

DISCUSSION GUIDE



"SELF-AFFIRMING AND DEEPLY MOVING"

J. ELLE

**WALKER
BOOKS**

FINDING JUPITER

Kelis Rowe

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Finding Jupiter, Rowe's debut novel, is a deeply thoughtful YA romance, offering an authentic exploration of first love against a backdrop of mystery and the secrets of family. Rich with themes and topics for discussion, the novel traverses love, loss, expectation, truth and beauty, art, and our futures and our pasts, all through the nascent relationship of Ray and Orion, star-crossed teens in their last summer before college. As past tragedies sow the seeds of the future, they must work out how they really feel about each other, and which risks are worth taking.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelis Rowe is a debut author and alum of Pitch Wars, the volunteer-run mentoring programme for aspiring writers. Kelis's passion for writing contemporary YA comes from her own experiences growing up as a Black teenager in Memphis and yearning to see her experience of first love, its scope and its nature, on the pages of the books she read. She is now based in Texas, USA.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

As a novel containing themes of familial loss, grief, sex and relationships, adolescent pressure and the impact of life choices, there is much to unpick. Discussion leaders should ensure that adequate support is available to any member affected by discussion of these topics, and that appropriate signposting and guidance is on hand. All members should feel able to contribute as they feel comfortable doing, given opportunities to engage, express themselves and consider their responses.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

To begin with, ask for general thoughts on *Finding Jupiter*. What did members like about it? How did they feel about the characters? Was the book what they were expecting? If not, in what ways? Would anyone like to expand on their feelings about the novel?

1. Finding Jupiter

"If you tell people your name's Jupiter, they have questions, you know?" – p. 136

Why is the title of the novel *Finding Jupiter*? Which Jupiter is being found? Discuss the implication of self-discovery, against the more conventional romance of stargazing, that comes up during the story. Does the name Ray – the one Jupiter is known by – carry additional meaning, as well as being her father's? If so, what does anyone think this suggests?

2. Perspective

"I can feel her watching me, but I'm afraid to look at her." – p. 111

What impact does the dual narrative voice of the novel have on the reader? How would the reading experience differ if it was written in, say, third person, past tense? How does Rowe create differing personalities through the two narrative voices? Why does this matter to the development of the plot?

3. Found poetry

"An ember stoked by deep love / Made promises as sure as the grave." – p. 180

What did members think of the found poetry that forms the backbone of the book? You might like to consider the author's note at the end. What is significant about the three books from which the poetry is made? (Establish who has read these books: *The Great Gatsby*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Black Boy*.) What comparisons, if any, can be made between these books and the plot of *Finding Jupiter*? How does the form – found poetry – relate to the wider narrative of Rowe's novel? Consider the idea of discovery of something new from something old, of forging anew from what has gone before.

4. Orion

"Very funny. I know that one. It's the three stars in a row ... there." – p. 132

How did readers respond to Orion as a character? What is the importance of his name? Is he a typical "star-crossed" lover? Compare Orion to other romantic leads – what are the similarities? What are the differences? How does he compare to Ray? You might like to consider his absolute belief in his feelings for Ray coupled with his nervousness and shyness, compared to Ray's constant uncertainty coupled with her self-confidence and assuredness of her own desires.

5. Friendships

"Bri knows me better than I thought." – p. 296

What parts do Mo and Bri play in the novel? How do they contrast with the two protagonists? Why is the novel about Orion and Ray, and not their friends? Is it important that Orion and Ray only meet because of Mo and Bri?

6. Coping mechanisms

"... she disappears into the back garden for her Sunday meditation." – p. 94

Throughout the novel we see various coping mechanisms from different characters. Some are emotional, some relate to identified conditions. Discuss how different characters find ways to cope with what they're dealing with. You might like to consider not just Orion's swim rituals, or Ray's art and poetry, but also Ray's mother and her garden, or Orion's father channelling energies into, e.g., Orion's swimming, or supporting Ray anonymously.

7. Secrets and secrecy

"It's fine. It's not a secret or anything. But all fairy tales start like that, right?" – p. 115

What part do secrecy and revelation play in the novel? How important is it that both Ray and Orion have parts of their history that must be revealed to each other? And how does this contrast with the secrets held from them by their families? How does Rowe present the decisions of Orion's father and Ray's mother? Who felt sympathetic towards them withholding the truth? Why? Or why not?

8. First love

"Love ends, but... / While it shines, you stand in the sun." – p. 329

What does Rowe have to say about the idea of first love? What are Ray and Orion's starting points in this regard? And how does this change or develop across the novel? How do Orion and Ray come to understand the idea of first love, by the end? How does the countdown of days that start some chapters fit into this? Consider the final lines of the novel – the end to Ray's poem. What does anyone take this to mean?