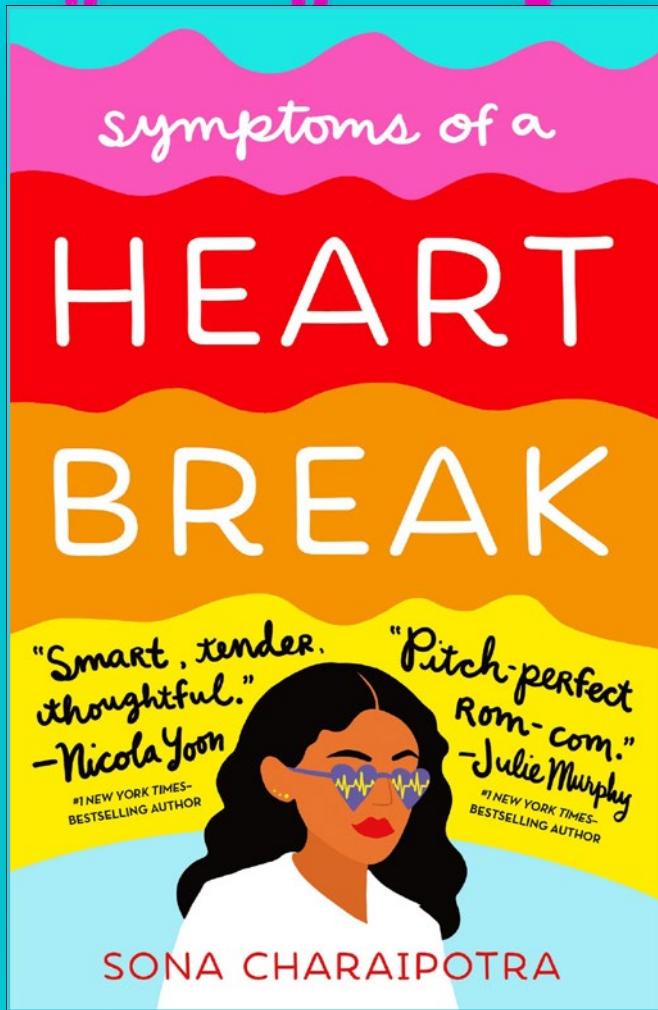


# SYMPTOMS of a HEART BREAK

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

The youngest doctor in America, an Indian-American teen makes her rounds—and falls head over heels—in the contemporary romantic comedy *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*.

Fresh from med school, sixteen-year-old medical prodigy Saira arrives for her first day at her new job: treating children with cancer. She's always had to balance family and friendships with her celebrity as the Girl Genius—but she's never had to prove herself to skeptical adult co-workers while adjusting to real life-and-death stakes. And working in the same hospital as her mother certainly isn't making things any easier.

But life gets complicated when Saira finds herself falling in love with a patient: a cute teen boy who's been diagnosed with cancer. And when she risks her brand new career to try to improve his chances, it could cost her everything.

It turns out “heartbreak” is the one thing she still doesn’t know how to treat.

In her solo debut, Sona Charaipotra brings us a compelling #ownvoices protagonist who’s not afraid to chase what she wants. *Symptoms of a Heartbreak* goes from romantic comedy highs to tearjerker lows and is the ultimate cure-all for young adult readers needing an infusion of something heartfelt.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of the YA doc dramedy *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*, Sona Charaipotra is not a doctor — much to her pediatrician parents’ chagrin. They were really hoping she’d grow up to take over their practice one day. Instead, she became a writer, working first as a celebrity reporter at People and (the dearly departed) *TeenPeople* magazines, and contributing to publications from the *New York Times* to *TeenVogue*. These days, she uses her Masters in screenwriting from NYU and her MFA in creative writing from the New School to poke plot holes in her favorite teen TV shows — for work of course. She’s the co-founder of [CAKE Literary](#), a boutique book packaging company with a decidedly diverse bent, and the co-author of the YA dance drama duology *Tiny Pretty Things* (now Netflix as an original series), as well as the upcoming psychological thriller *Rumor Game* (Disney, 2022). Her follow-up to *Symptoms* will be the contemporary YA romp *How Maya Got Fierce* (Macmillan, 2022), which draws on her magazine world experience and is pitched as *The Bold Type* meets *Younger*. She has served as a proud [We Need Diverse Books](#) board member. Find her sharing pictures of her kids and her chai on Instagram [@sonesone2](#), talking writing and books on Twitter [@sona\\_c](#).



