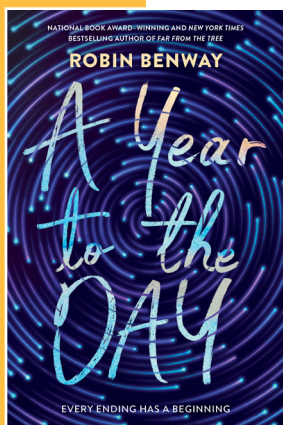


Book Club Guide



Includes letter from the author,
book club playlist, conversation starters,
reading recommendations, and more!



About the Book

IT'S BEEN A YEAR—A YEAR OF MISSING NINA

Leo can't remember what happened the night of the accident. All she knows is that she left the party with her older sister, Nina, and Nina's boyfriend, East. And now Nina is dead, killed by a drunk driver, leaving Leo with a hole inside her that's impossible to fill.

East, who loved Nina almost as much as Leo did, is the person who seems to most understand how she feels, and the two form a friendship based on their shared grief. But as she struggles to recall what happened, Leo discovers that East remembers every detail of the accident—and he won't tell her anything about it. In fact, he refuses to talk about that night at all.

As the days tumble one into the next, Leo's story unfolds while her world falls apart. How can she move on if she never knows what really happened that night? And is happiness even possible in a world without Nina?

About the Author

Robin Benway is a National Book Award–winning and *New York Times* bestselling author of seven novels for young adults, including *Audrey, Wait!*; the AKA series; *Emmy & Oliver*; and *Far From the Tree*. Her books have received numerous awards and recognition, including a Blue Ribbon Award from the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, ALA Booklist's Best Books for Young Adults, and ALA Booklist's Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults. In addition, her novels have received starred reviews from *Kirkus Reviews*, *ALA Booklist*, and *Publishers Weekly* and have been published in more than twenty-five countries. Her previous book, *Far From the Tree*, won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and the PEN America award. Robin grew up in Orange County, California; attended NYU, where she was the recipient of the Seth Barkas Prize in Creative Writing; and graduated from UCLA. She currently lives in Los Angeles.



Robin Benway photo by Carly Gaebel/Studio Sprints

A Note From the Author

I didn't want to write *A Year to the Day*.

I was scared of what my own brain was imagining, the characters and how they relate to one another, the loss of one teenage sister, the grief of another. I had experienced loss and death on a personal level, but I had never written about it before, and I wasn't sure if I could do this story justice.

But I had heard a song that made me picture two teenagers roller skating together and I couldn't get the image out of my mind. Who were they, and why did a third character keep popping up in my brain? An older sister no longer there, her presence still as strong as ever. And why, oh why, did I keep seeing this story playing out backwards? The whole project felt too challenging, which of course meant that it was all I could think about, which of course meant that I would be writing it.

That was in early March 2020.

Needless to say, a lot did not go as planned that year. I found myself unable to focus on fictional worlds, paralyzed by real-life news alerts, experiencing the kind of fear that felt so personal but I knew was universal. In those early months, we were all grieving something: the loss of loved ones, of routines, of hugs and human contact, things that we had taken for granted until they were taken away.

A few months into the pandemic, I packed up my life and my dog and flew to live with family for however long, I didn't know. I did know that despite the situation, I was extremely lucky: I had a place to stay and a job that could be done anywhere. Now I just had to do it.

I wrote *A Year to the Day* in my mother's guest room, hiding away for hours while wearing noise canceling headphones, listening to the same song over and over again as I cried, mourning the loss of a character that I loved. I would type and weep, type and weep, until my dog would come wandering down the hall and stand outside the glass bedroom door, staring at me until I pulled it together. I had never written a book like this before. I had no idea what I was doing, but I kept doing it anyway. But also? There was nothing else to do.

As I wrote and got to know Leo and East and their beloved Nina, I realized that I was writing a non-linear book about grief, itself a non-linear process. Leo goes from despondent to furious to resigned and shocked, sometimes all within the space of a single chapter. She and her parents and East all flounder, drowning in their own loss, mourning in their own personal ways. If there are five stages of grief, people certainly don't experience them in order, and in telling the story backwards, I was able to explore how the main characters in the book recover and relapse, fall apart and come back together, over and over again. Or at least, I hope I was.

