



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

Amina's Voice: Countering Islamophobia by Centering Young Muslim American Voices

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Abstract

This project outlines a sixth grade humanities mini-unit for [*Amina's Voice*](#), a contemporary fiction novel about a young, Muslim, Pakistani American girl living in Milwaukee. The author, Hena Khan, wrote the novel because she so rarely had the opportunity to read young adult fiction that reflected her own life experiences while growing up in the United States. In reading this novel, narrated by Amina herself, my students will have the opportunity to better understand one girl's experience of growing up Muslim in the United States. My hope is that students recognize both profound similarities and differences between themselves and Amina. This unit is designed to help students exercise empathy both for the characters in the novel and within their own classroom community.

Novel Summary [from Scholastic](#):

"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."

Essential Questions

- How can I understand a character's identities, motivations, and worldview?
- What might be common experiences and customs for young Muslim Americans?
- What choices do people have when they encounter a person or a group who is different from them? Why might they make those choices?

Learning Objectives

- Use text-based evidence to describe characters from the novel
- Describe the events from the novel from a character's perspective
- Organize, draft, peer edit and revise a paragraph
- Create and respond to text-to-self and text-to-world discussion questions
- Track and define words related to Muslim religious life or Pakistani culture
- Identify the diversity of beliefs and practices within a faith tradition
- Plan and execute a project in a limited period of time at home

Assessments: Addressing the Essential Questions

Each assessment below is designed to address one of the essential questions. Students will complete each of these assessments over the course of the unit.

- **Character Identity Charts:** You will work with a small group to create a detailed Identity Chart of a character from the novel. You should use words, symbols, and quotes from the novel to describe your character. Listed below are the aspects of your character that you could describe:
 - The character's identity groups (ex: gender, race, class, nationality, religion, age, family role, etc)
 - The character's personality characteristics (ex: stubborn, curious, caring, etc)
 - The family members or friends who are important to the character
 - The character's hopes, fears, or aspirations
 - A well-known quote (not from the novel) that this character lives by
(Adapted from [Facing History and Ourselves](#))For each detail that you add to the Identity Chart, you must also include a page number where a reader could find information to support that detail.
- **Amina's Islamic Life Paragraph:** What are customs, practices, or ideas that Amina follows as a part of her Islamic life? Identify three customs, practices, or ideas and describe each. Then, identify one part of the book that is evidence of the diversity of practices and beliefs within Islam. Organize these details in an outline, and use your outline to draft a paragraph.
- **Letter to the Author:** Write a letter to the author of *Amina's Voice*, Hena Khan. Your letter should address the following questions:
 - Why do you think Hena Khan wrote this book?
 - After reading this novel, how would you respond to our essential question: What choices do people have when they encounter a person or a group who is different from them? Why might they make those choices?
 - What questions do you have for Khan about the novel, her own life, or current events?**Organize the ideas in your letter into distinct paragraphs.**

Creative Projects: Demonstrating Understanding of the Protagonist

Students will choose to do one of the three projects listed below. For each project, students will demonstrate understanding of the challenges the character faces, what/who is important to the character, and how the character understands the world around them.

- **Scrapbook:** Imagine that you are Amina. You are making a scrapbook of the important events of the novel. Consider which events you would want to remember and/or events that made you grow or change. Imagine what photos of those events might look like. Illustrate five of these “photos” and assemble them in a flipbook. Include a detailed caption for each that describes what is happening in this event and why this event is included in the scrapbook (Project adapted from *National Council for Teachers of English*).
- **Current Events:** Select three current news articles that you think Amina would be interested in. Write a response paragraph to each news article from Amina’s perspective. What do you think about the article? What questions do you have? Does this news article remind you of anything in your own life? (Project adapted from *National Council for Teachers of English*).
- **Invention:** What challenges does Amina encounter during the novel? Create a list and choose one challenge. Design and build a three-dimensional model of a fictional invention that would help Amina solve a challenge. Along with your design sketch and model, write a paragraph explaining the challenge you chose and the ways your invention would help solve the challenge. Remember to give your invention a creative name!

Lesson Plans

Note: Many of the discussion questions are adapted from the [Simon and Schuster Reading Group Guide](#).

Week 1: Getting to Know the Characters & Text-to-Self Questions Chp. 1 - 14

Lesson 1

Focus:

How can I understand a character’s identities, motivations, and worldview?

