

# The View from the Very Best House in Town

## Meera Trehan

### About the Book

Sam and Asha. Asha and Sam. Their friendship is so long established, they take it for granted. Just as Asha takes for granted that Donnybrooke, the mansion that sits on the highest hill in Coreville, is the best house in town. But when Sam is accepted into snobbish Castleton Academy as an autistic “Miracle Boy,” he leaves Asha, who is also autistic, to navigate middle school alone. He also leaves her wondering if she can take anything for granted anymore. Because soon Sam is spending time with Prestyn, Asha’s nemesis, whose family owns Donnybrooke and, since a housewarming party gone wrong, has forbidden Asha to set foot inside. Who is Asha without Sam? And who will she be when it becomes clear that Prestyn’s interest in her friend isn’t so friendly? Told from the points of view of Asha, Sam, and Donnybrooke itself, this suspenseful and highly original debut explores issues of ableism and classism as it delves into the mysteries of what makes a person a friend and a house a home.

### About Meera Trehan

Meera Trehan grew up in Virginia, just outside Washington, DC, where she read as much as she could, memorized poem after poem, and spent many hours at the public library, eventually volunteering there. After attending the University of Virginia and Stanford Law School, she practiced public interest law for over a decade before turning to creative writing. She lives in Maryland with her family.



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### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

## Discussion Questions

1. This book is told from the points of view of three narrators: Asha, Sam, and the house, Donnybrooke. What did you think of having the house as a narrator?
2. Donnybrooke dominates the town, both in its placement on top of the hill and in the wealth and privilege that it represents. Do you think that is why Asha is so taken with it? Or are there other reasons?
3. The weather vane on Donnybrooke figures prominently in this book. What is the significance of the eagle about to catch the fish?
4. Was Sam's mother doing him a favor by applying to Castleton Academy for him?
5. Why did Dr. Deutsch, the head of Castleton Academy, read the "Miracle Boy" article to the whole school on the first day of school? Should she have predicted the impact that would have on Sam?
6. Why did Prestyn ask Sam to work on the Medieval Life project with her and Tessa?
7. A lot of schools have instances of bullying, where kids use what power they have to repeatedly be mean to less powerful kids. Have you encountered this in your life? How have you handled it? How does your school handle bullying? What supports do you think could help kids in this situation?
8. Several times the author mentions something bad that happened when Asha attended a party at Prestyn's house a few years earlier, causing Asha to be banned from the house forever, but readers don't learn what the incident was until near the end of the book. What did you think happened?
9. Why do you think Prestyn is as mean as she is?
10. On page 223, the author writes, "Donnybrooke wanted to inspire envy. It seemed like the closest it could get to love." What does this mean to you?
11. Asha and Sam have changed a lot throughout the book. They go from being best friends to not speaking to each other to, at the very end, beginning to talk again. What do you think will happen to their friendship? Will it be the same as it once was?
12. If you were to design a house for you and your family, what elements would you include?
13. Does a house have to have fancy architectural elements to be a good house? What makes a house "the very best house" in Asha's eyes? In yours?
14. Sam and Asha both love the game Househaunt, Asha because of the architectural elements and Sam because he gets to wipe out the monsters. By the end of the book, each of them is designing, or planning to design, games that would totally appeal to them. If you were to design a game, what elements would you include?
15. When Asha and Joanna go to Donnybrooke for the open house at the end of the book, Asha remembers what it was like when she attended the Castleton party there. "She'd been jealous of how the girls hung off one another like they were all one big organism. But now she knows there are other ways to not feel alone" (page 254). What are the other ways to not feel alone she's thinking of? Can you add any others?

These questions were prepared by Grace Worcester, a former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. She has served on the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award*, and National Book Award for Young People's Literature committees.