A Year to the Day is not, at least to me, entirely a book about grief. There are Blizzards from Dairy Queen, roller skating birthday parties and '80s music, corgis named Denver, tacos and skateboards and friends. I think the reason grief can be so strong is that life can be so wondrous, so full of small and magical things that feel like nothing until you realize that they are, in fact, everything. If I had written that previous sentence back in 2019, I would have rolled my eyes and deleted it, but I'm two and a half years into a global pandemic. All I wanted when I wrote this book were the little things that I couldn't have. I gave them to my characters instead.

If you're reading this book while struggling with your own loss, I truly hope that you find comfort and solace in these characters' stories. I hope you find whatever it is that can bring you peace while acknowledging your pain. I hope you enjoy following Leo's and East's story. I hope you cheer for them. And I hope that you find yourself loving and missing Nina as much as I do.

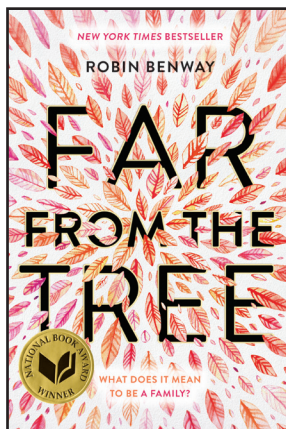
Thank you for reading my book.
—Robin Benway

Questions to Get the Conversation Started

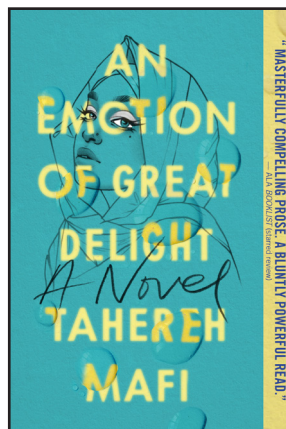
1. Have you ever experienced the loss of someone close to you? How do you “hold space” for them? Do you find it easier to “hold space” alone, or in the company of others? (p. 30)
2. Have you ever become closer to someone through the shared experience of losing someone you were both close to? Reflect on that experience and the bonds that were formed. (p. 46)
3. What do you think of the acronym Leo discovers for “FINE”? Have you discovered any resources that have helped you better navigate or understand the cycle of grief and loss? If so, what were they? (p. 80)
4. What are the forces that bring Leo and East together? What do you learn about their relationship as the book goes on? As a group, discuss your predictions for the future of their friendship. (p. 88)
5. What do you notice about the different ways Leo and her mother process the loss of their sister and daughter? How do you suppose a parent’s experience might differ from a sibling’s? (p. 123)
6. Discuss what you know or may have heard about “survivor’s guilt.” How do you think it shifts a person’s perspective? How does it show up in Leo’s thinking about herself and her relationship with those around her? (p. 130)
7. Why do you think East is so protective of his memories of Nina? (p. 158)
8. How does Leo’s father choose to continue his family life after Nina’s death? How does this impact his relationship with Leo? In what ways do they grieve and celebrate Nina’s life together? (p. 167)
9. How do people show condolences to those who have lost a loved one? In your opinion, do the cards, flowers, books, or other expressions of sympathy make a difference? What do East and Leo think? (p. 209)
10. How long do you think it takes to learn to live without the physical presence of someone you’ve lost? What, in your opinion, is the most important thing Leo says about the year she continued to live after her sister was gone? (p. 259)

Your next book club pick awaits!

If you loved *A Year to the Day*, don’t miss these other emotionally stirring novels.



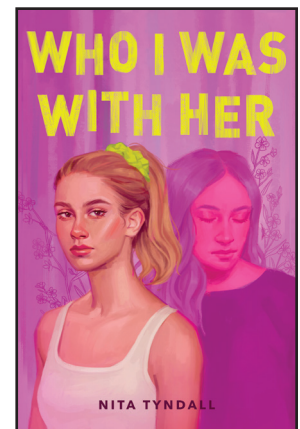
Three adopted siblings unite for the first time in this exploration of family in all its forms.



A searing look into the world of a single Muslim family in the wake of 9/11.



