

**FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX**  
**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**Skunk Girl**

by Sheba Karim

**Reading Level**  
Grades 9 up

"The book was a quick read and taught me a lot about the Muslim culture. The author uses everyday language, so anybody can read it. There aren't that many books out there that has such an interesting point of view (from a Muslim's perspective)."

—A YALSA YA Galley Teen Reader



**About the Novel**

If Nina Khan were to rate herself on the unofficial Pakistani prestige point system—the one she's sure all the aunties and uncles use to determine the most attractive marriage prospects for their children—her scoring might go something like this:

**+2 points** for getting excellent grades

**–3 points** for failing to live up to expectations set by genius older sister

**+4 points** for dutifully obeying parents and never, ever going to parties, no matter how antisocial that makes her seem to everyone at Deer Hook High

**–1 point** for harboring secret jealousy of her best friends, who are allowed to date like normal teenagers

**+2 points** for never drinking an alcoholic beverage

**–10 points** for obsessing about Asher Richelli, who talks to Nina like she's not a freak at all, even though he knows that she has a disturbing line of hair running down her back

In this wryly funny debut novel, the smart, sassy, and utterly lovable Nina Khan tackles friends, family, and love, and learns that it's possible to embrace two very different cultures—even if things can get a little bit, well, *hairy*.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Read the first chapter of *Skunk Girl*. List and discuss what you know about Nina Khan by the end of the chapter: her family, her culture, her town, feelings about school friends, her parents' expectations, and her aspirations.
2. Examine how the author revealed so much in a short chapter. As a writing exercise, write a few paragraphs about your first day of school and see how

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much you reveal. Now try the same in a fictional character voice.

3. *Skunk Girl* examines all the main relationships: friendship, family, boys, and self. Discuss Nina's relationship with her sister, Sonia. How have other people's comments and comparisons affected how Nina views Sonia? Identify the turning point in their relationship. What do you think their relationship will be like in the future?
4. What is the root of Nina's dislike for Serena? How does Nina resolve her issues with Serena?
5. List the qualities of Nina's friends. What is it that makes their friendships so strong despite having different personalities?
6. Why does Nina get along so well with Anthony?
7. Take a look at the Pakistani prestige point system. Is Nina really concerned about it? Do you know anyone else with a prestige point system? What do you think of it? How does it make you feel?
8. As Pakistani Muslim immigrants, Nina's parents have set expectations and rules for what she can and can't do. How does what Nina's mother expect of her differ from what Nina wants to do? Think of rules and expectations your caretakers have for you. How are your feelings about that similar to and different from Nina's?
9. For most of the book Nina is inwardly rebelling. How do her feelings manifest themselves and what is her ultimate decision?
10. Body image is a main theme in this book. Is Nina making too much or too little about her body hair? What would you tell her if she was your friend?
11. Discuss Asher's reaction. Does he judge Nina on her "plague"? Why or why not? And what does his reaction reveal about his character?
12. What else does Nina like about Asher?
13. Do you agree with her decision to not pursue Asher?



### About the Author

Sheba Karim lives in New York City. She is working on a short story collection and is very glad not to be a lawyer anymore.

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**For more information on Sheba Karim:**

**Web site:**

*www.fsgkidsbooks.com*

Includes a biography of the author and additional information about her books as well as excerpts and other teachers' guides.

***Skunk Girl***

by Sheba Karim

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