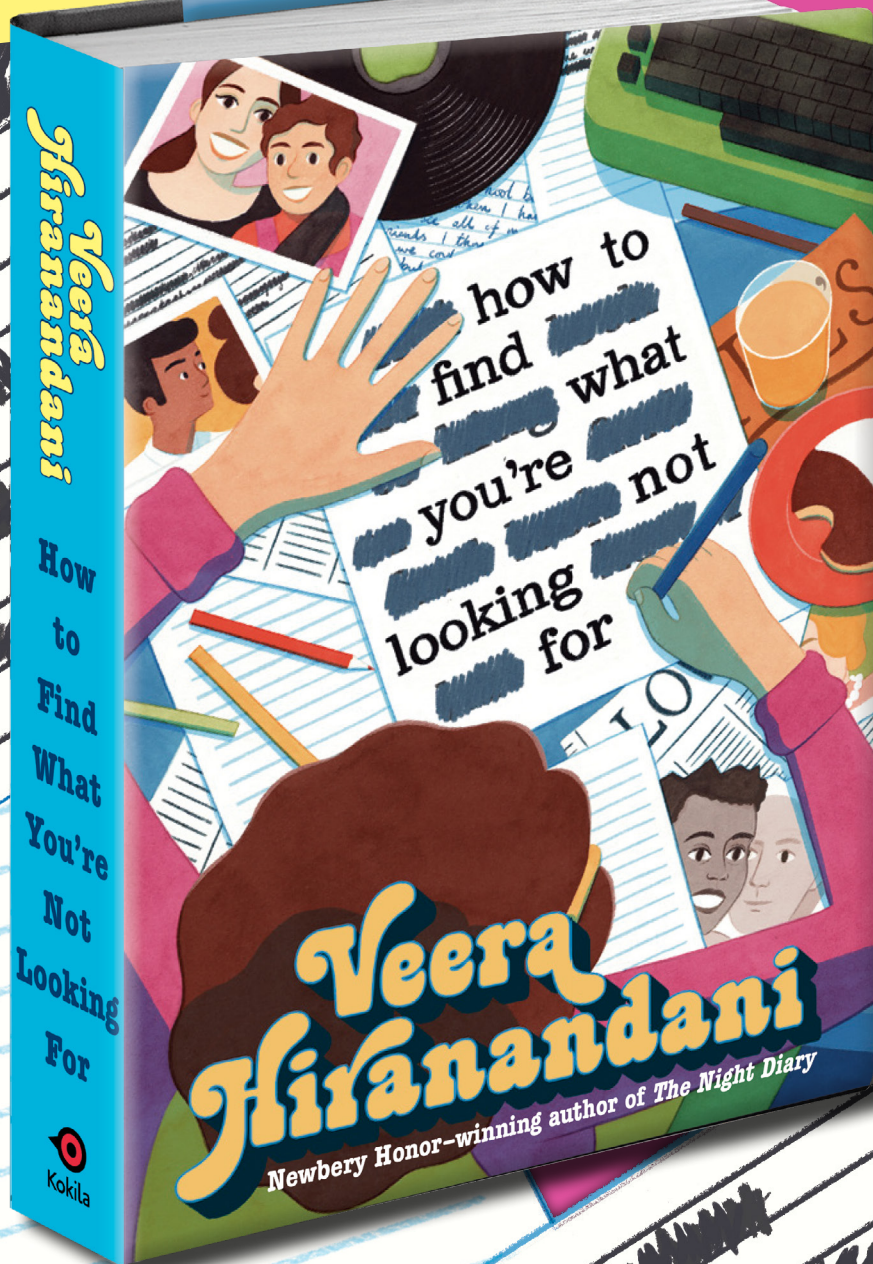


A Discussion Guide to How to Find What You're Not Looking For



Veera
Hiranandani

How
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Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Night Diary*



About the Book

New historical fiction from a Newbery Honor-winning author about how middle schooler Ariel Goldberg's life changes when her big sister elopes following the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* decision and she's forced to grapple with both her family's prejudice and the antisemitism she experiences as she defines her own beliefs.

