

## HOME Book Discussion Group

March-May 2021: Kao Kalia Yang's *Somewhere in the Unknown World: A Collective Refugee Memoir*

### Discussion

#### Part I: Other People's Children

- **Place:** Where does *Somewhere in the Unknown World* take place? Why is it important that the book "take place" there?
- **Storytelling:** Who do these stories belong to? Who is telling vs who is writing each story? How are the stories told?
- **Reader/Audience:** Who is Kao Kalia Yang's intended audience/reader? Does it, or how does it differ from Dina Nayeri's intended audience in *The Ungrateful Refugee*?

#### Part II: Certificate of Humanity; and Part III: Please Remember

- **Shaping a story collection:** How do the following parts develop? As we discussed, Part I employs the point of view of a child. How does Part II and Part III progress?
- **Storytelling:** In Dina Nayeri's *The Ungrateful Refugee*, the author poses questions about the reliability of storytelling. Does Kao Kalia Yang give readers the same doubt and curiosity about the reliability of the stories in this collection, or are the stories presented more concretely? Why, or why not?
- **Theme:** What constitutes a memoir? What does a 'collective refugee memoir' mean? Is there a collective theme and approach to the collection of refugee stories?

#### Part IV: Edge of the Horizon

- **Storytelling:** Who is the storyteller for each story? Reading Kao's own story (p. 235), does her story differ from other refugee's stories? Why is Kao's story placed at the very end? Finally, is *Somewhere in the Unknown World* a collective memoir, or is it simply a collection of stories?
- **Theme:** How do the chapters thematically progress from Part I to Part IV? As a collective memoir, is there a universal theme to the stories? What may stand out in any of the stories that may not fall under a 'universal theme' for a 'collective memoir'? What is the underlying message of *Somewhere in the Unknown World*?
- **Style & Approach:** Why are there stories with a 'second person perspective' and other stories that are told in the first person? Is this a style preference by the author? Does the author detail her process of retrieving, documenting, or researching the stories? How might this be important for the reader to understand?
- **Perspectives:** Is the book an 'optimistic' or 'pessimistic' collection of stories? How might your view of the book change, or not change, after reading the book in its entirety? What are the reoccurring themes? Do the stories sound similar, or do they each have their own unique perspective and stories? What might be the advantage of a universal theme in each story? Conversely, what might be a disadvantage?