

Discussion Guide

RECIPE FOR DISASTER

by Aimee Lucido



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Versify

About the Book

“With a delicious mix of prose, poetry, and recipes, this hybrid novel is another fresh, thoughtful, and accessible Versify novel that is cookin’.”—Kwame Alexander, *New York Times* best-selling author

Hannah Malfa-Adler is Jew . . . ish. Not that she really thinks about it. She’d prefer to focus on her favorite pas-time: baking delicious food! But when her best friend has a beyond-awesome bat mitzvah, Hannah starts to feel a little envious ...and a little left out.

Despite her parents’ firm no, Hannah knows that if she can learn enough about her own faith, she can convince her friends that the party is still in motion. As the secrets mount, a few are bound to explode. When they do, Hannah learns that being Jewish isn’t about having a big party and a fancy dress and a first kiss—it’s about actually being Jewish. Most important, Hannah realizes that the only person’s permission she needs to be Jewish is her own.

About the Author

Aimee Lucido is a software engineer and the author of *Emmy in the Key of Code* and *Recipe for Disaster*. She got her MFA in writing for children and young adults at Hamline University and lives with her husband and dog in

Berkeley, CA where she likes to bake, run, and write cross-word puzzles.

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Discussion Questions

1. Food plays a big role in this story, appearing in the language Hannah uses, the format of the poems, and even the title of the book. What role does food play in your family?
2. Hannah’s relationship to her hair changes over the course of the book. What does hair represent at the beginning, middle, and end of the story?
3. At the end of Shira’s bat mitzvah, Lin asks Hannah if she’s going to have a bat mitzvah too, and she says yes even though she doesn’t have permission yet. Would you have done the same thing in Hannah’s position? When, if ever, is it okay to say yes to something even if you don’t have permission?
4. Throughout the book, different people talk about what it means to be “really” Jewish. How does Hannah’s perception of being “really” Jewish change from the beginning of the book to the end?
5. Vee likes to tuck her Star of David necklace under her hoodie. Have you ever wanted to hide a part of yourself?
6. Hannah’s father has strong opinions about what Sam should be when he grows up. Do you think parents should get to decide what career paths their children take?
7. On page 127, Hannah says, “Maybe fighting is one of the ingredients of a relationship.” Do you agree with this?
8. One of the concepts that shows up throughout the book is *tikkun olam*, or healing the earth. How do you try to heal the earth?

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9. Hannah clings to the idea of a traditional bat mitzvah for the majority of the book before realizing that a nontraditional bat mitzvah is a better fit for her and her family. What traditions does your family have, and how have they changed over time?
10. In one of the more tense scenes in the book, Hannah sees a symbol of hate on Vee's front door and realizes "we don't always get a choice" in how people see us. What does she mean by this? What are some situations where we do and don't get to choose how the world sees us?
11. For the majority of the book, Hannah's mom, Liat, refuses to speak to her sister, Aunt Yael, because Aunt Yael did not accept Liat's marriage to a non-Jew as legitimate. However, Yael's views on this have changed over time and she is sincerely regretful of her past behavior. Have you ever said something that you believed at the time, and then grown to realize you were wrong?
12. Sam names his bakery Pie Are Squared because he makes square pies and also because πr^2 is the formula for the area of a circle. If you were to create your own bakery, what would you call it?
13. Early on in the book, Vee teaches Hannah the recipe for an apology: First, acknowledge what you did wrong. Then, actually regret what you did. Finally, fix the damage you caused and make sure it doesn't happen again. Why do you think each of the three parts of an apology exists?
14. For Grandma Mimi's bat mitzvah, Hannah makes all the food she used to make with her grandmother. What sorts of food would you have at your bat mitzvah?

Activities

Food is an important part of *Recipe for Disaster*. Make your own versions of some of Hannah's favorite recipes.

Rugelach

1 cup butter	8 oz cream cheese
sugar to taste	salt to taste
1 tablespoon vanilla	2 cups flour

butter for brushing

Filling:

In winter, use cranberries or apples.

In spring, use berries like strawberries or blueberries.

In summer, use peaches or plums (stone fruit).

In fall, use chocolate.

Beat butter, cream cheese, sugar, and salt.

Add flour until combined.

Split dough in half and press into circles. Spread filling on top, cut into triangles. Roll, brush with butter, and bake at 375 degrees until golden and puffy.

Remember: Don't be greedy with the filling. An overfull cookie leaks and burns.

Sufganiyot

dry yeast	4 tablespoons sugar
3/4 cup warm water	2 1/2 cups flour
pinch of salt	cinnamon to taste
2 egg yolks	2 tablespoons butter

Filling: jam, chocolate, cream

Activate yeast with 2 tablespoons of sugar and the water. Mix flour, rest of the sugar, salt, cinnamon, egg yolks, and the yeast and knead. Add butter, and let dough rise overnight.

Cut dough circles and seal filling inside of each with leftover egg whites. Let rise, and fry in hot oil until golden brown; fill and roll in sugar, cinnamon, or powdered sugar.

Remember: Sufganiyot are best when they rise in the cold. The colder the rise, the stronger the taste.

Guide written by Aimee Lucido, author of *Recipe for Disaster*