

ABDI NAZEMIAN

Stonewall Honor-winning author of *LIKE A LOVE STORY*



The Chandler Legacies

"Abdi Nazemian is a true artist, writing about beauty, hope, courage, and the most vulnerable parts of being human."

— Taylor Jenkins Reid, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Daisy Jones & the Six*



Book Overview

The Chandler Legacies is a novel about the enclosed world of privilege and silence at an elite boarding school and the unlikely group of friends who dare to challenge the status quo through their writing. At Chandler, an elite boarding school, five teens are brought together in the Circle, a coveted writing group where life-changing relationships are born—and secrets are revealed. Their professor tasks them to write their truths. But is the truth enough to change the long-standing culture of abuse at Chandler? And can their friendships survive the fallout?

Before You Read

Abdi Nazemian's *The Chandler Legacies* is a complex, multi-voiced narrative detailing the lives of five students at the fictional Chandler School. The book provides many entry points for students to engage in personal reflection, rich textual analysis and discussion, and dialogue about identity, community, and advocacy. As you plan, we hope you consider using the resources and activities below to build a solid community foundation in which you honor the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and expertise with which students will engage with this text.



Building Community

The Chandler Legacies is a novel that illuminates the importance of developing community, making meaningful connections, and building trust within (and outside of) learning spaces. The themes and characters of the text invite a deep exploration of personal identity, harm, and community responsibility. Thus, we suggest teachers make time and space for personal identity exploration and community building with students as core pre-reading activities.

Suggested Activities and Resources for Personal Identity

- **Reflect and Discuss:** The Social Identity Wheel and Activities
- **Watch, Reflect, and Share:** Watch: **“Come Home”** by Kevin Yang. In his piece, Kevin Yang speaks about home, identity, and stereotypes. Think about what home means to you. Write and/or draw a blueprint of home in which you include important people, memories, smells, sounds, items. How does home inform your identity?
- **Dream and Design:** Think about your “dream school.” What would it look like? Sound like, and feel like? What kind of courses might be offered? Who would attend? What makes it unique and perfect for you?

Suggested Activities and Resources for Community Building

- **Resource:** Let’s Talk Toolkit: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students (Learning for Justice)
- **Engage:** “Getting To Know You, Love You” Concentric Circles
 - + Develop a set of prompts for students to discuss in concentric circles. Consider starting with lighter prompts like “favorite season” or “is a hot dog a sandwich?” As students get comfortable, increase the depth and nuance using prompts such as “what does family mean to you?” or “what do you love about yourself?” This activity is designed to help students connect with many others on a deeper level. We suggest coming back to this activity throughout the duration of reading the text.
 - + **Build:** Work with students to collectively create community norms for engagement in class. Consider using the prompts below to guide your reflection, discussion, and norm-creation.
 - + What do you need to feel safe in this space? Affirmed?
 - + What expectations do we have for reading and discussing in community?
 - + What would make this the “best space ever” to read and discuss a text?
 - + Think of another learning space that felt good, what made it special?



Trigger Warning and Considerations when Reading

The Chandler Legacies is a novel that explores topics of trauma, harm, assault, and inequities with frankness. The book addresses the sexual assault of students, bullying, trauma related to structural injustices, and grief on the campus of Chandler. Nazemian does not shy away from the realities of living and attending school in our society – characters experience homophobia, classism, and racism. These topics are aligned with many students’ realities in our schools and thus must be read and discussed with care and consideration. Therefore, we suggest proceeding with the utmost attention to intentionality and community care. With specific respect to discussing trauma and reading narratives with sexual assault, we suggest you consult [this resource](#) offered by Alex Shevrin Venet (for #THEBOOKCHAT) on trauma-informed teaching of difficult narratives.

Reading and Teaching *The Chandler Legacies*

From Nazemian’s use of multiple narrators (and perspectives) to writing workshops as a core plot point, *The Chandler Legacies* invites us to imagine the diverse ways we might engage with this text in our literacy classrooms. Nazemian’s story seems fitting for both an entire novel study, a book club selection, or even a highlighted title in your classroom library.

The prompts below are meant to be starting points for exploration and discourse building and not the sole learning around the text, as we aim to equip students with transferable criticality strategies to apply to all aspects of life. Avoiding plot-based questions alone and prompting students to think about storytelling, author’s craft, theme and meaning will better promote empathy and understanding about the human condition and relationships in the real world.