Objectives:

Use text-based evidence to describe characters from the novel

Create and respond to text-to-self and text-to-world discussion questions

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Anticipation Guide
 - a. Students respond to the anticipation guide
 - b. Four Corners - Agree/Disagree

2. Activity:
 - a. Provide brief intro to the text
 - b. As we read chp 1-2 aloud, students are tracking...
 - i. A list of new characters that they come across
 - ii. Words that are associated with Islamic life
 - c. Twenty Questions: Think, Pair, Square, Share
 - i. Work with a partner to create twenty questions that you have after reading the first two chapters of the book.
 - ii. Share questions with another pair and work together to answer them
 - iii. Share out remaining questions

3. Follow-through:

Make a prediction

Homework:

Read: Chp. 1- 4

Journal: Describe Amina's feelings about music. What keeps Amina from telling her teacher that she would like to sing a solo? What could Amina do to overcome her fear? Have you ever been afraid to do something you wanted to do? What happened? Would you do anything differently if you could go back in time?

Lesson 2**Focus:**

How can I understand a character's identities, motivations, and worldview?

Objectives:

Use text-based evidence to describe characters from the novel
Create and respond to text-to-self and text-to-world discussion

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Share out journal response

2. Activity:
 - a. Explain Character Identity Charts
 - b. Model with Amina's character chart
 - c. Assign groups for each character

3. Follow-through:
 - a. Gallery walk of other group's character charts
 - b. Share out what stood out to you and what could be added

Homework:

Read: Chp 5 - 10

Journal:

One of the conflicts that Soojin must resolve is the question of whether or not to change her name. Ask your parents the story behind your own name. How did they select it? What does your name mean?

Week 2: Amina's Religious Life & Text-to-Self Questions
Chp 15 - 25**Lesson 3****Focus:**

What have we learned about aspects of Muslim life so far?
How can I organize my ideas using an outline?

Objectives:

Track and define words related to Muslim religious life or Pakistani culture

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Share out journal responses
2. Activity:
 - a. From reading this novel so far, what have we learned about the way some people might practice Islam? What questions remain?
 - i. Complete T Chart: I have learned ... / I'm curious about...
 - ii. Share out and brainstorm: how could we find out the answers to our questions?
 - b. Begin outline for *Amina's Islamic Life Paragraph*
3. Follow-through:
 - a. Model creating a text-to-self discussion question
Discuss the qualities of a strong text-to-self discussion question

Homework:

Read: Chp 15 - 18

Create a Text-to-Self Discussion Question based on an event or idea from chp 15-18

Lesson 4**Focus:**

How can I use an outline to draft a paragraph?
What might be common experiences and customs for young Muslim Americans?

Objectives:

Track and define words related to Muslim religious life or Pakistani culture
Identify the diversity of beliefs and practices within a faith tradition
Organize, draft, peer edit and revise a paragraph

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Journal Response
 - a. What causes tension between Amina’s parents and her brother? How do they resolve their differences? Have you ever wanted to do something your parents did not want you to do? Have your parents ever required you to do something you did not want to do? How did you handle the situation?
2. Activity:
 - a. *Amina’s Voice* includes vocabulary and references to Islamic and Pakistani culture. Choose an unfamiliar vocabulary word that you think is related to Islamic or Pakistani culture and research what it means.
 - b. Create a placard for the word(s) you chose for the word wall
3. Follow-through: *Amina’s Islamic Life Paragraph*
 - a. Brainstorm ideas that respond to prompt
 - b. Model how to follow an outline
 - c. Begin drafting paragraph

Homework:

Read: Chp 19 - 22

Journal: What is vandalism? How did the description of the vandalism of Amina’s mosque make you feel? How do you think you would feel if your school or place of worship was vandalized? Explain how this act of violence ends up bringing Amina’s community together.

Create a Text-to-Self Question

Lesson 5**Focus:**

What are the qualities of a strong TTS Discussion Question?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Share out Journal Responses
2. Activity:
 - a. [Save the Last Word for Me](#): In small groups, students discuss the text-to-self discussion questions that they created for homework. (Students should choose one of the two discussion questions they created).
3. Follow-through: Complete written discussion reflection
4. Activity 2: *Amina’s Islamic Life Paragraph*
 - a. Peer Edit
 - b. Revise

Homework: Read: Chp 22 - 25

Journal: Amina chooses the classic Sam Cooke song “A Change Is Gonna Come” to sing at the concert. Look up the lyrics and research the history of the song. What inspired Cooke to write the song? Why do you think the song became known as an anthem of the civil rights movement? Why do you think Amina relates to this particular song?

