
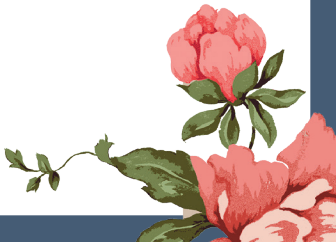


## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What was your biggest takeaway from *By Any Other Name*? You may wish to talk about the thematic significance—literal and symbolic—of the title, for starters.
  2. Take an opportunity to talk about Shakespeare and how his historic significance informed your reading experience. Were you surprised to learn that people question the true identity of The Bard? Do you believe Emilia is the true playwright now? Why or why not?
  3. Gender swapping, mistaken identity, and missed communication are amongst the many tropes found in Shakespeare’s plays. Did you notice these tropes also exist within Melina’s timeline in *By Any Other Name*? Why might the author choose to incorporate these themes into the modern timeline, rather than the historical timeline with Emilia? What message is related to the reader with this choice?
  4. Talk about the use of a framed narrative—the story behind the story—in *By Any Other Name*. Did you enjoy the alternating chapters between Emilia and Melina’s individual points of view? Did you prefer one to the other, and why? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way?
  5. Emilia Bassano is a real-life historical figure who lived during Shakespeare’s time. Did Emilia feel real to you in the world of this novel? And if so, in what ways? What narrative devices did the author use to bring her to life on the page? How is she similar to, or representative of, women in our day and age?
  6. “There was a reason you could not create history,” Emilia says, “without writing the word story.” Talk about the power and permanence of putting lived experience into words. What does the act of storytelling mean to Emilia, Melina, and other characters in the novel? What does it mean to you?
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7. Could you catch the various references to Shakespeare plays and sonnets in *By Any Other Name*? Which ones were your favorites? Did you check the back of the book—and discover any surprises?
8. “Being a woman,” says Melina, “means being told to speak up for yourself in one breath and to shut up in the next.” Do you agree? Cite examples from the book and popular culture that support this.
9. Melina struggles in being an ally for Andre as she advocates for herself as a woman. Do you think Melina is to blame for their fallout, or is Andre? How do we advocate for inclusion and diversity for others when we’re a member of one marginalized group, without losing our “place in the line” so to speak? Discuss.
10. What does *By Any Other Name* have to say about the nature of art and artifice, truth and deception? In what ways might you reconsider a woman’s place in the history of letters now that you’ve read this book?
11. Imagine Emilia’s time, when women were forbidden to write for a public audience . . . and now think of our very world today, one in which female voices across the globe continue to be suppressed, and books (especially about sex and gender) are banned. How does it make you feel to acknowledge the state of literature in the current moment?
12. We are taught that there is a moral to every story—something that we are supposed to learn about the world and ourselves from having read it. Do you believe that a work of fiction can “speak” to our own humanity? And, if so, what do you think *By Any Other Name* has to say?
13. If you had the chance to ask the author one question about *By Any Other Name*—about the inspiration for her story, the writing process, or her personal background—what might it be?
14. If *By Any Other Name* was being adapted into a television show or movie, who would you cast in each role?

