



# the UNLOVABLE Alina Butt

## Teacher Guide

### About the book

Fitting in at a new school is hard enough, but when you're an awkward, big-nosed, nerdy Pakistani girl with a funny last name, it can seem impossible. Eleven-year-old Alina Butt has changed schools four times already since her family moved to England from Pakistan. Mocked and singled out for her last name and her "weird" lunches, Alina has had enough! Taking a leap of faith to try and stand out for the "right" reasons, Alina auditions for the school play. Her hopes of landing the lead role in Cinderella are dashed when her new friend gets the part instead...and her bully is cast as Prince Charming! Alina must rely on her stubborn will and wacky sense of humor to survive the endlessly embarrassing and ridiculous situations she finds herself in and discover her own unique way to shine.



Credit: Hadia T.H. - White Cactus Studios

### About the author

**AMBREEN BUTT-HUSSAIN** was born in Pakistan but lived in England and Scotland before finally settling in Canada. She has a bachelor of science from the University of Toronto and a master of education from Queen's University. She has years of experience as an elementary school teacher, some experience as a writer and a lifetime of experience being the awkward new kid trying to fit in. She lives in Milton, Ontario.



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## Discussion Questions

1. Alina hopes to reinvent herself at her new school. What do you think the reason is for this decision? Why does she believe she is unlovable?
2. What are some things that stood out to you about the setting of the novel (place, time period)? Do you think Alina's experience would be different if the setting was different (e.g., US, 2023)? Why or why not?
3. What are some reasons that people might immigrate to a new country, even though they may experience adversity (such as racism and prejudice) in their new country? Why do you think Alina's parents moved to England?
4. Compare Alina's feelings of not being able to speak up in various situations to her mother's feelings about the car accident and the way she was treated? How does Alina's view of her mom change over time in the novel?
5. If you were to give Alina some advice, what would it be? What is the best piece of advice that Alina receives in the novel?
6. Why are Curly's advances to Nadia making her so upset? What do you think her dad could have done differently to help her with this situation?
7. What compels Alina to speak up against Curly, even though she has difficulty standing up to her own bully?
8. Compare and contrast two characters in the novel. Make a T-chart or a Venn diagram to outline their similarities and differences. (e.g., Alina and Nadia, Alina's mom and dad, Alina and her mom).
9. What are the different themes in this novel? Use specific details from the story to explain how these themes are conveyed.
10. Choose your favorite significant quote from the novel. Explain what this quote tells you about the character saying it, their personality, thought patterns, beliefs, fears or behaviors. Why do you like this quote?
11. Discuss a connection you can make to a scene in the story. This can be a text-to-text, text-to-self or text-to-world connection.
12. How do you think Alina's point of view influences the story? How would the story be different if it was told from Nadia's point of view? Her parent's point of view?
13. What makes Alina think differently about Adam? How does that impact how Alina thinks of herself and her life?
14. How do you think Alina has changed by the end of the novel?
15. What impact does self-talk have on the way you think about yourself? Find examples in the text where Alina has used positive or negative self-talk to drive her thoughts and actions.
16. This novel is inspired by the author's own childhood. What are three questions you may want to ask the author?



## Journal Prompts

1. Imagine your family has recently moved and tomorrow is your first day at your new school. Reflect in your journal about your hopes for the school year, what kind of student you want to be, what kind of friend you want to be, as well as what qualities you're looking for in a new friend.
2. As you read the book, draw an image of either a character, a setting or a significant scene.
3. Alina has a hard time standing up for herself to Adam. What are some ways to deal with a bully? How do you feel you would react in Alina's or Nadia's situation dealing with Adam or Curly?
4. Of all the characters you encountered in the novel, who stands out to you as an example of strength? What do you think makes a strong person or character?
5. Write a paragraph (or more) re-telling a part of the story from another character's perspective.
6. What is your understanding of racism and prejudice? What are the dangers of making judgments about people based on race, gender, age, sexuality, etc.? How is this something we can combat as a society?

## Extension Activities

1. Create a mock social-media page (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok) for a character of your choice (you can draw this by hand or create an image for it online). Your page should include the following information about your character:
  - An image (picture) of them
  - Their name, career/education,
  - The character's opinions/thoughts (in the form of a post, a tweet, a photo description)
  - Interaction with another character
2. Working with a partner, write a script, and perform an interview either between:
  - a. Two novel characters
  - b. A well-known podcaster and a novel character
  - c. Yourself and a character from the novel
3. Loving yourself does not mean you are perfect. You can love yourself with your flaws. Reflect on things you like about yourself. Make a T-Chart listing your strengths and weaknesses. Create a collage using words and images of things that you love about yourself (remember, these can be both strengths and weaknesses).
4. Interview a family member or a friend who immigrated to a new country. Keep in mind that reasons for immigration can sometimes be sensitive or difficult for the person to talk about, so remember to be respectful. Ask your interviewee why they immigrated, what changed for the better or worse, if they learn a new language, and other questions about their experience as an immigrant.
5. You are part of a leadership program at your school. Your task is to create a plan to make new students feel welcome. Create a presentation (slideshow/video/brochure) and outline five different ideas you would like to implement. These can be activities/games, mentorship programs, guides to making friends and dealing with bullies, school clubs, etc.

