DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After Iris stops speaking to Dad, they begin communicating again through acrostic poems. What was it about her dad's first poem that reopened their communication (pp. 19–20)? How is Iris's acrostic reply—despite being titled “NO”—a message of forgiveness (p. 20)?

2. Dad teaches Iris that to write poetry, “you first have to identify the beating heart of what you want to say” (p. 22). What do you think he means? How does the beating heart of what Iris wants to say change over the course of the novel?

3. In chapter three, how does Mr. Inglash's extreme reaction to Iris's splinter affect her? What does this scene show you? In what ways do adults who Iris should be able to rely on either disappoint or uplift her over the course of the story?

4. What causes Iris's “bug-infested rage monster” to rise up (p. 66), and what calms it? How does Iris's grief and mourning differ from that of other characters you've read who are reeling from loss? Think about characters in such books as *The Thing About Jellyfish* by Ali Benjamin, *Hazel Bly and the Deep Blue Sea* by Ashley Herring Blake, or *The Canyon's Edge* by Dusti Bowling.

5. Why is Iris so determined to hate J.R., and how does she feel about him by novel's end? What do you make of J.R. and Iris's evolving relationship?

6. What is it about Julian that allows Iris to grow closer to him, to the point that “life would feel normal again” (p. 137)?

7. How do Iris's friends—new and old alike—help her grieve? How do they help her grow?

8. How do the poems incorporated throughout the novel impact the narrative? Why do you think the author chose to include them?

9. How is this novel as much about community as it is about grief? How are these two things related?

10. How does the character of Dr. Anthony Fauci in the novel compare with the real person as you have seen him in the news? How do real people help make historical fiction come alive?

11. The title of the book appears in the novel's last line, which is also the last line of a poem: “This beautiful, breakable world made of glass” (p. 265). What does the phrase mean in the context of J.R.'s limerick? What does it mean applied to the book as a whole? How does glass serve as a motif throughout the novel?

12. How does the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s as depicted in this novel compare and contrast with the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s?