

# Goucher College First Year Summer Read

## *Behind You is the Sea: A Novel*

Susan Muaddi Darraj

Your academic journey at Goucher begins with the First Year Summer Read, offering an opportunity to explore complex themes central to your academic growth. At its heart, the First Year Summer Read encourages critical thinking about identity, belonging, and the intersection of personal and social justice. First Year Summer Reads from previous years have, for example, explored the experiences of a Cuban American woman navigating predominantly white spaces (*My Time Among the Whites*), racism in the medical community (*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*), and the challenges facing children seeking asylum due to displacement (*Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*).

This year's First Year Summer Read explores the immigrant experience of Arab American communities living in Baltimore. Like any great work of fiction, author Susan Muaddi Darraj invites us into a world where the protagonists react to situations that may differ from our own. We might disagree with their actions, but understanding their context helps us reflect on the connections between identity, perspective, and biases. Or, as Goucher's Professor Emeritus and novelist, Madison Smartt Bell wrote, "this book will show you how different kinds of people can learn to get along, and also how they often don't." You'll reflect on these connections in an essay, marking the start of a three-year exploration of Race, Power, and Perspective (RPP) within the Goucher Commons Curriculum. Besides RPP, you'll have opportunities to explore your identity and examine how factors like race, gender, and class influence access to privilege and power. You'll also develop skills for engaging in respectful communication across differences, both in the classroom and beyond. All these experiences are part of your global changemaker journey, and we encourage you to enjoy the adventure.

### The RPP Roadmap

The first step of RPP begins before you arrive on campus, with two components: completing the First Year Summer Read and writing a reflection on your and the author's perspectives. This reflection could include a well-supported critique. During Fall Orientation, you'll discuss the book and your reflection with your peers and a professor or staff member.

The second step of RPP is a course you will take during your second year of college. These RPP courses go beyond identity and perspective-taking by exploring larger institutional, cultural, and structural factors of race, power, and privilege that shape those perspectives and identities.

The final step of RPP is the Study Abroad experience, typically undertaken during your third year at the College. By experiencing perspectives and identities in another society, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own journey and evaluate how your perspective has evolved since you first set foot on campus.

### The Four Steps of the First Year Summer Read Assignment

The first step is, of course, to read the book—but to do so with *purpose*. Pay attention to the broader context of the novel, take notes and highlight passages that stir strong reactions (positive or negative) in you. Consider the author's life and any cultural or historical moments referenced in the novel, as these will help guide our discussion once you're on campus.

The second step is to write your essay based on your notes, addressing these three questions:

1. How has the characters' identity shaped their perspective on the experiences described in the novel?
2. How might your identities inform these experiences if you were in a similar situation?
3. How might your views be similar to or different from the novel's characters', and why?

Support your responses with evidence from at least three different chapters. Consider factors like parenting, personal situation, identity, community, and cultural, religious, and socioeconomic background that may have influenced the

characters' perspectives. The essay should be a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx) of 300 to 500 words, or approximately one and a half to three double-spaced pages.

The third step is the book discussion, which will take place on Wednesday, August 27 during Fall Orientation. Please bring your notes, essay, and any questions you would like to discuss with your peers and the faculty/staff members who will facilitate the discussion.

The final step is (a) to submit your essay via Canvas in your First Year Seminar (FYS) course within the first two weeks (you'll learn more about Canvas during orientation), and (b) to attend the author's presentation by Susan Muaddi Darraj on Thursday, September 18 in the Hyman Forum, where you can ask questions directly.

Please feel free to contact the Office of the Associate Provost for Curriculum ([provostcurriculum@goucher.edu](mailto:provostcurriculum@goucher.edu)) if you have any questions about the assignment. In the meantime, we hope you have a wonderful summer and look forward to your arrival in the fall.