



## Reading Guide

### ***The Lion's Binding Oath* by Ahmed Ismail Yusuf**

1. Name three adjectives or themes that you feel best describe this collection. Do these adjectives or themes resonate in or connect to your own life or the lives of people you love? Why or why not?
2. The set of linked stories at the heart of the collection that feature Mayxaano deal with Somalia's caste system. What is your experience or knowledge of caste systems prior to reading this story? What did you learn about caste systems in the Horn of Africa? How does Yusuf present this issue and why do you think he spends several stories building and growing our understanding of it?
3. Somalis are known for their love of poetry. This is an element of Somali culture that Yusuf emphasizes in several stories. Why do Somalis revere poetry and what has poetry bring into their collective culture? Is poetry important in your own life and culture? Why or why not?
4. The story "Don't Lose" is a frame narrative, where two displaced Somalis, living in the U.S., discuss all the people they have lost in their lives. The center of the story recounts a soccer match during Somalia's happier days and features a light-hearted rivalry between two cities, where the underdog team wins the game. What context does the frame narrative bring to this classic tale of a sports rivalry?
5. The final three stories of the collection—"The Vulture Has Landed," "A Delicate Hope," and "The Lion's Binding Oath"—are set squarely within a time of war in Somalia. Each protagonist of these stories faces severe and violent consequences as a result of the war. What picture of war does this mixture of stories suggest? Which character(s) did you connect to most closely and why?
6. In the past few decades, Somalia has become known for war and displacement based on ethnic and religious conflicts. The Lion's Binding Oath puts some of these themes in context. What is that context? What surprised you about that context? What made you uncomfortable? Was there any hope offered in that context?
7. How would you connect the more historical issues of displacement and refugees in Lion's Binding Oath with current events, social attitudes, and political policies throughout the western world?