

Rumi and the Red Handbag

Book Club Questions

1. Much of *Rumi and the Red Handbag* is devoted to attempting to capture Ingrid-Simone's elusive character. How would you describe her? Do you know anyone like her?
2. Shaya is interested in literary secrets, and the novel has, at its core, a secret. How does the symbolism of the handbag work with this idea of literary secrets in *Rumi and the Red Handbag*?
3. The question from the Grail quest comes up as the two women discuss a book Shaya keeps in her purse. The question is, "What are you going through?" What are the barriers to asking this question? Is it always possible? What happens when we don't ask this question of people in our everyday lives?
4. Much of the novel takes place in a second-hand store. What meaning does the store take on in the book?
5. We spend a great portion of our lives at work and *Rumi and the Red Handbag* is very much about the work that these two women perform. How does the work they do shape them, and how does it shape the novel?
6. Ingrid-Simone reads poetry, books suggested by Shaya, and she visits the library to let books find her. She also indulges in reading vintage romance novels. How does her reading affect her view of the world? What other instances of reading are there in the book?
7. Has reading *Rumi and the Red Handbag* changed how you imagine individuals that you encounter?
8. The subject of memory comes up in several instances in the novel. Shaya constructs the retelling of the story of her time with Ingrid-Simone from post-it notes, entries in a notebook, and from random bits of paper on which she's jotted down details. Ingrid-Simone has a wonderful memory for reciting poetry, but her mother is afflicted with Alzheimer's. If the story of those winter months had been told by Ingrid-Simone, how might it have differed from Shaya's version?
9. How do you interpret the ending of the novel? What does it say about the friendship of Shaya and Ingrid-Simone?
10. What do you have in your purse right now?