Exploring Structure and Author’s Craft

Structure: Diverse Perspectives

The story is told in multiple perspectives, each from a different student at Chandler. While they have many similarities, each faces their own insecurities, unique upbringings, and varied experiences. One way readers keep track of characters might be to organize their thinking about each in a visual or written form. As portraits of each character take shape across the pages, have readers jot down, illustrate, web, map and think through what they learn about each character as they go. These character trackers (webs, charts, maps) can serve as a springboard for analyzing character development as well as considering what Nazemian achieves through telling this story from multiple perspectives.



- **Complete:** Have students create a “character tracker” for each member of the circle: Beth Kramer, Sarah Brunson, Amanda Priya “Spence” Spencer, Freddy Bello, and Ramin Golafshar. As you read, suggest students take note of the following information on their trackers.
 - + What facts do we learn about each character? How do those facts shape their identities?
 - + What is gained through seeing this plot event (or series of events through the eyes of this character)?
 - + How do these events contribute to the characters’ personal development? To their writing? To their experience at Chandler?
- **Analyze and Discuss**
 - + How does Nazemian’s use of multiple perspectives impact the narrative?
 - + Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from the perspective of only students? What might the impact have been if he chose to include Professor Douglas as a narrator?
- **Extend: Creative Writing**
 - + Consider having students engage in a writing activity where they write about their school day from their own perspectives and share it with the class. Invite students to share their writing with others and discuss how their identities, interests, and experiences shape their experiences.
 - + At the end of one Circle meeting, Professor Douglas provides each member with notecards for writing. Try out this activity with students, providing them with index cards and prompts for either an in-class or out-of-class activity. Consider posting student cards (with permission) around the room and doing a gallery walk to spur discussion about perspective and writing.

Craft: Considering Authors’ Motivations

Knowing the mind behind the art helps us better understand the creation. The author’s note by Abdi Nazemian offers a poignant and direct explanation for how this story came to life. He writes, “The details belong to me, and as I’ve grown up, I’ve discovered that fiction is my preferred method for making sense of the world.” Read [this feature article](#) on the We Need Diverse Books blog that describes Abdi’s process and thinking.

- + What else did you learn about the author, and how do you think his personal experience shaped his art?
- + How might your own experiences shape the art you create?





Discussing Text Themes, Characters, and Plot

Identity Development

- On page 16 of *The Chandler Legacies*, Beth Kramer admits to loving the title of their teacher’s book, Supplemental Facts. Consider your own identity. What might be your supplemental facts? In the novel, several characters identify as LGBTQ+—Freddy, Beth, Brunson, Ramin, Professor Douglas. Consider their journeys, experiences, and backgrounds. What does this diverse representation of the LGBTQ+ experience offer readers in our own understanding of LGBTQ+ identity and allyship? How do the differences in characters’ experiences complicate the traditional “coming-out” stories? How does Nazemian’s portrayal of characters challenge assumptions about what being LGBTQ+ “looks like?” How is the portrayal different or similar to others you have seen in texts, pop culture, media?
- The five members of the Circle come to Chandler with very different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic (class) backgrounds. How do their backgrounds impact their experiences given the culture, status, and expectations of the school?
- Throughout *The Chandler Legacies*, many students are impacted by others’ biases, assumptions and stereotypes. For example, Freddy is labeled just a jock, Ramin faces assumptions about his home country of Iran and his sexuality, and Spence is hyper-aware of being exoticized as a budding Indian actress. How do biases and assumptions impact the actions, relationships, and experiences of the students at Chandler? Consider your own experiences – where have you encountered biases, assumptions, and stereotypes in your own life? How did it impact you?

Community and Belonging

- Based on the culture and expectations of the school, who “belongs” or “fits in” at Chandler? Why? How do the events that unfold challenge that definition of belonging?
- The Circle is a very exclusive experience offered at Chandler. How does The Circle align with or depart from the culture of belonging at Chandler?
- **RAMIN:** Names are critically important. In what ways does Ramin being called Ramoon affect his ability to confidently show up wholly at Chandler? What is the significance of the dancing and name scene on page 138? (suggested reference pages: 130, 138)
- **BETH:** In many ways, Beth feels invisible at Chandler. What contributes to this lingering feeling? How does she code switch from Townie to Chandler in the text? (suggested reference page: 101)
- **FREDDY:** What additional pressures does Freddy face, when it comes to his family specifically? How does that affect his freedom and goals as a student, athlete, and writer? (suggested reference page: 141)
- **BRUNSON:** How does Sarah Brunson grapple with her inability to belong to school? (suggested reference pages: 56-57)
- **SPENCE:** How does the question “What are you?” and the label “exotic” affect Spence’s understanding of her own identity? How does color-blind casting objectify and further exoticize her? (suggested reference pages: 19, 123-125)



