

Stonewall Honor-winning author
ABDI NAZEMIAN





A Note to Teachers

At its core, *Only this Beautiful Moment* is a richly complex novel about family, home, and finding oneself. The novel urges readers to grapple with difficult, yet necessary topics – global conflicts, resistance movements, gender and sexuality, family dynamics, and grief (to name a few). Through a host of diverse characters and plots, *Only This Beautiful Moment* offers vital perspectives often erased in curricula and libraries. Therefore, we want to begin by recognizing that some teachers may not be familiar with many of the ideas, events, or concepts presented in *Only This Beautiful Moment*. Before teachers consider teaching and incorporating *Only This Beautiful Moment* into their curriculum, we suggest teachers gain some foundational knowledge about Iranian history, the Iranian Revolution, and LGBTQ+ terminology. We have provided links for resources on these topics at the end of this document to assist in teachers' understanding and preparation.

In a time of increased censorship, Nazemian's *Only This Beautiful Moment* is a defiant statement about the beauty, fluidity, and resilience of queerness, family, and borders. The novel does not shy away from discussions of authoritarian governments, consensual sex, shame, LGBTQ+ history and oppression, deportation, and death. Many of these topics echo the experiences of students in today's high school classrooms, both in the United States and abroad. Including a novel like *Only this Beautiful Moment* in your curriculum has the potential to be a springboard for students' inquiry, creativity, and meaningful dialogue.

In reflecting on writing *Only this Beautiful Moment*, Abdi Nazemian writes, “by shining a light on all the histories that were once invisible, we can honor those who paved the path for us by making the world a place of greater empathy, forgiveness, and understanding.” May this document be a guide as you teach *Only this Beautiful Moment* in ways that illuminate once-invisible histories, build bridges toward a better world, and encourage youth to stand fiercely in their truth every single day.

To begin, please spend some time reviewing the following resources, which will serve to further support your teaching of the text.

Resources from the National Coalition Against Censorship

[Book Censorship Action Kit](#)

[DEFEND LGBTQ STORIES: A Resource Guide](#)

[Responding to Book Challenges: A Handbook for Educators](#)

Resources from the National Council of Teachers of English

[Position Statement: Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Instructional Materials](#)

[Book Rationale Database](#)

[Teaching LGBTQ History and Activism \(with *Like a Love Story*\)](#)



Book Overview

***Only This Beautiful Moment* is a novel about three moments in time.**

2019. Moud is an out gay teen living in Los Angeles with his distant father, Saeed. When Moud gets the news that his grandfather in Iran is dying, he accompanies his dad to Tehran, where the revelation of family secrets will force Moud into a new understanding of his history, his culture, and himself.

1978. Saeed is an engineering student with a promising future ahead of him in Tehran. But when his parents discover his involvement in the country's burgeoning revolution, they send him to safety in America, a country Saeed despises. And even worse—he's forced to live with the American grandmother he never knew existed.

1939. Bobby, the son of a calculating Hollywood stage mother, lands a coveted MGM studio contract. But the fairytale world of glamour he's thrust into has a dark side.

Set against the backdrop of Tehran and Los Angeles, this tale of intergenerational trauma and love is an ode to the fragile bonds of family, the hidden secrets of history, and all the beautiful moments that make us who we are today.

Before You Read

Abdi Nazemian's *Only This Beautiful Moment* tackles a variety of themes and topics, from uncovering family history and knowing one's identity to personal acceptance and historic criminalization of queer people in both Iran and America at different points of time. The story vacillates in perspective, historic period and setting (between Los Angeles and Tehran), and is rife with Iranian history, food, culture and language. It explores family, secrets and love—and the lengths we go to for all the kinds of love in our lives. The intergenerational nature of this story begs the question, 'How does knowing our personal histories support the understanding of ourselves?'

Before you read, be sure to [locate Iran on a map](#). We suggest listening to some of the music that is mentioned in the story, for example Googoosh's "[Do Panjareh](#)" or [Dalida](#) to further immerse yourself and prepare. At the end of this guide, there is a table with many examples of Iranian culture, including language, food and historical context. Ahead of sharing this text with young people, you might spend some time researching from the table.



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

Build: Work with students to collectively create community norms. Co-construction will ensure norms are upheld as you engage in reading the novel.