A teen brings his best friend back to life, but only for a day, in this speculative novel about love, grief, and friendship.



While grieving the death of the girlfriend she kept a secret for over a year, a teen strives to open herself up to honesty and love again.

Visit [HC.com/bookclub](https://www.hc.com/bookclub) for more book recommendations and discussion starters.

A Year to the Day: The Playlist

Get your club on the same page with a custom playlist curated by the author.

1. Hallelujah // Haim

“I met two angels but they were in disguise” are the opening lyrics to this song, and I felt like they perfectly encapsulated Leo’s feelings for the two most important people in her life, as well as the devotion that she has for her older sister, Nina. Also, the band Haim consists of three sisters, which felt extremely relevant to the book’s opening pages.

2. You and Me // Shallou

I grew up near the ocean in Southern California. Along one stretch of coastline, there are fire roads that are supposed to be for easy access during emergencies, but instead, a lot of kids just use them to practice skateboarding tricks. It’s also beautiful, with these gorgeous cinematic views of the ocean, and I loved the image of East and his friends filming each other up there, and Leo tagging along.

3. I’ll Be Over You // TOTO

A couples’ skate song if ever there was one.

4. Signs // Bloc Party

A sad, mournful song that also sounds like the holidays. I pictured Leo and East sitting in a car, a few days away from Christmas, listening to this song together, which is how their post-Christmas party moments came to be.

5. Kite Song // Rosie Thomas

I’ve always loved Rosie Thomas, and this version of “Kite Song” has always seemed very honest and raw, which is how I think Leo feels as the holidays approach.

6. Git Wit Dis // Manics

I never went to parties as a high schooler, so I asked a friend what they were like and he replied, “There was always a fight.” Done and done.

7. That’s All // Jimmy Forrest

There’s a scene in the book where Leo and her father are cleaning up after dinner while listening to jazz music on her dad’s transistor radio. This scene was born from my own experience during the pandemic. I keep a small solar-charged radio in my kitchen and normally have it tuned to the local NPR station, but switched it over to the local jazz station during the pandemic. I was washing the dishes one night and this Jimmy Forrest song came on. I immediately fell in love and knew I had to put it in the book.

8. Malibu Nights // LANY

To me, this is East's song. He hides a lot of his grief from Leo in order to protect her, but when he's alone, I suspect that this is how he feels.

9. Forever Young // Firewoodisland

One of my strongest memories from high school was hearing the original version of this song by Alphaville played over every single photo montage at every single assembly and pep rally ever. In the book, I imagine that this cover is playing during the school's ill-fated tribute to Nina, and Leo hating every single second of it. It's a little bit of a throwback to my own high school days, and also a nod to every kid who had to suffer through these kinds of experiences.

10. Wildflowers // Tom Petty

I always thought that this was a song that Leo and Nina's dad would have sung to them when they were babies, so I wanted to have it playing after Nina's funeral. I used to love this song, but now it's just something very emotional for me. I can't listen to it the way I used to anymore.

11. When the Party's Over // Billie Eilish

To me, this is what the early days after Nina's death sound like: haunting, wistful, mournful, broken. I could see Leo listening to it on repeat in her bedroom, taking comfort in it at a time when nothing can comfort her.

12. An Ending (Ascent) // Brian Eno

This song has always sounded very celestial to me, and at the risk of sounding trite or insensitive, this is the scene when Nina crosses over from one world to the next. Another song that I can no longer listen to without tearing up.

13. Time After Time // Cyndi Lauper

The song that started the whole book. I heard this song while in my car one afternoon and immediately pictured two kids roller skating to it, and that's how I first met Leo and East. To me, the lyrics represent how love never dies, how you can lose a person but not the feelings that you have for them.

14. Pinô // Otto A. Totland

I listen to a specific playlist whenever I fly in order to ease my travel anxiety, and during one flight I realized that I had been listening to "Pinô" on repeat for hours. To me, this is just Leo and Nina huddled up in bed together, talking and laughing, not realizing that their time together as sisters is finite. This song breaks my heart and puts it back together.

Inspired to
throw your own
roller skating party?
Click here for
a ready-made
soundtrack!



Listen on Spotify here: <https://bit.ly/AYearToTheDayPlaylist>