

Teaching Guide: *Ask Me No Questions*

Intro

Since emigrating from Bangladesh, fourteen-year-old Nadira and her family have been living in New York City on expired visas, hoping to realize their dream of becoming legal U.S. citizens. But after 9/11, everything changes. Suddenly being Muslim means you are dangerous - a suspected terrorist. When Nadira's father is arrested and detained at the U.S.-Canadian border, Nadira and her older sister, Aisha, are told to carry on as if everything is the same. The teachers at Flushing High don't ask any questions, but Aisha falls apart. Nothing matters to her anymore - not even college. It's up to Nadira to be the strong one and bring her family back together again. (Amazon)

Length

192 pages

Lexile Measure

790

Recommended Grade Band

7-12

Recognition

- ALA Best Books For Young Adults
- ALA Notable Children's Books
- Bank Street Best Books of the Year
- Booklist Editors' Choice
- Chicago Public Library's Best of the Best

What students will love:

- Relatable characters
- Relevant connections to real-world issues
- Multi-layered conflicts

Potential Struggles:

- The use of languages other than English (Bangla)
 - 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.
- Understanding the history of US immigration policies and reform
 - Teach this book alongside a [lesson](#) on the myths surrounding immigration or this [unit](#) on the history of immigration in the United States and current US immigration policy.

Rationale/ Connection to Unit

Ask Me No Questions 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 intersectionality of anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant rhetoric as it relates to the Muslim community. It highlights how racist rhetoric is the foundation for the institutional forms of racism we see in our immigration policies and the everyday impact it has on Muslims across the country.

Learning objectives

- Analyze Nadira’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. The Muslim Ban)
- Debate the ethics of US current immigration laws.
- Historicize the understanding of US anti-immigration policies.

Literary Elements

- Flashback
- Foreshadowing
- Symbolism
- Theme

Themes

- **Coming of Age:** The novel follows Nadira as she finds her confidence and her place in her family and world.
- **Identity:** While facing the brunt of the United States’s immigration policies, Nadira and her family struggled to define who they are by a country that does not want to accept them.
- **Individual v. Society:** Nadira has to push back against immigration policies she finds unfair to fight for her family’s right to stay in the United States.

Context

Nadira and her family are living in Queens, New York on expired visas. They hoped to get permanent citizenship, but the process is long and costly. They have attempted to get their papers updated, but flaky lawyers, who are only out for money and other incidents make the process much harder. After the events of 9/11 Muslims (especially those that were immigrants or looked to be “other”) were under new scrutiny and suspicion. Nadira’s father is considered to have political affiliations simply for giving money to a mosque. Furthermore, undocumented students like Aisha, do not qualify for federal aid for college, and as such may not have the same opportunities as their documented classmates. All of these issues present a multi-faceted depiction of what life can look like for undocumented, immigrant, Muslim students in the United States.

Summary

Nadira and her family immigrated to Queens, New York from Bangladesh over eight years ago. While they hoped to have gained permanent citizenship, they have been living on expired visas for years. Her father is convinced that they must leave New York for Canada, but when they get there, they are turned away, and her father is detained. Nadira and her ‘perfect’ older sister, Aisha, are sent back to continue living as if nothing has happened.

They stay with their relatives, but adjusting back to normal life proves difficult for Aisha. Together, she and Nadira work on collecting documents, proof that their father and family deserves to be in the United States, The pressure becomes too much for Aisha who starts to crack under the pressure. She begins skipping school and missing extracurricular events, so Nadira is forced to fight for both of them. She finds her strength and figures out a way to get her father released, and bring her family back together.

Comprehension/ Discussion Questions

- What purpose do memories and flashbacks serve Nadira throughout the novel?
- What is the significance of land, water, and the borders between them to Nadira?
- Look up the history of Bangladesh. What is the Bengal famine? The Partition?
- Describe the relationships between Nadira and her family members? What are the roles of each person in the house?
- Compare and contrast the character’s feelings/ beliefs about America: Taslima, Abba, Uncle, etc.
- How do the experiences of immigrant children, like Nadira and Aisha, differ from their native-born counterparts?
- How does the instability of their new lives affect Aisha? How does it affect Nadira? Why do they respond so differently?
- Compare and contrast Taslima and her parents? How do they each respond to Uncle’s arrest?
- How does Nadira’s running away and subsequent presentation in court show her character development?
- Uncle decides to go back to Bangladesh because he would rather be “poor in a country where I can feel at home.” Would you rather be poor, but belong, or rich and ostracized?

LITERATURE EXTENSION

- What do you infer happened to Ali-Uncle?
- Why do you think Nadira uses the term “illegal alien” in her Valedictorian speech?
- How did life change for Nadira’s family (and Muslims, in general) after the events of 9/11?
- How is the symbol of the flat-bottomed boat significant to Nadira?

Essay Questions

- What policies have led to the cultural climate of the world that Nadira lives in?
- Nadira’s father gets detained at the US/ Canada border trying to flee from the uncertainty of his life in New York. What would you have done if you were in his shoes?
- What does being Bangladeshi mean to Nadira? How is it similar or different to how *you* feel about your own ethnicity?