

ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY 2020 SUMMER READING PROGRAM
WHAT THE EYES DON'T SEE REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To guide your reading of *What the Eyes Don't See: A Story of Crisis, Resistance, and Hope in an American City* by Mona Hanna-Attisha, the following questions* have been compiled for you to reflect upon. You will be encouraged to share your reflections in the small group discussions you will have with your Gateway classmates and University community members (faculty, staff, alumni, and student leaders) during Turning Titan: New Student Orientation 2020.

1. *What the Eyes Don't See* calls attention to a real life crisis in our society and highlights how a government by the people, and for the people, ultimately failed to protect some of its most vulnerable populations. In recent months there has been a diversity of opinions on how various entities have addressed how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. What arguments does Dr. Hanna-Attisha raise in her book that can help draw parallels between these two crises?
2. The Illinois Wesleyan annual theme for the 2020-2021 academic year is "Health, Healing, and Humanity." Identify specific ways in which the book addresses each aspect of the theme "Health, Healing, and Humanity."
3. Dr. Hanna-Attisha includes an excerpt from *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss as the epigraph for this book: "Unless someone like you / cares a whole awful lot / nothing is going to get better. / It's not."
 - a. Why do you think she chose this passage?
 - b. How does it relate to Dr. Hanna-Attisha's advocacy work in Flint?
 - c. How do you see yourself, as an IWU student, enacting this passage? What do you care about?
4. During her pediatric residency, Dr. Hanna-Attisha first heard the expression, "The eyes don't see what the mind doesn't know," based on a quote by D. H. Lawrence.
 - a. Why are healthcare providers trained to look beyond what is immediately apparent?
 - b. What leads some people to ignore crises like Flint or COVID-19?
 - c. What leads some people to dig in and become knowledgeable about those same kinds of crises?
5. Dr. Hanna-Attisha writes, "We each have the power to fix things. We can open one another's eyes to problems. We can work together to create a better, safer world" (p. 13).
 - a. How did Dr. Hanna-Attisha's actions make a difference in the community of Flint?
 - b. What do you believe you can do as an individual to make your campus, local community, country, or world a better and safer place?
6. Dr. Hanna-Attisha describes Flint as being in a "man-made state of emergency for forty years" (p. 128), with very high poverty rates, numerous abandoned homes, and little incoming tax revenue.
 - a. How does systemic racism such as in employment policies, housing segregation, and blockbusting disproportionately affect black families?
 - b. How did government policies and deindustrialization play roles in the water crisis in Flint?
 - c. How was Dr. Hanna-Attisha inspired by the history of Flint and the roles of labor rights, workers, and strikes—especially the women's brigade strikers—in that history?

*These questions have been copied and adapted from the following: https://images.randomhouse.com/promo_image/9780399590856_5941.pdf

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7. How does Dr. Hanna-Attisha's identity as an Iraqi American woman not living in Flint influence her actions?
 - a. What is the role that allies might play in helping marginalized groups?
 - b. Can you think of a time that your own identity affected how you dealt with a problem?

8. Why did Dr. Hanna-Attisha initially tell Grace not to use bottled water to make formula for her infant daughter, Nakala? Why did Dr. Hanna-Attisha ignore the news about the contamination of Flint water?
 - a. How does the media impact our perceptions of what is safe and unsafe?
 - b. How do you choose what media to pay attention to?
 - c. How do you determine what is reliable versus unreliable?
 - d. Have you ever tuned something out, only to later realize its importance?

9. Dr. Hanna-Attisha was surprised to learn that Marc Edwards was a conservative Republican, given how much they had in common.
 - a. How might their political differences affect how they worked together?
 - b. Given that 2020 is an election year, what is the importance of political partnerships in dealing with crises like what occurred in Flint?
 - c. Describe a time when you have worked with someone who has different beliefs than you. What did you learn from the experience?

10. What are the connections between Dr. Hanna-Attisha's stories of Iraq and those of the Flint water crisis? What is the purpose of family stories like Haji and the Birds in the narrative? What does Dr. Hanna-Attisha mean by "We step over complex systems every day, walking through history and pretending darkness isn't there" (p. 72)?

11. Dr. Hanna-Attisha describes the "real villains" in the Flint water crisis as being "the ongoing effects of racism, inequality, greed, anti-intellectualism, and even laissez-faire neoliberal capitalism. These are powerful forces most of us don't notice, and don't want to" (p. 14).
 - a. Share your reactions to this statement.
 - b. How could the water crisis have been prevented?
 - c. How might the response from those in power have looked different if Flint was an affluent white area?
 - d. What policies and practices do you think should be put in place in order to prevent future crises?

12. Dr. Hanna-Attisha explains that resilience is not a trait you are born with; rather, resilience is learned. She writes, "Just as a child can learn to be resilient, so can a family, a neighborhood, a community, a city. And so can a country" (p. 14).
 - a. To what extent does this seem true?
 - b. What challenges might a community like Flint face in trying to learn resilience?