Twelve-year-old Ariel Goldberg's life feels like the moment after the final guest leaves the party. Her family's Jewish bakery runs into financial trouble, and her older sister has eloped with a young man from India following the Supreme Court decision that strikes down laws banning interracial marriage. As change becomes Ariel's only constant, she's left to hone something that will be with her always—her own voice.

Background Information

Yiddish Glossary

- **challah** - a type of bread often served on Jewish holidays
- **farblondjet** - the state of aimlessly wandering, or being hopelessly lost and unsure of where to turn next
- **farkakte** - lousy, ridiculous, covered in excrement
- **goy** - a derogatory name for a non-Jewish person
- **hok a chainik** - literally means "knocking on someone's teapot," but often used to mean bothering or annoying someone
- **Kaddish** - mourner's prayer
- **kvetching** - to complain, complaining
- **kugel** - a baked noodle or potato pudding
- **mazik** - a mischievous child
- **mishegas** - craziness or nonsense
- **mench** - an honorable person with integrity
- **meshuggener** - a foolish person
- **oy** - a shortened version of "oy vey" a worried expression similar to "oh no!"
- **Shabbos** - sabbath for people of the Jewish faith (Friday evening to Saturday evening)
- **tsuris** - trouble or problems

This guide was written by Jenice Mateo-Toledo, Ed.D., a veteran ENL teacher and Director of Diversity and Inclusion in Westchester, NY. Jenice leads professional learning workshops for educators and presents at national conferences on topics that focus on diversity, equity, racial literacy, and culturally responsive-sustaining education through children's literature. Jenice is also a team member of [#JustLit](#), an affiliated MASCLab project that is housed in the CMLTD program at Teachers College, Columbia University. [#JustLit](#) curates resources that center multimodal explorations of social change through young adult and children's literature, media production, and popular culture.

Family History, Language, & Assimilation

Ariel's parents are Jewish and speak Yiddish and English. Yiddish, written using the Hebrew alphabet, is a German dialect that integrates many languages including Hebrew, Aramaic, and various Slavic and Romance languages. Yiddish was the daily language used among Jewish people in business and at home in central and eastern Europe before the Holocaust. Today it is spoken mainly in the United States, Israel, and Russia.

- Ariel states that her parents never taught her Yiddish “because they wanted to keep it for themselves, a secret language” (p.44). Using information from the text and historical evidence from the links above, infer another reason why Ariel and Leah's parents might have chosen not to teach them how to speak Yiddish.
- Share why you agree or disagree with the parents' decision and explain why.

Raj was raised in Bombay (today called Mumbai), a large city in India, and speaks English, Sindhi, Hindi, and Urdu. Raj's family arrived in the United States as part of the wave of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America that entered the country as a result of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.

This act ended the US quota system that favored European immigrants and established a new immigration policy focused on reuniting immigrant families and attracting skilled labor. This policy shifted the demographic makeup of the US for the next four decades.

- Using information from the text and evidence from the information in the links above, explain how the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 might have affected Raj's family.

Research your own family history.

- How has US history shaped your family tree?
- What language(s) does/do your family speak or choose not to speak? Why?
- How have historical events positively and/or negatively affected your family history?
- How is your family history similar to and different from Ariel and Leah's? How about similar to and different from Raj's?

History

- What do you know about 1960s US history?

The 1960s was an era of protest, revolution, and change in politics and music. Dominant social norms and laws that perpetuated inequality were challenged. Using the links below, review the historical events referenced in the text.

[1960s History](#)

[The Vietnam War](#)

[The Civil Rights Movement](#)

[The Beatles:](#)

[The Black Panther Party](#)

[Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club](#)

- Explain how learning about historical events helps the reader better understand the characters' actions and decisions.
- What connections can you make between the struggle for equality in the 1960s and the civil rights movement that exists in the United States today?
- Ariel has a discussion with her mother about the difference between protests and riots (p.338-340). How are these words used to protect people? How are they used to vilify people? Who benefits from each?

