

Teaching Guide: *Amina's Voice*

Intro

A Pakistani-American Muslim girl struggles to stay true to her family's vibrant culture while simultaneously blending in at school after tragedy strikes her community. Amina has never been comfortable in the spotlight. She is happy just hanging out with her best friend, Soojin. Except now that she's in middle school everything feels different. Soojin is suddenly hanging out with Emily, one of the "cool" girls in the class, and even talking about changing her name to something more "American." Does Amina need to start changing too? Or hiding who she is to fit in? While Amina grapples with these questions, she is devastated when her local mosque is vandalized. *Amina's Voice* brings to life the joys and challenges of a young Pakistani American and highlights the many ways in which one girl's voice can help bring a diverse community together to love and support each other. ([Amazon](#))

Length

208 pages

Lexile Measure

800

Recommended Grade Band

4- 7

Recognition

- ALA Notable Children's Books
- CCBC Choices (Cooperative Children's Book Council)
- CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book
- William Allen White Children's Book Award Master List (KS)
- Chicago Public Library's Best of the Best

What students will love:

- Relatable characters
- Relevant connections to real-world issues
- Focus on friendship, family, and community

Potential Struggles:

- The use of languages other than English (Urdu)
 - Encourage students to use context clues, and Google Translate for more complex terms.
- Misinformation/stereotypes about Muslims/ Islamic traditions
 - Make space for understanding the myths and stereotypes that surround the Muslim community before beginning the novel.
- Understanding the history of anti-Muslim racism in America
 - Teach this book alongside the CCC curriculum for students to have a comprehensive understanding of the history, rhetoric, and policies that allow a novel like this to take place.

Rationale/ Connection to Unit

Amina's Voice is a great text to teach alongside the [Anti-Muslim Racism unit](#) as it brings to life the effects of anti-Muslim racism in the United States. This text in particular touches on the day to day life of a young Muslim girl- how she struggles to fit in and find herself in the context of her friends, family, and community. It sheds light on how harmful rhetoric often manifests itself as violence against the Muslim community like attacks on mosques, and the effects it has on communities and families.

Learning objectives

- Analyze Amina's character development throughout the novel.
- Connect the events of the novel to real-life incidents that affect the lives of Muslims in America (ex. anti-Muslim sentiment, the attacks on mosques, etc.)

Literary Elements

- Flashback
- Foreshadowing
- Symbolism
- Theme

Themes

- **Coming of Age:** The novel follows Amina as she learns to accept herself, her faith and her friends.
- **Identity:** When her friend tries to change her name to something easier to pronounce, Amina is forced to grapple with her Muslim name and identity.

Context

Amina and her family are Pakistani-Americans living in Milwaukee during a time when anti-Muslim racism is widespread. This leads them to worry about the impression they will give Thaya Jaan (Amina's uncle) when he arrives from Pakistan. They have developed identities that are unique to them, and their lives here in America. She is too "strange" or different from the other girls at school, and too "Americanized" for her traditional uncle. Amina's story is one that many children of immigrants face as they develop unique identities shaped by their familial cultures and their experiences growing up in America. Furthermore, The attack on the mosque in their community comes as a shock to Amina. But [anti-mosque activity](#) is nothing new. All of these issues present a multi-faceted depiction of what life can look like for young, Muslim students growing up in the United States.

Summary

Amina is a shy, 11-year old Pakistani-American starting her first year of middle school. Along with her friend Soojin, she is one of the only girls in school with a name that's hard to pronounce. Soojin, however, begins to consider more 'American' names for herself when she finally becomes a citizen in a few weeks. When Soojin starts hanging out with Emily (the girl that used to make fun of their smelly food, and different languages) Amina wonders if she needs to start changing herself to fit in better.

At home, the arrival of her traditional uncle from Pakistan throws her family into a frenzy as they try to make a good impression. Her father enrolls Amina and her brother, Mustafa in a Qur'an competition at the local masjid. Amina loves singing but is terrified of performing in public, let alone reciting Qur'an she's not fluent in. But she and her brother practice with their uncle in preparation.

Meanwhile, at school, Amina's jealousy gets the best of her, and she accidentally lets out a secret she was supposed to keep for Emily. When her friends find out, she tries to apologize, but they ignore her. But when the local mosque is vandalized, Amina and the Muslim community are shaken up. They worry about how to repair the damage done, but Soojin's family offers their church to hold the competition and Emily's father offers his construction company to do the repairs at cost. Amina realizes how lucky she is to have two such great friends.

Comprehension/ Discussion Questions

The author, Hena Khan, has created a list of [discussion questions and extension activities](#) that best fit the goals of this novel.