Suggested Pre-Reading Activity: Telling the Stories of Our Names

In this novel, names and naming are important. As you begin to engage in this text, consider asking students to reflect upon and tell the stories of their own names. There are countless resources online to support you in facilitating this activity, but we suggest grounding this activity in two questions we deem particular to *Only this Beautiful Moment*:

1. What are the stories behind your name?
2. What history do you carry in your name?

You might consider layering in additional stories about names in the form of picture books and spoken word. You can immerse your students in stories about the power of names using [this compilation](#). We hope that this activity offers a springboard for student exploration and sharing of their own histories, cultural backgrounds, and experiences.

Suggested Pre-Reading Activity: Creating a Parking Lot of Curiosities

Only This Beautiful Moment is rich with cultural references, historical events, and vocabulary that may spark student questions and curiosities. Before you begin reading, consider co-creating a community “Parking Lot of Curiosities” with your students. This parking lot could be an anchor chart where community members (students and teachers) can place post-it notes throughout class or even a collaborative online tool (like Jamboard or Padlet) where community members have autonomy to add wonderings as they arise. As you’re developing this “Parking Lot” with students, we encourage teachers to add questions alongside students. This engagement of teachers as readers reminds students of the importance of curiosity, regardless of age or expertise. As you read, consider using the “Parking Lot of Curiosities” to fuel extension activities, discussions, or prompts for research and writing.



Content Warnings and Considerations

This book contains discussions of government violence against its citizens, policing, racism, prejudice, homophobia, immigration, and grief. We highly suggest teachers make space for students to take care of their socioemotional needs while engaging with this book.

This book also includes depictions of consensual sex and intimacy, particularly between queer youth. Many of the “classics” we teach year after year include intimacy between romantic partners; this new classic, *Only This Beautiful Moment*, is no different. We suggest previewing these sections, teaching them with a focus on relationships and consent, and preparing resources should students, parents, or administrators have questions about its inclusion in your curriculum.

Reading and Teaching *Only This Beautiful Moment*

Exploring Structure and Author’s Craft

Structure Spotlight: Diverse Perspectives

The story is told in multiple perspectives. There are chapters from 2019 told by Moud, 1978 by Saeed, and 1939 by Bobby. Teaching students to unpack and empathize with the varied perspectives of characters based on their upbringings, experiences, motivations - and the context of their lives - is important while we read. Secondary characters like Shane, Ava, Margaret, Vicente, Willie, Zip, Shirin, Bahar and Siamak all play critical roles in the plot and texture of the story as well.

Analyzing Characterization and Perspectives

Complete: Have students create a “character tracker” or web for each main character: Mahmoud (Moud), Bobby/Babak, Saeed. A tracker might look like a three-column chart or web with all three characters, time periods and settings, and notes. Be sure to remind students that this sort of organizational tool is just one way to track thinking - if it’s useful to keep track of characters.

While reading, suggest students take note of the following information on their trackers.

- What details do we learn about the character’s life? What questions do you have about their experiences, relationships with others, and the context in which their story is told?
- How do the character’s experiences shape their identity and understanding of the world?
- What connections or parallels can you draw between the characters’ journeys?

Share examples of character webs that support the note-taking and tracking of connections in the story, without forcing students to record their thinking in any one specific way.



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 three members of the same family? What might the impact have been if he chose to include other characters (such as Shane or Ava) as narrators?

Structure Spotlight: Multiple Settings

The stories in this novel are grounded in several settings – Los Angeles in 1939, 1978, and 2019, along with Iran in 1978 and 2019. Helping students to examine the impact of setting (the time and place in which the story is told) on the characters’ experiences, decisions, and motivations is essential while reading the book.

Further, encouraging students to consider the author’s decision to use the present-tense in multiple settings helps ground the story in *Only This Beautiful Moment* (refer to Author’s Note). Pose the question to students: how does the present-tense keep the story centered in the now? What effect would it have had to storytell in the past?

Analyzing the Impact of Setting: Place, Time, and Context

Complete: Have students create a map or chart that allows you to track how Nazemian depicts the settings in the novel. Be sure to remind students that this sort of organizational tool is just one way to track their processing while reading and thinking about characters’ experiences in multiple settings.

While reading, suggest students take note of the following information on their trackers.