Supreme Court Decision

The [Supreme Court](#) is the highest court in the Judicial Branch of the US government. In the text, Leah and Ariel reference the *Loving v. Virginia* case. The plaintiffs, Mildred and Richard Loving, were arrested and informed that their marriage was illegal in the state of Virginia because they were an interracial couple. The justices disagreed with the state's position and banned laws that made interracial marriages illegal in the US.

- Why is this Supreme Court decision important to American citizens, including Leah?
- The *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision was groundbreaking at the time. How has this decision been used to support marriage equality today?

Activists

An activist is a person who strives and campaigns for political or social change. Several important activists in history are discussed in this text.

[Mohandas Gandhi](#)

[Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

[Malcolm X](#)

History [continued]

- Why are these activists important in history?
- Explain how their activism continues to influence American society today. How do they influence global society?
- Leah and Raj discuss different perspectives of activism (p.17-18). Whom do you agree with? Explain why.

Racial Literacy

Glossary

- **prejudice** - a preconceived opinion of another person not based on reason or experience ([Cole](#))
- **racism** - a belief that some races are superior to others that results in the unequal distribution of power based on race ([Cole](#))
- **antisemitism** - belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish ([ADL](#))
- **allyship** - speaking out against injustice and supporting marginalized groups and individuals on their own terms ([Learning for Justice](#))

Ariel and Leah witness prejudice in their own home. In fact, Leah accuses her mother of being prejudiced after meeting Raj for the first time. Her mother states that she's only thinking of Leah's future. (p.41)

- How would you feel if you were Leah? Explain why.
- Explain why Leah accuses her mother of being prejudiced. Do you agree with Leah's accusation? If so, why? If not, why not? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Ingrained prejudice is defined as deeply embedded and difficult to remove. How does Ariel support her sister and push back against the "ingrained prejudice" (p.32) of her family?

Ariel is the victim of antisemitism in school. Chris teases and bullies her often. One day, he asks Ariel, "Where are your horns?" because his father told him that Jews have horns "like the devil" (p.23).

- How would you feel if you were Ariel?
- Explain why Chris's behaviors are antisemitic. Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

Racial Literacy [continued]

- Ariel is ignored when she asks for help from the adults in her school community. What would you do if you were Ariel? What would you do if you were Ariel's friend?

Ariel questions the adults around her and stands up for what is right even when it's extremely difficult.

- What did you learn about allyship and self-advocacy after reading this text?
- What can you do when you hear prejudiced, racist, and/or antisemitic remarks at home, school, and/or other community spaces?
- Create a poem you would share to support a friend or family member who is dealing with prejudice, racism, or antisemitism.

Learning Disabilities

Ariel has a learning difference called dysgraphia, which means that writing is a challenge for her.

- One way people can be diverse is in our abilities. Ariel has [dysgraphia](#). How does her learning difference impact her experience in school?
- The novel is set in 1967, and the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) wasn't passed until 1990. Why do you think this law needed to be passed? How do you think Ariel would have benefited from it?

Author's Craft

Hiranandani uses a second-person point of view to tell Ariel's story.

- Why do you think Hiranandani choose this point of view?
- Explain how the story would be different if it was written from a first- or third-person point of view?

Hiranandani often references food when using figurative language.

- What can food tell us about a character beyond cultural background?

In the Author's Note, Hiranandani reveals that some aspects of this story are true.

- How does this story inspire you as a writer?
- Write a short story or poem using your life experiences as inspiration.

Praise for HOW TO FIND WHAT YOU'RE NOT LOOKING FOR by Veera Hiranandani

- ★ "A splendid historical fiction tale of bravery and determination." —*School Library Journal*, starred review
- ★ "A powerful blend of important themes and everyday triumphs and sorrows." —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ "Explores the benefits and costs of assimilation and the complexity of being both white and a religious minority in America then—and now." —*Publisher's Weekly*, starred review

About the Author

Veera Hiranandani, author of the Newbery Honor-winning *The Night Diary*, earned her MFA in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College. She is the author of *The Whole Story of Half a Girl*, a Sydney Taylor Notable Book and a South Asia Book Award finalist. Her latest novel is *How to Find What You're Not Looking For*. A former editor at Simon & Schuster, she now teaches creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College's Writing Institute.



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