



About the Book

Aru Shah meets *One Thousand and One Nights* in this lavish middle-grade adventure following a girl who must travel to a mystical land of sorceresses, alchemists, jinn, and flying carpets to discover her heritage and fulfill her destiny.

My own Yara, if you are reading this, then something terrible has happened, and you are on your own. To return to the city of Zehaira, you must read out the words on the back of this letter . . . Good luck, my brave girl.

When twelve-year-old Yara's mother passes away, she leaves behind a letter and a strange set of instructions. Yara must travel from the home she has always known to a place that is not on any map—Zehaira, a world of sorcerers, alchemists, and simmering magic. But Zehaira is not the land it used to be. The practice of magic has been outlawed, the Sultan's alchemists are plotting a sinister scheme, and the answers Yara is searching for seem to be out of reach.

Yara must summon all her courage to discover the truth about her mother's past and her own identity . . . and to find her place in this magical new world.

Key Characters

Yara Sulimayah—protagonist

Nahzin Sulimayah—Yara's mom (deceased)

Meriyem (Meri) Shereen—sorceress, bakery owner

Mehnoor—soothsayer, Meri's niece

Ajal—jinn

Leyla Khatoun—sorceress

Shehzad—Leyla's raven familiar

Rafi Al-Qamar—Leyla's magic student

Omair Firaaz—Sultan's Chief Alchemist

Ismah Parveen—Grand High Sorceress



Reflection Questions

1. In her letter, Yara's mama gives her instructions to pack food, warm clothes, and a waterproof coat for her voyage, but Yara also adds a history book, two photos, a pocket atlas, and her mother's blue headscarf to her bag. In addition to food and clothing, what three things would you pack for a journey to an unknown place if you have one small backpack?
2. The kitchen is a special place for Yara; it's where she feels closest to her mom's memory. Is there somewhere that you feel a connection to someone important in your life? Why?
3. As she is preparing to perform the locating spell that will lead Yara to find Leyla, Meri says, "If we never took any risks, we'd never do anything at all." Can you think of a time when you took a risk in order to help someone in your life? How did it turn out?

4. How does Yara change from when we meet her to the end of the book?
5. “*The truth is, I like the part Leyla despises—going into the villages with tonics and making people better. But it would never occur to her that anyone would want to learn about that.*” When we first meet Rafi, he does not like sharing his sorcery lessons with Yara. Sorcery—and the poetry required to make it work—does not come naturally to him, but we learn that he does have a knack for helping people with his potion-making abilities. What is a skill you have that may be a bit different, but is true to you? What is a skill you admire in others?
6. Halfway through the story, we learn about a sickness that is infiltrating the magical world and attacking sorcerers’ powers. Were you surprised by this plot twist? Write about how you felt when the Council of the Northern Sorcerers refused to aid Yara and her friends.
7. *The Kingdom over the Sea* is a fantasy story, but there are thematic elements that exist in the real world (for example: refugees who have to leave their home

because of religious or cultural persecution). Can you draw connections between this book and three other middle-grade titles set in our world? There are lots of genres to explore, including contemporary fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, even picture books!

8. Reflect on the story as a whole when you are finished. How was the story different than you may have expected when you started chapter one? Did you predict any plot points? What questions would you ask the author if you had the chance? Write a short review of this book that you could share with a friend or classmate who hasn't read the book yet.



Go Beyond the Book! Extension Activities

1. **Draw a picture or make a mind map of the scene that stuck with you the most.** What was it about this scene that stood out to you? Why was it important to the story?
2. **Choose a quote from the book and free write for ten minutes about whatever it brings to mind.** Not sure where to start? Pick from one of these:

Nothing Mama had given her had been magical. There are things you can pass on that are more important than magic. . . . Teaching your daughter that she must keep making demands of the world, no matter how often it denies her.

“When you practice magic, you hold the laws of nature in your hand, and that comes with a duty to the world around you.”

“The Great Library was a magnificent place, filled with its own sort of sorcery that would invite you in and lead you to the books you needed most.”

3. Write a spell!

“A powerful spell needs powerful language, language that can bring things that are strange and marvelous to life. The combination of a well-made potion and a verse spell—it is there that wonders have been achieved.”

In this story, words hold enormous power and poetry can make magic happen. Using an ABAB rhyming pattern, write a spell that a sorcerer may use to bring a wish into reality.

If you're not sure where to start, use Yara's safe passage spell as a guide:

“Beneath these stars and on this sea,
An ancient spell once carried me.
Borne by wood and left on stone,
I bid your ship come take me home.

Unravel now these threads of time
Spent in foreign land and clime.
My time beneath this sky has passed.
I bid you, take me home at last!”