Love and Relationships

- Ramin befriends Hiro while living in the Wilton Blue Basement. While they are both international students, their backgrounds and journeys are different. Consider the evolution of their friendship. What do their distinct and shared experiences help us understand about the nuances of the immigrant experience, particularly in a school setting?
- Each member of the Circle struggles with insecurity. How does the Circle help them face, process, or overcome these insecurities? How do the characters make each other more brave? (suggested reference pages: 67, 119)
- Throughout Ramin's first semester at Chandler, he often returns to his memories of Arya to comfort him. Though he is not an actual character in the text, consider Ramin and Arya's former relationship. What does it reveal about Ramin's past, the way he approaches building relationships, and his writing in the Circle?
- Consider the relationships between students and teachers at Chandler. How are the relationship dynamics similar and/or different to those in your own school?
- While the students attend boarding school, they still must manage and consider their relationships with family and friends who are back home. How does the culture of Chandler impact how the members of the Circle (and other students on campus) connect with their family and friends?

Trauma, Healing, and Advocacy

- At Chandler, several students experience trauma. Each of them deal with it differently. What are some of the various ways characters process their experiences? How does the school's environment, expectations, and structures impact students' processing and healing?
- When considering speaking out about his experience, Ramin remarks, "I need to feel safe...That's why I came here. To be safe. Not to be a hero." Think about our own community. What do you think is necessary for a community like ours to truly feel safe for all of us? What changes might you suggest to our current practices and policies? (suggested reference pages 201-202)
- As the Circle discusses whether or not to speak out about bullying, Brunson reminds the group of the school motto, "veritas vos liberabit" which means "the truth will liberate us all." Do you agree with Brunson and/or the school motto about the possibility of telling the truth in difficult situations?
- Early in the novel, Mr. Plain camps outside to bring awareness to the privilege of being in a community like Chandler. Not all students agree, especially Amira. What is learned and lost in Mr. Plain's advocacy effort? (suggested reference pages: 122-123)
- Toward the end of the novel, we learn more about how the school and faculty has handled sexual assault allegations. How does power and privilege impact the outcomes of students and faculty speaking up (or not speaking up) about sexual assault at Chandler?



Place, Space, and Home

- The idea of “home” is a recurrent theme throughout the novel. Explore how home is interrogated through the novel in the following settings:

- + Beth’s house
- + The town
- + Chandler
- + Douglas’ house
- + Spence’s house
- + The Lake
- + The basement

- Throughout the novel, how is home defined? Who and/or what is permissible at home? How are these ideas of home different from your own definitions? The importance of place is further explored on page 149 in the text. How does physical space contribute to feelings of safety or lack thereof?
- Think about the housing situation for each of the members of the Circle. How does each member’s living situation impact their relationship with others and how they engage with the larger Chandler community?

Exploring Writing Workshops

- In what ways does the story elevate the act of writing toward processing challenges and emotions in life?
- What are some of the guiding principles of the Circle that teach us about writing and the process of composition? What can readers learn about the act of writing through the activities, rules and provocations of the Circle? (suggested reference pages: 76-77)
- How does music affect writing and creativity output across the text?
- How does writing serve as catharsis for the Circle members, particularly Ramin? (suggested reference page: 132)
- On page 158, Professor Douglas reminds the students, “you’re always writing. Writing is observing. Listening.” What does this mean, and how can we use it in our own compositions/ classroom work?
- Write: During one workshop, Professor Douglas returns The Circle members’ essays with every word blacked out except one – *belong* (Freddy), *perfect* (Spence), *survival* (Brunson), *forgiveness* (Beth), and *fear* (Ramin). As a writing exercise, provide each student with a word from the list above and have them complete a timed free-write.

- + **Optional extension: Consider doing this exercise five times as you read the book, each time choosing a different character’s word. After students write, encourage them to share their work and have a discussion in which they make connections between their writing and the journey of the members of The Circle.**



Extending Your Engagement

Extension Activity: Create a Book Playlist!

Music plays a beautiful role in the story in bonding together students and groups across the pages. In the acknowledgements, author Abdi Nazemian thanks Tori Amos for being his muse and inspiration, fueling him not only when he wrote this book but for decades. Take a listen to the book playlist-- all the album and song mentions across *The Chandler Legacies*- and create your own cathartic writing workshop playlist. What might you include to help fuel you when you write?

