

Teaching Guide: *Internment*

Intro

Set in a horrifying near-future United States, seventeen-year-old Layla Amin and her parents are forced into an internment camp for Muslim American citizens. With the help of newly made friends also trapped within the internment camp, her boyfriend on the outside, and an unexpected alliance, Layla begins a journey to fight for freedom, leading a revolution against the internment camp's Director and his guards. Heart-racing and emotional, *Internment* challenges readers to fight complicit silence that exists in our society today. (Amazon)

Length

373 pages

Lexile Measure:

N/A

Recommended Grade Band

7-12

Recognition

New York Times Best Seller

What students will love:

- Relatable characters
- Relevant connections to real-world issues
- Debating the ethics of a dystopian society

Potential Struggles:

- The use of languages other than English (Urdu/Arabic)
 - Encourage students to use context clues, and Google Translate for more complex terms.
- Misinformation/ stereotyping about Muslims/ Islamic traditions
 - Make space for understanding the myths and stereotypes that surround the Muslim community before beginning the novel. Lesson 3.1, in particular, addresses this issue.
- 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 are referenced that led to the dystopian society the book takes place in.

Rationale/ Connection to Unit

Internment 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. It highlights how racist and Islamophobic rhetoric is the foundation for both institutional and individual forms of racism. The book utilizes plenty of real-life events that make the novel seem hauntingly familiar, and relevant.

Learning objectives

- Identify elements of dystopian fiction within the novel.
- Discuss how the government in Layla's world deals with issues of religion, surveillance, security, and identity.
- Connect the events of the novel to real-life incidents that affect the lives of Muslims in America.
- Analyze the chronology of rhetoric/ events that allow the internment to occur.
- Compare and contrast the fictional events of the novel to similar historical events, including Japanese Internment and the Holocaust.

Literary Elements

- Flashback
- Foreshadowing
- Metaphor
- Symbolism
- Theme

Themes

- **Coming of Age:** The novel follows Layla as she matures and takes charge of the future for herself, her family and her community
- **Identity:** While facing discrimination and ostracization from the US government, Layla develops a stronger sense of her Muslim-American identity.
- **Activism:** The discrimination she faces as a Muslim-American, drive Layla to enact change and push for what she believes to be just.
- **Power and Privilege:** As the Muslim-American community in this novel is under threat from the US government, Layla and other characters in the novel learn about who has privilege, and who benefits from the power that results from that.
- **Individual v. Society:** The new internment order for Muslim Americans ostracizes Layla from her community as an American.

Context

This novel takes place in a world where internment camps for Muslims could exist. The author references America's history of Japanese internment as context for how this could occur. While this is a dystopian novel, many of the events referenced are incidents that have actually affected the Muslim community. The ['Muslim Ban,'](#) the [murder](#) of 3 students at Chapel Hill, the [attacks](#) on mosques across the country are just a few of the events that Layla experiences that are part

of the growing anti-Muslim rhetoric in her world. In fact, the PEW research center's 2017 [study](#) shows that hate crimes against Muslims have surpassed post-9/11 numbers. Today, issues of racial profiling, surveillance, and criminalization of the Muslim identity set the stage for a world in which this dystopia seems almost plausible.

Summary

Internment is a dystopian novel set in the near-future United States. Anti-Muslim rhetoric has increased with a President that reinstates the Exclusion Act as a matter of national security. As a result, Layla, her family, and other members of the Muslim community are forced into Mobius, an internment camp in the middle of a California desert. Here, the strict rules and expectations do not allow for mistakes, as people who show even the slightest resistance are tortured or made to disappear. Layla, with the help of her friends and a sympathetic guard named Jake, starts small forms of resistance like a hunger strike which only leads to added restrictions and scrutiny for Layla. Jake helps her get in contact with David, her boyfriend outside the camp, who helps publicize articles and videos about the situation inside the camp. One of her friends, Soheil, tries to climb the electric fence surrounding the camp and is killed. In the ensuing chaos, she is found out by the Director of camp and is taken and tortured for answers. When Layla is released, she leads the internees in taking a final stand, where she calls out the director and forces him to open the gates and release the internees. The pressure and defiance become too much for the Director who threatens her life but kills Jake instead. Thereafter, the government orders the immediate closing of Mobius and the internees are free to return to their lives.

Comprehension/ Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the author mixes real and fictional events when setting the stage for the social landscape of the novel?
- What elements of the story help you understand this is a dystopian fiction novel?
- Imagine if you were in the Amin family's shoes- would you answer the census truthfully?
- The events Layla mentions on pg. 23 are all real. Look up those incidents. Why do you think the author chose to include real-life events in this fictional work?
- If you had 10 minutes to pack up your life, what would you take with you?
- What is the purpose does the *dua* that Layla makes in Chapter 10? What does it mean to her?
- What does Layla's father mean when he says "It's not about danger. It's about fear." What are the ways that idea plays out in modern policies?
- What is the significance of the ID numbers on Layla's wrist being invisible?
- Why do you think the camp is segregated by ethnic/racial groups? What purpose does it serve?
- Why might the internees have set up a garden, school, etc.?
- What purpose do the minders serve? How do you think they justify their jobs in the camp?
- What is Jake's motivation for helping Layla?
- Would you have taken David's offer to get out with your family?
- Was the hunger strike and the ensuing chaos worth it?
- What is the role of protestors and the public in the resistance?
- How does Soheil's death propel the plot of the story?

LITERATURE EXTENSION

- How does the Director use fear to try and get Layla to turn on her fellow internees? What choice would you have made?
- What are the events leading up to the closing of Mobius? Do they seem realistic?
- What do you think life after Mobius would be like for the internees?

Essay Questions

- What is the role of hate speech or rhetoric in the creation of internment camps like Mobius?
- How is Layla's experience different or similar to that of what we know of historic Japanese internment camps?
- Imagine a scenario where Layla was killed in the standoff. What do you think would have happened after. Explain your decision.
- Do you think this story could ever happen in real life? Why or why not?
- If you could hear this same story from another person's point of view, who would you choose?
- Layla references the black liberation movement, Japanese internment, and other historical movements as her motivation for resisting. What comparisons can you make between those movements and that of the Muslim-American experience?

Possible Parental Concerns:

- Explicit language, pg. 30, 233, 279, 349