

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR *WE THE INTERWOVEN*, VOLUME 2

CREATING POWERFUL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



**WE** *the*  
**INTERWOVEN**

ANTONIA RIVERA, AJLA DIZAREVIĆ,  
DÁWSON DAVENPORT,  
SARAH ELGATIAN, RANA HEWÉZI,  
HIEU PHAM, AND ANTHONY MIELKE

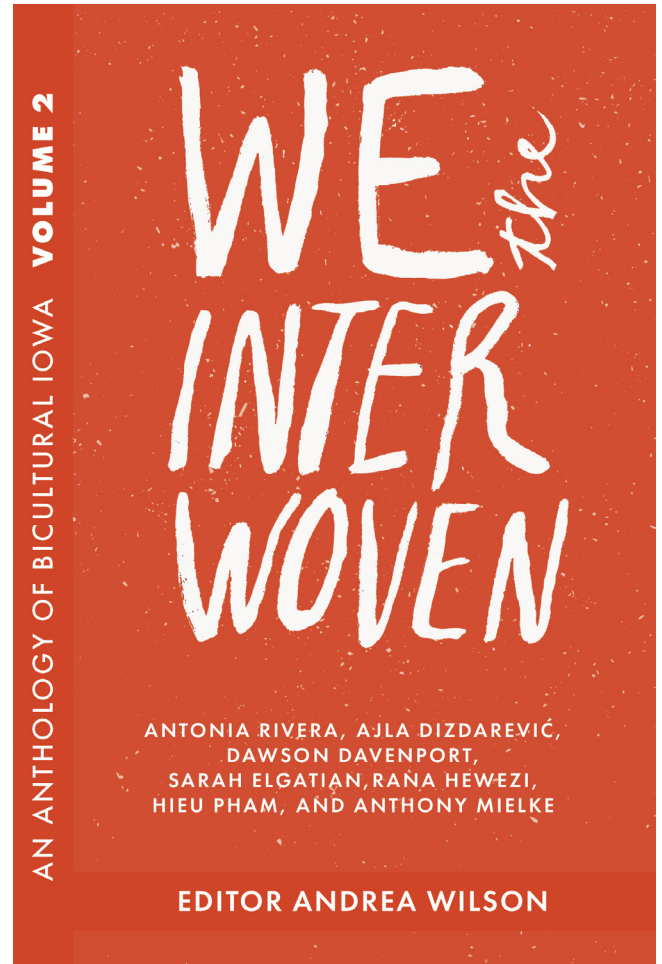
EDITOR ANDREA WILSON



# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to help readers start conversations about *We the Interwoven, Volume 2*, in order to better understand challenging issues and find ways toward a more connected tomorrow. We hope it will provide many ideas for discussing this groundbreaking work from bicultural writers in Iowa and the questions it raises about ourselves and America.

We would love to hear about your experience and share it with other readers. Simply take a photo of your group and submit it to our website along with some of the answers to your questions to [www.wetheinterwoven.com](http://www.wetheinterwoven.com)





# HOW TO HOST A DISCUSSION GROUP

Follow these simple steps to organize a discussion with your book club, community group, church group, library, class of students, or anyone who is interested in talking about the book.

---

1. Gather six or more people (the discussions get even more exciting if you include people who don't know each other well).
2. Buy copies of the book or check it out from your local library. (Bookstores with copies are listed on our website. Our wonderful Iowa libraries take requests for books to order if they don't have it already!)
3. Have group members introduce themselves so as to provide some background on the perspective they offer the group. People might discuss their life experiences, identity, expertise, known blindspots, or anything else they feel is important.
4. Go through the questions from this guide and talk about your experiences. If you can, have someone write down some of the answers.
5. Take a photo of your group and share it on our website with the answers to your questions. We'd love to hear them!



# ABOUT THIS BOOK



At six years old, Antonia Rivera crossed the border from Mexico with nothing but the doll in her hands. Ajla Dizdarević's family brought traditions across an ocean after leaving a home torn apart by the Bosnian War. Sarah Elgatian's grandmother played cards and spoke of a country her Armenian-American grandchild had never known. Hieu Pham couldn't relate to all of her mother's Vietnamese traditions, but when she became a mother herself, everything changed. Rana Hewezi grappled with tragedy in her Egyptian family's past and the power of a name in determining her fate. Anthony Mielke couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to his birth story than he had been told. A member of the Meskwaki Nation, Dawson Davenport was born into a world that was not told in the history books.

How do we make our way in a society that looks nothing like the one our families once knew? How do we find a sense of belonging in a past and a place we've never been, or in a world that feels as if it's changing faster than we are?

