

HOLLOW FIRES

SAMIRA AHMED



Book Club Pick

PRAISE

★ “A deeply **chilling, inventive, and timely** page-turner.”

—Kirkus

★ “Ahmed weaves evocative prose with images, articles, and text messages to explore with skill and depth the twining of social media in an age of misinformation, alt-right political movements, and racism and Islamophobia.”

—Publishers Weekly

“An **impossible-to-put-down** thriller. Spectacularly haunting and deeply thoughtful.”

—Sabaa Tahir

“**Powerful, timely, and relentlessly compelling.**”

—Karen M. McManus

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Hollow Fires* is told through various forms of media: interviews, articles, transcripts, etc. How does the way you receive information affect how you process it? What do these different forms of storytelling reveal?
2. Each chapter opens with a set of facts, alternative facts, truths, or lies. How do characters lie and manipulate the truth in both small and large ways? How can you determine truth from among different sources? What is the responsibility of the press? Are journalists and reporters neutral observers?
3. Ms. Ellis tells Jawad that “being creative takes courage” (p. 11). Who is allowed the space for play and creativity? Who is given the benefit of the doubt? Why are these ideas important?
4. How do different characters conceive free speech? What role does anonymity play in the freedom of expression? Do you think people behave differently online and in person?
5. How does stereotyping people based on one trait dehumanize them and erase the true range of diversity within communities? How are different forms of bigotry (e.g. misogyny, racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism) linked?
6. Safiya’s newspaper column encourages people to Be the Change. How do Safiya and other characters work for change? What various forms can activism take?
7. Safiya and Asma discuss the popularity of true crime. How does media coverage, including true crime narratives, impact victims and their families?
8. How do characters experience systems of power differently? Can you work for change within these systems of power? How?
9. Jawad remarks that “demons are everyday people” (p. 253). How do characters hide their true selves? What coded language do they use to mask their beliefs and communicate among themselves?
10. Jawad wonders “if you can’t see, how can you make sure everyone is treated equally?” (p. 277), while Safiya laments that “we might get accountability, but it won’t be justice” (p. 355). How do you ensure equality? What does justice mean to you?