



A GLASSHOUSE of STARS

SHIRLEY MARR

DISCUSSION PACK

FOR AGES 8+/KS2

***A Glasshouse of Stars* is a powerful and beautiful story based on Shirley Marr's childhood experience of migration. This discussion pack explores some of the important themes within the book using quotes, discussion questions and ideas aimed at 8+/ KS2 readers.**



ABOUT THE BOOK

Meixing Lim and her family have arrived in the New Land to begin a New Life. Everything is scary and different. Their ever-changing house is confusing and she finds it hard to understand the other children at school. Yet in her magical glasshouse, with a strange black-and-white cat, Meixing finds a place to dream.

But then Meixing's life comes crashing down in unimaginable ways. Only her two new and unexpected friends can help. By being brave together, they will learn how to make the stars shine brighter.

A powerful story of kindness, resilience and imagination, based on the author's childhood experience of migration.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shirley Marr is a first-generation Chinese-Australian author living in sunny Perth. Shirley describes herself as having a Western mind and an Eastern heart and likes to write in the space in the middle where both collide, basing her stories on her own personal experiences of migration and growing up. Arriving in mainland Australia from Christmas Island as a seven-year-old in the 1980s and experiencing the good, the bad and the wonder that comes with culture shock, Shirley has been in love with reading and writing from that early age.



THEMES: Choose a theme below and discuss its importance in the story with a friend, classmate, teacher or family member.

Look out for them in the quotes that follow.

FRIENDSHIP

Inside-
outside

Race and
racism

Self
expression

Feeling lost

IMAGINATION

Bullying

DIFFERENCE

COMMUNICATION

Home and
family

Displacement

Grief

Fears and
anxiety

Education

CREATIVITY

Hopes and
dreams



Use these ten quotes from the story and corresponding discussion questions to explore Shirley Marr's magical new book, 'A Glasshouse of Stars'.

These quotes and questions illuminate some of the important themes in the story.

QUOTE 1 P9

Because when you look down at your skin you know it is darker than the people in this New Land, and when you see the plait of hair over your shoulder, you know nobody here has coarse black hair like yours. Maybe you look frightening and different.

THEMES: *Displacement, Difference, Race and Racism*

QUESTIONS: How does Meixing feel in this 'New Land'? Why does she think she looks 'frightening and different'? Why do you think the book is written in the second person – 'you'? How does this help to show Meixing's feelings of displacement?

EXPRESSION: *Think of a time when you felt out of place or self-conscious. Perhaps you have also moved house or school, like Meixing. Write a list of emotions that you felt.*



QUOTE 2 P12

You run away in fright and bolt back down the hallway. You stop at your bedroom door, your hand over your heart. It is beating like mad. How big is this house? How scary?

Big Scary.

The house slowly closes the door you have left open; the creaking sound a sad whimper.

THEMES: *Home and Family, Fear and Anxiety*

QUESTIONS: Why does Meixing name her new home 'Big Scary'? Why do you think the house seems to be 'alive'?

EXPRESSION: *Use descriptions from the book to draw Big Scary. How do Meixing's feelings about her 'home' change?*



QUOTE 3 P15

You feel nervous, upside-down, inside-out, heart-in-mouth, snakes in your stomach, intimidated and scared. But you don't say so, in case the fear crawls out of your mouth and takes the form of monsters.

THEMES: *Fear and Anxiety, Communication*

QUESTIONS: How does Meixing feel? Why do you think Meixing often stays quiet about how she feels?

EXPRESSION: *Read out this quote and act out each phrase – what does it 'look' like to have 'snakes in your stomach'?*



QUOTE 4 P19

She tries to gesture with her hands, but the meaning doesn't come out. She clicks her tongue at herself. You are lost with each other and lost in this land.

THEMES: *Displacement, Feeling Lost, Communication*

QUESTIONS: How is the theme of communication so important in the book? How does Meixing often feel about communicating?

EXPRESSION: *Think about all the ways you can communicate non-verbally. Can you show someone what you think or feel using only gestures and sounds? Can you think of any other forms of non-verbal communication?*



QUOTE 5 P66

It all goes quiet and you are floating around in the space where your stories and your drawings come to life. That special place that is yours and yours alone, where nothing is denied and everything is possible.

