



Let's talk about Emina: Discussion questions and key points

Emina, a 16-year-old blind girl, is forced into a marriage to ensure that she gets the support she needs in the future. Her story offers an opportunity to discuss the law related to (forced) marriage and whether she freely consents or merely repeats what she is being told without actually agreeing with it and the marriage arrangements. It also offers an opportunity to discuss her capacity to consent based on her age and disability. Her story highlights disability and concerns for a person's wellbeing as a cause of forced marriage. Isolation is indicated as a potential consequence of forced marriage. Together with the images that show Emina and her family as part of a community, the ambiguous reference to 'them' as perpetrators indicates that 'they' might be Emina's parents and/or other family or community members, emphasising social pressure not only on Emina but also on her parents. Emina's light skin can inspire a discussion about the prevalence of forced marriage in different communities. Her interactions with classmates, her family and community offer an opportunity to discuss opportunities for intervention and resistance.

1. Does Emina want to get married? Could she say no?

The question of consent is key in this story and is threefold: 1) The question is whether Emina freely and fully consents. While there is no physical violence or financial abuse, Emina feels pressured to get married because she does not want to be a burden on her family and because she feels she owes it to the people who have helped and supported her so far. She repeats the positive picture that 'they' have painted about marriage and her future husband, but she is sceptical. While her parents are not bad people and only want her to be safe and cared for, Emina does not feel like she can reject the marriage. Panel 4 shows a physical distance between Emina and her parents which could indicate a barrier she cannot overcome. Her doubts can be seen in the change of colour from bright and positive in panel 1 to dark and gloomy in panel 6. The fallen flower petals in panel 6 also indicate that she does not quite believe in the positive picture 'they' have painted of marriage and that she imagines in panel 2. 2) The question is whether she has reached the age of consent to marriage. The law in the UK recently changed the minimum age of marriage from 16 with parental consent to 18. In the last panel, Emina says that she is 16. Therefore she is below the minimum age of marriage and cannot legally consent to marriage. The age difference between Emina and her future husband does affect the question of consent to marriage, but the power differences and consequent risks are another point that could be discussed. 3) The question is whether Emina has capacity to consent. This is linked to the question whether someone understands the nature of marriage and the responsibilities stemming from it.¹ Emina is blind. She wears sunglasses and uses a white cane to walk. While her disability is unlikely to negate her capacity to consent to marriage, it is a risk factor of forced marriage. You can use this point to discuss possible causes of forced marriage. Forced marriages can happen for many reasons, for example because parents want a better and safe life for their children and want them to be cared for. Forced marriages can also happen because people are worried about the family's reputation and honour. Many people also still try to justify forced marriage as part of their traditions and beliefs and think that it is their obligation to comply. And forced marriages can happen because people want to pay off a family debt; because they do not want their children to have relationships or sex; or because they do not approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Some of these risk factors are picked up in the other comic stories.

¹ [Re E/ Sheffield City Council v E \[2005\] 1 FLR 965](#), paragraph 141.

2. Would her marriage be legal?

No, because she is below the minimum age of marriage and does not and cannot freely and fully consent to the marriage. That makes her marriage a forced marriage which is a crime in the UK and 'they' can go to prison for it. Emina could also get a forced marriage protection order. This can forbid 'them' from doing certain things such as being physically violent, contacting Emina, taking her out of the country, or making marriage arrangements.

3. How do you think marriage would change Emina's life?

Discuss potential consequences of forced marriage. Forced marriages do not have to lead to unhealthy and abusive relationships. But they can have a negative effect on people's physical and mental health and well-being, on their education and career, and on their social life. Where people are used, controlled, and treated like they belong to someone else (before or during the marriage), or where they are forced into marriages in exchange for money, forced marriages can be a form of modern slavery. Emphasise that the nature of the relationship, whether it is healthy, unhealthy or abusive, does not change anything about the fact that it is a forced marriage if at least one of the spouses did not freely consent. The comparatively smaller size of panel 6 indicates that Emina's world would get smaller with the marriage. The fallen petals and darker colour indicate negative consequences. In panel 6, Emina is alone again which might indicate that the marriage would isolate her from her friends and family who could be seen in previous panels. It could also indicate that she feels alone with her doubts and does not think she can talk to anyone about it. The scenes in panel 3 and 4 indicate that she wishes she could talk to a friend or her parents.

4. Who are 'they'?

Discuss different perpetrators. The text and images in panel 4 and 5 indicate that 'they' could be her parents, other family members, or members of her community. It is common for there to be multiple perpetrators involved in a forced marriage which can be male and female family members, friends and members of the community.

5. Where do you think Emina is from?

Discuss different victims. We think Emina is from a White, Eastern European background. This highlights that forced marriages happen in many nationalities, ethnicities, cultures and religions. Statistically, forced marriages mostly happen in South Asian communities. However, people at risk of forced marriage can come from Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Romania and Somalia. They can be Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh. But not every member of those communities experiences forced marriage and all major religions are against the practice.

6. Where could Emina find help? How could we help her?

Discuss possible interventions. Emina could speak to her friends from panel 3, to her parents, or a member of her community from panel 5. She could also speak to another person she trusts. For example, this could be a member of staff at her school. She could also reach out to the Forced Marriage Unit or organisations that work to end forced marriage, like Karma Nirvana and Savera UK. She does not seem to be in an emergency situation but she could still speak to the police. We could help her by offering a listening ear and compassionate support. If Emina agrees or asks us to, we could speak to a trusted person, the Forced Marriage Unit, Karma Nirvana or Savera UK on her behalf. In an emergency,

we should call the police. Speaking to her family or a member of her community might not be the best course of action though because it might put the person at risk.