeen-year-old Isra prefers reading books to entertaining the suitors her father has chosen for her. Over the course of a week, the naïve and dreamy girl finds herself quickly betrothed and married, and is soon living in Brooklyn. There Isra struggles to adapt to the expectations of her oppressive mother-in-law Fareeda and strange new husband Adam, a pressure that intensifies as she begins to have children—four daughters instead of the sons Fareeda tells Isra she must bear.

Brooklyn, 2008. Eighteen-year-old Deya, Isra's oldest daughter, must meet with potential husbands at her grandmother Fareeda's insistence, though her only desire is to go to college. Deya can't help but wonder if her options would have been different had her parents survived the car crash that killed them when Deya was only eight. But her grandmother is firm on the matter: the only way to secure a worthy future for Deya is through marriage to the right man.

But fate has a will of its own, and soon Deya will find herself on an unexpected path that leads her to shocking truths about her family—knowledge that will force her to question everything she thought she knew about her parents, the past, and her own future.

About the Author

Etaf Rum was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York by Palestinian immigrants. She teaches English Literature in North Carolina, where she lives with her two children. *A Woman Is No Man* is her debut.

About this Guide

This guide consists of questions that can be used either as discussion questions or as short writing prompts. Most questions encourage students to think across characters and themes in the novel to formulate their answers. Page numbers included parenthetically in this guide are for the paperback edition of the text, ISBN: 9780062699770.

E-book and digital audio formats of *A Woman Is No Man* are also available.

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Questions

- In the novel's opening, Isra says this of her upcoming move to America: "She had never imagined a life in America. She didn't even know where to begin" (6). What does America mean to the characters in *A Woman Is No Man*?
- The structure of *A Woman Is No Man* alternates character, time, and place. We hear from Isra, Deya, and Fareeda at different points in time and in their family history. What do these alternating points of view, and alternating historical time of the story, allow for a reader?
- What are the ways in which Deya, at the novel's opening, already rebels against her culture? In what ways does she keep to her grandmother's wishes?
- In the novel's opening, Isra's mother gives her one piece of advice before she is married: "Soon you'll learn that there's no room for love in a woman's life. There's only one thing you'll need, and that's *sabr*, patience" (10). What are the ways in which Isra is patient? Is patience something that is a positive or negative experience for her?
- A piece of advice Fareeda gives Deya is, "You need to put the past behind you in order to move on" (69). How would you describe Fareeda's relationship with the past? What is her motivation for having Deya try to forget the past? How successful, or not, do you think Fareeda has dealt with her own past?
- What does having a voice mean in *A Woman Is No Man*? Who is allowed to have a voice and who isn't? In what ways is that distinction significant?
- Books are an integral part of the lives of characters like Isra, Deya, and Sarah. What do books, stories, and storytelling mean to these women? Why are they so vital to their lives?
- The main male characters in the novel seem to be Khaled, Adam, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Omar. How would you describe these men? What are their similarities and differences? What pressures do they have, both in their culture and also in their family unit?
- One of the themes in *A Woman Is No Man* is choice: having choices and the absence, or feeling like there is an absence, of choice. In what ways does this theme manifest for the likes of Adam, Isra, Deya, and Sarah? How is the presence or absence of choice influential for these characters and their motivations and aspirations? Is choice always a good or hopeful thing to want?
- How does shame function throughout the generations of this family?
- What are the ways in which characters in *A Woman Is No Man* define being a woman? How do these definitions overlap? In what ways do they conflict?
- When the truth of Isra and Adam's deaths are revealed, are you surprised by Fareeda's actions?
- What are the ways in which *A Woman Is No Man* depicts motherhood? How do daughters and granddaughters see their mothers and grandmothers? How do mothers and grandmothers see their daughters and granddaughters?
- Throughout the novel, we learn of men like Khaled and Adam committing zina, drinking, and being violent toward women without impunity. How is their behavior justified?