These seven stories take us on a ride through the heart and the moral conscience as they explore how we find identity and make a future in an America that is still deciding its own.

Each feature includes a translation published alongside the story in order to provide accessibility to the bicultural language communities and to honor the language. The book also includes cultural glossaries and artist statements to help readers contextualize the work and connect with the writers.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



## OPENING QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be in community with others?
- What is the value of culture and cultural identity to you?
- What do you know about your own culture or your family's heritage that reading this book made you remember?
- What do you believe America's culture is?
- What is your experience of Iowa and of being Iowan?
- What do you hope we might gain from conversation today?
- What do you want to discuss about what you read in the book today?

# STORY QUESTIONS



## **"I, ANTONIA" AND "DEAR CIEL"** BY ANTONIA RIVERA

- What did you learn from "I, Antonia"?
- What did you feel when you read about Antonia's experiences as an undocumented immigrant?
- How did the poem "Dear Ciel" influence your reading experience of "I, Antonia"?
- What does it mean that a changing federal policy can affect a person's family stability?

---

## **"A DRINK TO END ALL DRINKS"** **AND "ŠTA DA VAM KAŽEM"**

BY AJLA DIZDAREVIĆ

- What did you learn from "A Drink to End All Drinks"?
- What did you feel when you read about Ajla's family tradition?
- How did the poem "Šta Da Vam Kažem" influence your reading experience of "A Drink to End All Drinks"?
- How do cultural and family traditions impact younger generations?







## **“WHAT WE OWE OUR MOTHERS”**

BY HIEU PHAM

- What did you learn from “What We Owe Our Mothers”?
  - What did you feel when you read about Hieu’s experiences as a new mother?
  - What do we owe our parents? Our children?
- 



## **“A NEW DIASPORA”**

BY SARAH ELGATIAN

- What did you learn from “A New Diaspora”?
  - What impact do you believe surviving the Armentian genocide had on Annig as a person? As a grandmother?
  - What did you feel when you read about Sarah’s relationship with her grandmother?
  - What role do grandparents play in passing on a family’s culture?
- 



## **“A GATEWAY TO JENNA”**

BY RANA HEWEZI

- What did you learn from “A Gateway to Jenna”?
- What did you feel when you read about the death of Issam and how it affected the entire family, including Rana’s mother and Rana herself?
- How do names and language impact who we are?



## **"STRANGER IN MY OWN WORLD"** BY ANTHONY MIELKE

- What did you learn from "Stranger in My Own World"?
- What did you feel when you read about Anthony meeting his Puerto Rican family for the first time?
- Why do you think Anthony's mother didn't tell him about his father?
- How do shame and family secrets affect one's personal and cultural identity?

---

## **"BLACK THUNDER: A MESWAKI STORY"** BY DAWSON DAVENPORT

- What did you learn from "Black Thunder"?
- What did this story teach you about the experience of indigenous people in America?
- What did you feel when you read about Dawson's struggles with anger and addiction? His recovery?
- What has your experience been with crime? How does this impact your perspective?
- What does Dawson's hope for his own people and their future make you think about your people and your own future?





# CONCLUDING QUESTIONS



- When you read the artist statements and lines like “I am afraid I might lose everything” (Dawson) or “Sharing my story may have consequences” (Antonia), how did you feel? What risks have you taken by telling your truths to others?
- Do the issues raised in these stories affect your life? If so, in what ways?
- What do you think our state or our community could do as a result of what we have learned through these stories?
- What step might you take, whether big or small, as a result of what you have learned through these stories?
- What is a wish you have for our shared future?
- What do we hope for in the story of America?



## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Bicultural Iowa Writers' Fellowship (BIWF) is the state's first fully funded residency for emerging writers who are immigrant, first-generation, or second-generation Iowans. It provides education, support, and resources in the renowned UNESCO City of Literature, Iowa City, and it offers space and time for writers to explore their multilayered identities. Each fellow gets the opportunity of a lifetime to study and grow in their writing and ultimately to have their work published and supported by the Iowa Writers' House in *We the Interwoven*.



## ABOUT THE IOWA WRITERS' HOUSE



The Iowa Writers' House (IWH) is a nonprofit literary center whose mission is to centralize access to Iowa's literary resources in a single organization that provides programming, workshops, and a welcoming community for all. Since its founding in 2015, the Writers' House

has built a community of over 3,000 writers; delivered cross-genre programs to writers of diverse ages, races, and life situations; and founded the Bicultural Iowa Writers' Fellowship. Today it has become an integral part of the beautiful ecosystem of Iowa lit.