THEMES: *Imagination, Creativity, Self-Expression*

QUESTIONS: What happens to Meixing in the Glasshouse? Why is it such an important place? What do you think it represents?

EXPRESSION: *Take a moment to close your eyes and breathe deeply. Can you find that 'special place that is yours and yours alone'? Is there anywhere that you go to feel safe and secure? Draw it.*



QUOTE 6 P108

Josh goes first. He says that he likes stories, but because no one in his family can read and as he himself did not start to speak the New Language until last year, he can't read very well. That's why he likes comics, because anyone can understand pictures. You find yourself nodding along.

THEMES: *Friendship, Communication, Self-Expression, Education*

QUESTIONS: What does Meixing have in common with Josh? Why are drawings and pictures so important in the story?

EXPRESSION: *Draw a comic book representation of your favourite scene or moment in the story.*





QUOTE 7 P137

You understand that he is only being mean because you were mean. That now you are locked in this spiral and it's hard to get out. You understand what it's like to be in his shoes. Kevin notices this change in you and his face softens.

THEMES: *Friendship, Empathy, Communication*

QUESTIONS: How does Meixing help Kevin? How does their relationship develop?

EXPRESSION: *In an outline of a pair of shoes, draw or write the similarities between Meixing and Kevin. Why does Meixing find it easy to empathise with him?*



QUOTE 8 P76

Ma Ma has her arm around you and it makes you feel a little safer. But at the same time it also breaks your heart because she is leaning on you. She knows less of the New Language than you do, and she needs you to tell her what the police have to say. It is too much of a burden to bear.

THEMES: *Grief, Home and Family, Communication, Education*

QUESTIONS: How do Meixing and her Ma Ma deal with the grief of losing Ba Ba? How do they learn to support one another?

EXPRESSION: *The story teaches us that sometimes there is more going on behind the surface than we can see. For example, Meixing has lost her father – yet she continues to struggle silently at school. Make a list or draw the ways that Meixing learns to heal her grief in the story.*



QUOTE 9 P236

🌸 The teenager then says a word that you haven't heard before. He spits it out with a pure hatred you have never experienced before. His friends laugh. Grasping Ma Ma's wrist firmly, you sidestep to the right so that you can go around the footpath. 🌸

THEMES: *Bullying, Race and Racism, Displacement*

QUESTIONS: What examples can you find in the story of Meixing dealing with bullying or cruel behaviour? How do these incidents make you feel? Why do you think people behave like this towards Meixing and her family?

EXPRESSION: *Think of any examples in your own life where you've been the victim of bullying behaviour or witnessed bullying behaviour. In groups, re-enact a scenario that shows bullying behaviour (it can be something from real life or something made-up). At each point in the role-play, pause the action and reflect on what each person is thinking. What can they say to improve the situation? What can they do? Consider the bully's perspective: what causes them to act the way they do? Share your ideas with your class and record your thoughts and feelings. Come up with one sentence or statement as to why it is important to tackle bullying behaviour in school.*



QUOTE 10 P95

🌸 You greet your broken Glasshouse as though it is your greatest friend. Maybe it understands what it's like to look damaged on the outside but to be brimming with the hopes and dreams of an entire universe inside. 🌸

THEMES: *Friendship, Inside-Outside, Hopes and Dreams, Self-Expression*

QUESTIONS: Can you think of any examples in the book where Meixing shows one thing on the outside, but feels something else inside? What about the other characters, for example Kevin? Does the story end with a 'hopeful' message? What is it?

EXPRESSION: *Draw an outline of a human figure. On the outside, write down all the ways that other people see you. On the inside, write down how you really feel. What are your hopes and dreams?*



“Heart-twisting and hopeful.”

Jessica Townsend,
author of *Nevermoor*

“A rare and beautiful masterpiece.”

Sophie Anderson, author of
The Girl who Speaks Bear



BOOK CLUB EVENT

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

LOCATION: _____



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