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text including examining author's craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. Charaputra's novel *Symptoms of a Heartbreak* includes complex characters and character decision making, a well-crafted plot, specific word choice, and cross curricular opportunities that allow the reader to deeply delve into the text. This teaching guide includes discussion questions and language arts activities to be used in grades 9+ as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and Next Generation Science Standards that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1  
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2  
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3  
Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4  
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5  
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9  
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10  
Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1  
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7  
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5  
Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6  
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

### SCIENCE

The NGSSS Standards that will be addressed will vary depending on the medical terms studied. Potentially:

- HS-LS1-1 From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes  
Construct an explanation based on evidence for how the structure of DNA determines the structure of proteins, which carry out the essential functions of life through systems of specialized cells
- HS-LS3-1 Heredity: Inheritance and Variations of Traits  
Ask questions to clarify relationships about the role of DNA and chromosomes in coding the instructions for characteristic traits passed from parents to offspring



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*.

1. *Rock Star Boot Camp* is a made-up reality show; however, it alludes to a few reality shows. What reality shows does *Rock Star Boot Camp* make you think of?
2. Why was Dr. Davis so hard on Saira?
3. What are the negative and positive connotations of being known as and called a “genius”?
4. What extra pressure does Saira face because of expectations from the community?
5. What is the first thing you would do after leaving the hospital when you’d been sick for a long time?
6. What would you wear to your first day of a new job at a hospital? What is important to consider when dressing for work?
7. Why does Vish feel he needs to hide his sexuality? How did Saira support him?
8. Did the outcome for Saira and Link fit your predictions?
9. How does Saira’s culture influence the story?
10. How does Saira’s mom being around all the time affect Saira’s success? Is it positive or negative?
11. How did Harper’s death influence Saira for her whole childhood?
12. Why does Saira’s driving test scare her so much? How is this a contradiction of everything else in her life?
13. It is hard to earn respect as a teen, specifically when doing something most teens do not. How did this lack of respect for teenagers play into how Saira was treated at the hospital?
14. Nicknames are given for many reasons, but some have negative connotations. What are the dangers of nicknames?
15. One strong trait Saira has is stubbornness. This proves to be helpful and hurtful for her. What are some examples of her stubbornness working out? What are some examples of when her stubbornness was what caused her issues?
16. Intellectually, Saira is ready to be a doctor from page one. But being a doctor takes much more than the practical knowledge that Saira learns as she begins her internship. Through her time working at the hospital, how did Saira grow as a doctor and a person?

## CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these activities to extend your students' thinking and experience with *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*.

### 1. INTRIGUING WORDS

- Research shows that finding, defining, and discussing vocabulary within the context of reading is one of the most effective ways to learn vocabulary, and Sona Charaiotra uses very specific word choice in *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*.
- While reading, have students mark words that intrigue them. Intriguing words can be words they like, words they didn't know, words that they can tell were specifically chosen by the author, medical terms, etc.
- Using the words identified by your students, have students create a word wall of the vocabulary from *Symptoms of a Heartbreak* by picking five words that they liked learning the most and posting them on a Word Wall with their student-created definition and a drawing/symbol that matches their definition. They should also note what page the word is on in the book, and the context in which it is used. You can have them add anything else on the word wall index card as well, such as synonyms, antonyms, the word in a sentence, etc.

- Before posting the word wall vocabulary on the wall, have students get in small groups and share their words with peers, making sure to share why they chose the word and where it is in the book.
- **Example of word wall index card:**

**KOHL**  
A black powder often used in make up  
that is worn around the edge of eyes



Synonyms: black make up, black eye liner  
Sentence: To add some drama to my make up,  
I put kohl around my eyes.

Page 5

### SOME EXAMPLES OF WORDS (PAGE #) THAT MAY BE CHOSEN ARE:

- platonic (5)
- narcissist (27)
- prominent (37)
- unabashed (70)
- hemming (94)
- dapper (101)
- smitten (107)
- psychosomatic (109)
- readmit (115)
- pristine (126)
- idealistic (139)
- ravenous (153)
- racks (159)
- inebriated (170)
- intently (180)
- beckoning (181)
- droning (189)
- thrum (194)
- spite (211)
- progressive (225)
- cadence (232)
- manifesto (258)
- justifications (266)
- compiling (276)
- divert (292)
- bode (310)

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Using the student-chosen words, create a list of “intriguing words” that your students found and challenge students to use some of the words in their own writing.
- Ask students to answer the following standards-based question about their intriguing word(s):
  - *Why would the author choose to use this word over a synonym?*
  - *How did the author’s choice of this word change the tone or mood of the section the word is found in?*

- **Extension Activity: Medical Terms**

Many medical terms are used in the book as well, so students could specifically look for medical terms and create a similar word wall index card, but instead of synonyms, etc., there would be more information about the term such as causes, symptoms, etc.

## BONE MARROW TRANSPLANT

Replacing damaged bone marrow by transplanting blood stem cells which travel to the bone marrow and make new cells thus new marrow

Also called a stem cell transplant. Transplant is needed when marrow has been damaged due to illness, disease, or treatments.

Page 316

- See “Dig Deeper” activity below if students are more interested in going deeper with medical or doctor aspects of the novel.