- What language does Nazemian use to signal the time and place?
- How does Nazemian depict the cultural norms, societal expectations, and widely-held beliefs within the setting?
- How does the setting impact the characters’ experiences, beliefs, decision-making, and motivations?
- How does the setting impact the characters’ sense of belonging and understanding of the world?
- What connections or parallels can you draw between the characters’ journeys in different settings?

Share examples that support the note-taking and tracking of connections in the story, without forcing students to record their thinking in any one specific way.



Analyze and Discuss

- How does Nazemian’s use of multiple settings impact your understanding of the characters’ journeys, conflicts, and themes in the novel?
- Why do you think the author chose to use multiple settings in the novel, mostly grounded in adolescence? What might the impact have been if he chose to prioritize one setting or shifted the time periods to decenter the teenage years of the main characters?

Exploring Craft: Considering The Author’s Perspective

Knowing the mind behind the art helps us better understand the creation. The Author’s Note shares with readers some of the motivation behind the creation. Spend some time exploring Nazemian’s words.

My kids once asked me, “What’s your favorite day ever?” Perhaps they were expecting me to say it was the day they were born. Or the day I was married. But after giving it some thought, I told them my favorite day was today, because it holds every preceding day within it. This book, in some ways, was born from that conversation, from wanting to understand the way my present, and our collective present, holds the past within it.

What do you think Nazemian means by the last line?

Discussing Text Themes, Characters, and Plot

Identity Development

- Bahar says, “we should all define ourselves however we want to. There are more serious things to argue about than words.” How are the characters shaped by definitions (others and their own) throughout the novel? Discuss the impact of those definitions on how they see themselves and interact with others.
- Moud spends the novel trying to figure out where he “fits” as a gay Iranian-American teenager. How do his identities, cultural background, and life experiences impact his feelings “fitting in” in different contexts? How do these feelings shift throughout the novel?
- Upon learning about Moud’s name change, Hassan Agha responds, “What is the story behind your name? What history do you carry?”. Consider your own name and the story behind it. How does it make you feel? What history do you carry?
- In Iran, Moud finds some peace in not being on social media. Ava suggests, “maybe not documenting every moment allows us to, I don’t know, be in the moment.” Consider the social media engagement of Moud, Ava, and Shane. How does social media impact their sense of self-worth, belonging, and pride? What connections and/or dissonances do you see between the way social media is discussed in the book and your own perceptions of it?



Community and Belonging

- Both Moud and Bobby have names that have been changed in order to make them more palatable while living in the United States. How does this naming impact their understanding of who they are and how they relate to others?
- Upon Moud's arrival to Iran, Hassan Agha remarks "we were one people connected by the Persian culture and language before new borders were created". Throughout the novel, many borders and lines of separation (literal and figurative) exist. How do the use of borders, categories, and labels divide and/or create community?
- Consider the "soundtrack" of the book. How does the music and poetry referenced throughout the novel create connections and foster relationships?

Love and Relationships

- Zip tells Bobby, "when you become a man, be a teacher, a guide. Help young people who are made to feel invisible feel the opposite. Make them feel seen. Without guides and mentors, our community would be lost." There are many guides and teachers throughout the novel – Zip for Bobby, Baba for Siamak, Bahar for Saeed, Ava for Moud. How do the guides in this novel help others feel seen? Next, consider your own guides and teachers. How has their guidance made you feel seen? What was the impact of that feeling on how you perceived yourself and the world?
- Throughout the novel, many of the characters push boundaries and break rules in the name of love. Review the characters' love-driven decisions throughout the novel. What were the impacts of these decisions? How does love drive the narrative across time?
- A big source of tension between Moud and Shane is Saeed's avoidance of Moud's sexuality at home. What does this tension reveal about cultural differences, expectations of "coming out" in America, and how we define love?
- Review Saeed's trip to the piano bar with Bahar, Luis, and Enrique. How does his experience disrupt what he knows to be true about love, relationships, gender, and sexuality? What does this scene offers readers in our understanding of how we perceive ourselves and the world around us?