Lesson 6

Focus:

How have the characters changed over the course of the novel?
How can we show what we know about the characters in a creative way?

Objectives:

Plan and execute a project in a limited period of time at home

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Share out journal response
2. Activity 1:
 - a. Think/Pair/Share: The novel ends with a message of change. In literature, characters that change are called *dynamic* characters. Almost all the characters in *Amina's Voice* are dynamic characters. Choose one character and describe how they change.
 - b. Add to Identity Charts / Character Maps
 - c. Share out on what was added
3. Activity 2:
 - a. Explain Creative Projects
 - b. Make Project Choice
 - c. Plan Projects - get project plan approved
4. Follow-through:

In your planner, write the specific project goal that you will accomplish

Complete project goal

Week 3: Encountering Difference Discussions & Assessments Share Assessments

Lesson 7

Focus:

What choices do people have when they encounter a person or group who is different from themselves?
How can we show what we know about the characters in a creative way?

Procedure:

1. Warm Up:
 - a. Journal: Think about a time when you felt misunderstood by another person. Describe what happened. What emotions were you experiencing?
 - b. Share in small groups - choose one person's scenario to create a frozen sculpture of the scene.
 - c. Share out and debrief - how is this question relevant to *Amina's Voice*?
2. Activity: Addressing the central question
 - a. Discussion: What choices do people have when they encounter a person or group who is different from themselves?
3. Follow-through:
 - a. Skits?
 - b. In your planner, write the specific project goal that you will accomplish

Homework:

Project

Lesson 8**Focus:**

What have we learned from reading this novel?

How can we show what we know about the characters in a creative way?

Objectives:

Describe the events from the novel from another character's perspective

Procedure:

1. Warm Up: Share out on project progress
2. Activity: Letters to the Author
 - a. Brainstorm using webs graphic organizer
 - b. Draft letters
 - c. Peer edit letters
3. Follow-through:

In your planner, write the specific project goal that you will accomplish

Homework:

Project

Make edits to letter to Hena Khan

Lesson 9**Focus:**

How can we show what we know about the characters in a creative way?

Objectives:

Describe the events from the novel from another character's perspective

Procedure:

1. Warm Up:
 - a. Set up classroom for project share
 - b. Explain qualities of a strong share
2. Activity: Project Share
 - a. Students share their projects in small groups and take questions
 - b. Students write appreciations for each other's projects
3. Follow-through:

Students close the unit by sharing one word or phrase that they are taking away with them from reading *Amina's Voice*.

Homework:

Make edits to letter to Hena Khan

Additional Resources

I came across the following resources while searching for texts that centered the voices and experiences of young Muslim Americans. Many of these resources are related to debunking stereotypes and challenging Islamophobia. Each resource could be used as a tool to inspire extension discussions in a 5th-12th grade classroom.

Films and Videos

[I am Divided, I Learn America Documentary](#)

[Islam: My Life, My Religion \(BBC\)](#)

[CBS Extended interview: Millennial Muslims on life in America](#)

[This Is Our Islam: To Be Young, Devout and Muslim in America Today](#)

[Young Muslim Voices: Underneath the Hijab](#)

[Fusion: Voices of Young Muslim Americans in New York](#)

News Articles / Audio

[Muslim Girls Design Their Own Culturally Appropriate Basketball Uniforms \(Huffington Post/Teaching Tolerance\)](#)

[The Burden of Being a Young American Muslim \(Washington Post - Teaching Tolerance\)](#)

[Watch Muslim Girls Get Real About Love, Faith, and Donald Trump \(Teen Vogue\)](#)

[I am You: American Muslims on Faith and Fear \(CNN\)](#)

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Goldschmidt, Henry. "From World Religions to Lived Religion." *Civility, Religious Pluralism, and Education*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 177-90. Print.

Jurskis, Amy. "Amina's Voice Reading Group Guide." *Simon and Schuster*. 2017.

Quattlebaum, Mary. "A step toward greater diversity in children's books: Hena Khan's 'Amina's Voice.'" *Washington Post*. March 20, 2017.

For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, see: www.religiousworldsnyc.org.