Some of the musicians named across the story include:

- Joni Mitchell
- The Beatles
- Lauryn Hill
- Ricky Martin
- Destiny's Child
- TLC
- Simon & Garfunkel
- Snoop Doggy Dogg
- Elvis Costello
- Ella Fitzgerald
- Little Richard
- Billie Holliday
- Don Williams



Extension Activity: Making Connections to History and Current Events

Topic: Survivorship, Speaking Up, and Healing

- *The Chandler Legacies* addresses a variety of ways survivors of sexual assault choose to respond to trauma. Nazemian's portrayal of the diverse responses of both survivors and allies reflects the complex realities of survivors in our own society. Using the resources below (and other sources), have students explore the ways in which survivors' engage in advocacy, art, and community as healing.

- + **Art:** [Stop Telling Women to Smile](#), a street art project addressing gender based street harassment by Tatyana Fazlalizadeh.
- + **Video:** Tarana Burke: ["Me Too is a movement, not a moment"](#) (TedTalk)
- + **Essay:** ["How Latin American feminists shifted global understanding of gender-based violence"](#) by Diana M. Barrero Jaramillo
- + **Poem (video):** ["Paper Dolls"](#) by Sierra DeMulder



Topic: Elite Boarding Schools, Privilege, and Schooling in the United States

The main setting of the novel is Chandler Academy, an elite boarding school in Connecticut. Nazemian's use of multiple points of view in the novel allows us to witness the schooling experience through diverse perspectives. In all the perspectives, Nazemian makes clear the privilege, culture of wealth, and expectation of success one holds when attending an elite boarding school. After students read, consider having them engage in a discussion or complete a project surrounding different types of schooling institutions in the United States (and the power, privilege, and expectations that surround them).

Topic: Iranian Culture and History

Ramin Golafshar immigrated from Iran, a country in Western Asia of almost 84 million people. Also known as Persia and officially called the Islamic Republic of Iran, the people who live there speak Farsi, like Ramin. Read and research about Iran and its culture below.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Cuisine</u> Khoresh Gheymeh, as mentioned in the story	<u>Pasur</u>	<u>Poets Hafez and Rumi</u>	<u>Singer Googoosh,</u> (and take a listen to her music from the 1970s.)
----------------	--	--------------	---------------------------------	--

Focus on two of the areas above and create a representation about what you learn about Iran and Iranian culture in any form (web, notes, visual). How did this research help you better understand the character of Ramin, and his experience with immigration? How is Iran similar or different from the country where you live?



Creators of the Guide



Photo: Dalia Rooni

Nawal Qarooni is an educator and writer who works in education spaces to support a holistic model of literacy instruction. She and her team of coaches at NQC Literacy work with teachers and school leaders to grow a love of reading and composition in ways that exalt the whole child, their cultural capital and their intrinsic curiosities. She is the proud daughter of immigrants, and mothering her four young kids shapes her understanding of teaching and learning. Nawal's first book about family literacy with Heinemann is forthcoming in 2023.



Photo: Jane Martin

shea wesley martin is a lit teacher, scholar, and community curator raised at the intersections of gospel and go-go. Their scholarship and praxis explore the liberatory possibilities within queerness, transness, Blackness, and education in the past, present, and beyond. In their work, shea partners with teachers, community leaders, and (most importantly) young people to reimagine what reading and teaching literacy look, feel, and sound like. A seasoned educator and audacious dreamer, shea is a co-founder of **Love & LiteraTea** and spearheads The Unicorn Express, two community initiatives focused on providing books, support, and affirming literacy experiences to LGBTQ+ youth.



Photo: Mandy Vahabzadeh

About the Author

Abdi Nazemian is the author of four novels. His latest is *The Chandler Legacies*. His first, *The Walk-In Closet*, won the Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Debut Fiction. His novel *Like a Love Story*, was awarded a Stonewall Honor, and was chosen by *Time* as one of the hundred greatest young adult books of all time. His screenwriting credits include the films *The Artist's Wife*, *The Quiet*, and *Menendez: Blood Brothers*, and the television series *Ordinary Joe*, *The Village* and *Almost Family*. He has been an executive producer and associate producer on numerous films, including *Call Me By Your Name* and *Little Woods*. He lives in Los Angeles with his husband, two children and their dog Disco. You can find him on Instagram: [@abdaddy](https://www.instagram.com/abdaddy) and at abdinazemian.com