Government and People

- Throughout the novel, there is a constant tension between Americans' perceptions of the Middle East and the true lived experience of Iranians. What did you learn about this tension through the novel? How does it compare/contrast with your related experiences and knowledge previously held? What other curiosities do you have about this ongoing conflict?
- Ava reminds Siamak, “never say America. Always say Americans. Using the noun takes the agency away from the people who did the dirty work.” What is the purpose of this distinction? Do you agree or disagree with this sentiment?
- Moud says, “Iranians aren’t even part of the cultural conversation in America. Nobody from the Middle East is.” Reflect on what you see depicted in the media, the conversations you have on a daily basis, and the societal norms you observe. What messages and/or perceptions of Iranians or “the Middle East” are prevalent in your day-to-day life? How do your experiences confirm and/or disrupt Moud’s statement?
- Consider Coach Lane’s treatment of Vicente and Shane’s perception of Iranian life. What beliefs and understandings of the world drive each character’s actions? What can we learn about the wide spectrum of “American values” by studying how these characters’ statements and actions throughout the novel?
- When Vicente’s father is forced to return to Mexico, the government calls it “repatriation,” instead of deportation. Spend some time researching the history of U.S.-Mexican immigration. How does repatriation differ from deportation? What surprised you from what you learned? What questions emerged in your research?

Protest and Resistance

Throughout the story, protest and resistance movements take many forms – Saeed and Shirin meet at protests in Iran, Shane advocates for gay rights through his podcast, and Siamak makes powerful statements through his art. Discuss the complexities of resistance and how characters’ resistance is shaped by their context, relationships, and experiences.

When discussing corruption and power within resistance movements, Baba says, “the only thing I understand is people. Individuals, not groups.” Consider this distinction given the history of conflict, resistance, and oppression throughout the world. What might be the benefits and drawbacks to Baba’s philosophy on life? How does it compare/contrast to your own?



Queer Representation and Identity

- Moud overhears a Down With America? listener’s comment: “I am not down with queer pain. I’m so sick of queer characters suffering in our stories. And let’s talk about how our stories are always about coming out to straight people. Especially parents. Aren’t we over that?”. Consider the texts you have encountered – novels, movies, TV shows, music, art, fan fiction, video games, etc. How are LGBTQ+ characters represented? What are their common storylines and conflicts? How do these representations align with or diverge from this listener’s perceptions?
- Saeed describes the inside of The Other Side: “Bahar is one of the only women in the room though there is femininity everywhere. Men crowd the tables together. They hold hands. They giggle like schoolgirls. Some embrace their lack of masculinity, wearing hints of makeup, shirts that glitter, pants that shimmer. Others overdo their masculinity, wearing leather, sitting with their legs, open wide, like an invitation. It all feels obscene.” What do Saeed’s perceptions of the other people in the club reveal about gender norms and expectations? How are these norms similar or different to those that you experience in today’s society?
- In the author’s note, Abdi Nazemian recalls comments made by Iran’s former president during a visit to the United States: “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals like in your country. In Iran, we don’t have this phenomenon.” How does Moud’s journey to Iran (and the family story he uncovers) complicate the former president’s comments? What is the impact of comments like these on our understanding of queerness on a global scale?

Extending Your Engagement

Extension Activity: Exploring Persian Poetry

Persian poetry is exalted in the text, as it’s a huge part of the culture. To know and recite lines of ancient poetry and to tap into their meaning in emotional times of need is part of the fabric of Iranian culture. You might immerse your students in a variety of Persian poetry translations, and ask them to discuss in partnerships or table groups their connections. Leave this fairly open-ended so that students can easily hinge from one idea to the next, and give them space to explain their connections.

- The Guest House by Rumi
- The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam
- Poetry of Forough Farrokhzad





Extension Activity: Create a Forough Farrokhzad Book Playlist!

In *Only This Beautiful Moment*, music connects characters not only to one another but also to home, culture, and history. Take a listen to the book playlist – all the albums and songs mentioned throughout the novel – and create your own playlist that feels like home. What songs might you include that affirm you, remind you of warm memories, or connect you to meaningful people and places?

Below are some of the instruments and musicians named across the story. During independent work time, you might ask that students spend time researching and listening to them to further engage with the story’s setting, tone and context. How does listening to what the characters are listening to help readers better understand the story?

