

Joseph Luzzi
Whereabouts
Virtual Book Club • June 3, 2021 • Reader's Guide* • © Joseph Luzzi

Please note: the below are only intended to help you “get inside” the book—please do not feel compelled to answer them in full, unless you wish to, and if there are questions or elements in the book that you don't understand, no worries, we will explain all when we meet for our Live Presentation on this new selection!

1. What themes of *Whereabouts* remind you of some other contemporary works you have read, either in the VBC or elsewhere?
2. How would you describe Jhumpa Lahiri's prose style? What three words immediately come to mind?
3. One website describes Lahiri's novel as a work “about a woman questioning her place in the world, wavering between stasis and movement, between the need to belong and the refusal to form lasting ties.” Do you think this description captures the essence of the novel? If you had to “sum up” the novel in one sentence, what would it be?
4. The epigraph to *Whereabouts* comes from the great Italian novelist Italo Svevo:

Every time my surroundings change I feel enormous sadness. It's not different when I leave a place tied to memories, grief, or happiness. It's the change itself that unsettles me, just as a liquid in a jar turns cloudy when you shake it.

How does this epigraph anticipate the narrative and major themes of the book? Do you believe that it epitomizes the novel in some fundamental way?

5. *Whereabouts* was first written in Italian by Lahiri, then she translated it into English. Is there something about the novel that makes you aware of or perhaps suggests this intimacy between the two languages? Does the novel feel like a “translation” to you, and if so why (or why not)?
6. Why do you think that Lahiri has been so drawn to the Italian language, and Italian culture writ large? Does the novel communicate the author's incredible affinity for Italy, and if so how?
7. In her review of *Whereabouts* for the *New York Times Book Review*, Madeleine Thien writes:

The entries sometimes sing and sometimes perplex. This is partly because although written by the same narrator, they seem to emerge from a person not fully realized. At times she seems Italian and at other times not; rooted yet adrift; untraveled yet well traveled; parochial yet cosmopolitan.

What does this assessment reveal about the larger issues and themes of *Whereabouts*?

8. Do you believe that *Whereabouts* is an important book for our time and world? Why or why not?

* This document is for the exclusive use of the Virtual Book Club and may not be shared, cited, or otherwise disseminated.