## 2. CHOICES SAIRA MADE

There are many questionable decisions that Saira makes throughout the book. Some are made out of being misguided, because of love, or just her being hopeful, but in the end much of it works out. However, her decisions led her astray many times and the outcomes could have gone worse. Have students analyze Saira's decisions and their consequences using this graphic organizer:

CHOICE SAIRA MADE	CONSEQUENCE(S) OF THE CHOICE	DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CHOICE SAIRA MADE?	WHAT ELSE COULD SAIRA HAVE DONE?	HOW WOULD THAT HAVE CHANGED THE BOOK?
Using social media to seek a bone marrow donor match				
Redoing the patient's lounge even though Dr. Davis did not give permission to				
Continuing to see Link after she is told to make no contact				
Etc.				

When students have completed their initial analysis, have them pick the decision they believe was the riskiest and write out their analysis in essay form with text-based evidence and more elaboration.

### 3. DIG DEEPER

- When Saira begins her work at the hospital, there are realities that she has to face that medical school could not prepare her for including health insurance, stem cell technology, childhood cancer, ethical decisions regarding life and death and patient choice, etc.
- Have each student choose a topic that interests them to learn more about. (This activity could also be done as a pair or group activity.) To research, students should find real life examples via news articles, media stories, etc. to build their knowledge about the topic.
- The culminating task would be two-fold (or either can be chosen):
  - First, students would write a research paper about the real life issue they chose, what they learned, and how it was embedded in the novel.*
  - Second, students will create a presentation to share the new knowledge with their classmates. The presentation could be whatever format or media the student chooses.*

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### 4. FOOD

Food is a central part of the novel and frequently is used to bring family and friends together. One example is on page 195, when Vish brings food to his first session with Link to help ease the tension.

Send students on a scavenger hunt through the book to find different examples of food being utilized in the story. For each, students should complete a scavenger hunt form:

PAGE #	FOOD MENTIONED	WHAT WAS THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSE IN INCLUDING FOOD HERE?	HOW DID THE FOOD CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF THE NARRATIVE?
195	Samosas Chai Paneer Pakore	To show that Vish wanted to help alleviate any tension during this first meeting.	The food made Link feel welcome and more comfortable with Vish there.
Etc			

**Extension:** A large portion of the examples are showing the connection between Saira and her family and friends. Have students write an autobiographical scene where food was important to their life story then have each member of the class bring the food to share and read their story to the class.

## 5. DESIGN A PATIENT LOUNGE

- On page 163, despite Dr. Davis's rejection of her idea, Saira goes about redesigning the patient lounge.
  - Using a design app or sketching on paper, have students design what they think a pediatric cancer ward's patient lounge should look like and include reasoning for each item.
  - **Extension:** For each item they include in their lounge, have them write a small persuasive paragraph on why it needs to be included. Additionally, they can create a budget for all that they'll want to do in the lounge. Then, students can present in a Shark Tank type way to a panel of judges to decide if their lounge (or just parts of it) get approved.
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## 6. PERSONAL NARRATIVE AUDITION VIDEO

- Part of Link's success with *Rock Star Boot Camp* was the personal narrative video that Vish recorded of him (Pg. 209). It showed his true self and his true passion.
  - Have each student make up a name of a reality TV show that they would want to try out for because they are passionate about the topic.
  - Then have them plan a personal narrative video to include anecdotes from their life, others speaking about them, and examples of them partaking in what they are passionate about.
  - **Extension:** Have them create a logo and opening sequence for the reality show to introduce their personal narrative.
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## 7. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The author includes texting and newspaper articles throughout the book to add extra information and to give more insight into character relationships.
- Have students find a time in the book that they wish there had been an article or texting and create their own addition to the book in the format of their choice.

## 8. DOOGIE HOWSER VS. SAIRA SEHGAL

- *Doogie Howser, MD* was a TV show in the late eighties and early nineties that focused on a boy genius who became a doctor at 14. While there is overlap in some basic details, there are vast differences between the main characters and the plots. On page 37, a newspaper article even uses Doogie Howser to describe Saira.
- After finishing *Symptoms of a Heartbreak*, have students read about *Doogie Howser, MD*, starting with its Wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doogie\\_Howser,\\_M.D.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doogie_Howser,_M.D.)
- After understanding the basics of the TV show, have students create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two.
- When finished, ask students to decide if they believe the book drew on ideas and themes from the TV show and provide examples of why they believe it did or did not.
- Finally, have students answer: Explain the two authors' approaches to delivering the content of a young teen doctor. How did both of these approaches bring awareness to different issues arisen in the narratives?

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This guide was created by Kellee Moye, a middle school teacher-librarian in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog [Unleashing Readers](#); a jury member then co-chair of the 2020-2021 Schneider Family Award Jury; on the 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors and current social media chair for ALAN; a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA; and a member then chair of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award committee from 2012-2014. Kellee can be reached at [Kellee.Moye@gmail.com](mailto:Kellee.Moye@gmail.com).