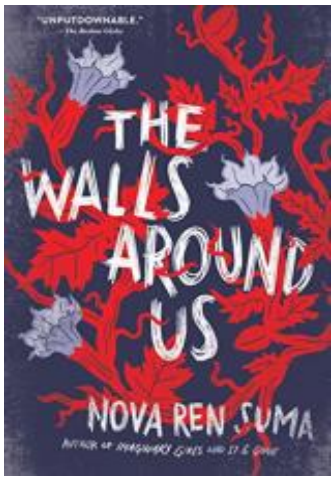
The Walls Around Us

by Nova Ren Suma



About the Book

THE WALLS AROUND US is a ghostly story of suspense told in two voices --- one still living and one dead. On the outside, there?s Violet, an 18-year-old dancer days away from the life of her dreams when something threatens to expose the shocking truth of her achievement. On the inside, within the walls of a girls? juvenile detention center, there?s Amber, locked up for so long she can?t imagine freedom. Tying these two worlds together is Orianna, who holds the key to unlocking all the girls? darkest mysteries.

We hear Amber?s story and Violet?s, and through them Orianna?s, first from one angle, then from another, until gradually we begin to get the whole picture --- which is not necessarily the one that either Amber or Violet wants us to see.

Nova Ren Suma tells a supernatural tale of guilt and innocence, and what happens when one is mistaken for the other.

Discussion Guide

1. Is either Amber or Violet a sympathetic narrator? Why or why not?

2. On page 8, when describing the night the locks opened and the inmates had the chance to escape, Amber says, ?I get hung up on it sometimes, on what if things had gone another way. If I?d made it past the gates and gotten out. If I?d run.? What would have happened had Amber run? Where might she have gone?

3. Consider the books and authors that are mentioned throughout the novel (e.g., WATERSHIP DOWN, Libba Bray, BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY?S) and the quotes chosen as section openers. How do they contribute to the overall tone and atmosphere? What do they add to the plot?

4. On page 280, Amber says, ?I couldn?t know for sure if our newest inmate, Orianna Speerling, regretted going outside after her friend that day.? What do you suspect?

5. When Orianna receives the only red cup in the dining hall, her reaction is markedly different than that of her fellow inmates. Why does she respond the way she does? Why do you think she influences the other girls? feelings about the red cup going forward? How does Ori change the mood of the inmates in general?

6. Three years after Ori?s death, Violet still believes she is the inferior dancer, even though she?s become the star. How do Violet?s insecurity and jealousy shape her character and actions? Why does she remain jealous of Orianna even after Orianna?s death?

7. Violet?s account of the crime changes as she repeats her telling of it. What do you make of the different accounts she gives us over the course of the novel? Similarly, Amber gradually changes some details in the stories she tells us. How do the various versions of events --- and their timing --- affect your feelings about Violet and Amber? How do they affect your reading experience?

8. On page 70, Violet describes how Orianna?s face changed after her conviction. On page 143, when describing her own trial, Amber says, ?I weighed less, back then. I hadn?t yet had my growth spurt. My shoulders hadn?t filled out. Still, there was something menacing they saw in me, even at that size.? How does a person?s appearance influence what you assume about his or her character or personality? Do you believe you can ever tell whether or not someone ?did it? just by looking at them?

9. Amber makes frequent references to seeing Orianna on the news before she arrived in jail. She tells the reader that Orianna was nicknamed the ?Bloody Ballerina.? Think about real-life murder cases you?ve seen play out in the media. How do things like nicknames affect your perception of an accused person? How does news coverage affect how Orianna is treated in jail?

10. As you read THE WALLS AROUND US, did you believe Amber was innocent or that she shouldn?t be in jail? Did the guilty receive the right punishments in the end? If your answer is no, discuss what the right punishments would have been.

11. Why do you think being in charge of the book cart is so important to Amber?

12. On page 312, when the officers are counting the girls in the dining hall, Amber says, ?It seems we are meant to stay at full capacity, which for this facility is forty-two girls.? How does the number forty-two play a role in the novel? Why do you think the author decided it was important to keep the number of inmates at forty-two?

13. How did you interpret the ending? Do you think all readers will reach the same conclusion? Why or why not?

Author Bio

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