Tar (instrument)	Aretha Franklin	Lana Del Rey
Piano (instrument)	Mary Martin	Britney Spears
Donna Summer	Madonna	Rihanna
Dalida	Ma Rainey	Googoosh
Tori Amos	Don McLean	Pink Floyd
Cole Porter		

Extension Activity: Create a Remix of Traditional Art

The character Siamak in the story makes art by adding queer people into traditional paintings. Though his life is in danger in Iran as a result of his remixing, his art is an expression of himself and a testament to the authentic identity of himself and those he loves. As readers, we learn about Siamak and the underground queer scene in Tehran through Ava, Moud’s cousin, at the party they attend together during his visit. Suggested pieces might include:

- Share with students several pieces of art to “read” together in table groups or partnerships.
- Ask students to have a conversation about what they see, notice and wonder, potentially using a [simple template](#).
- Prompt students to discuss how they might share some of their own identities by altering and remixing the art. You might ask, “What story is this artist trying to tell? How might you share yourself in this story?”
- Allow students to get creative by adding paint, colored pencils, collage newspaper/magazine, words and construction paper on top of the original pieces.



Extension Activity: Making Connections from History to Current Events

Topic: Zan, Zendegi, Azadi

In the Fall of 2022, a young woman named Mahsa Jina Amini was murdered in Iran for not fully covering her hair according to the law of the Islamic Regime in the country. After her killing, the country began a revolution—led by young people and women—against the policing of women’s bodies via law—a law that has been enforced for over forty years. As of Spring 2023, the revolution continues, with demonstrations, protests and often violence, as people in Iran fight for freedom to choose how women can dress, act and live in public in Iran. Share with students a variety of multimodal information about the current state of the revolution. How is art used as an outlet for peaceful protest? In what ways are the protests in *Only This Beautiful Moment* and current-day Iran similar or different?

- Art: Iran Through Illustration and Women of Iran: Heroes of the Year TIME cover
- Song: Baraye, the “anthem” for the Women, Life, Freedom movement by Shervin Hajipour (with English translations)
- Essay: “I Am Iran’s Daughter” by Naz Riahi
- Language: learn more about the slogan #ZanZendegiAzadi and its origins

Topic: Running Radicals; Artists and Creatives Who Fled

Because of the political climate in Iran, intellectuals and artists have not historically been allowed to freely create. In the story, Bobby/Babak plays a role in protecting youth in Tehran, like Siamak, who remixes traditional art with queer figures.

In the text, Siamak says, “Asking why people have to leave Iran is like asking why your ancestors died.”

Allow students to research additional running “radicals” by choosing from the list below. These creatives may have left Iran for various reasons but cannot return as a result of their writing, art or music. Why did they have to leave? How do they continue to use their art as resistance, even in exile?

- Shahriar Mandanipour
- Shirin Neshat: Art in Exile TED talk
- Golshifteh Farahani





Extension Activity: Contextualized Learning on Iranian Food, Culture, and History

There are many references in the text to Iranian food, music, history, and language. Create space for students to explore the context of this story by choosing several references from the table below to look up and share about with table partners. You might create a jigsaw activity or gallery walk activity where students can share with their classmates what they looked up, learned and discovered.

Food	Text/Music	History/Context	Language/ Expressions
Yakh dar behesht	The Shahnameh	Paykans	Persian expression: May Your Hand Not Hurt/jan
Doogh	Tar	Shahyad Square	Salam
Kookoo sabzi	Omar Khayyam	Alborz Mountains	Azizam
Tahdig	Rumi	The Shah	Beshkan
Kotlet	Hafez	“Down With America!”	Chador
Lavash	Saadi	King Mahmoud	Tarof
Barbari	“Do good. Allah loves the doers of good.”	Pictorial rugs	
Faloodeh	Quran	Perisanate society	
Khoreshteh	Dalida	Firooz Zahedi	
Kadu	Forough Farrokhzad	Tehran Contemporary Sculpture Biennial	
Polo	Shahriar	Jaleh Square	
Mast	Reza Baraheni	Mossadegh	
Kabob	Aalam E. Yekrangee	Khomeini	
Balal	Bekhoon	SAVAK	
Khorakeh	Bekhoon	Anglo-Persian Pipeline	
Morgh	Soltane Ghalbha		
	Do Panjereh (Googoosh)		





About the Author

Abdi Nazemian is the author of five novels. 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

About the Writers of this Guide

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