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Manglik, Gauri and Sadaf Siddique. *Muslims in Story: Expanding Multicultural Understanding through Children's and Young Adult Literature*. ALA Editions, 2018. 264 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8389-1741-1

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In 2017, Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13769, titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.” The signing provoked controversy and condemnation, with many calling it a “Muslim ban,” particularly because it affected Muslim-majority countries. Trump had previously called for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” following the 2015 San Bernardino attack (Bobic), and he himself equated the ban with a Muslim ban on at least twelve different occasions (Bier). The narrative of the “foreign” and therefore, “dangerous” Other, which taps into a longer history of pernicious representations of Arabs and Muslims, is alive and well in the West today. Beyond just shaping anti-Muslim policies, however, such divisive and racist rhetoric and behavior inspires acts of violence against minorities in America, including the increased bullying of Muslim children. In fact, following Trump’s presidency, hate crimes against Muslims spiked in the U.S. (Kuruvilla). While it is crucial to examine the ramifications of hateful anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric on the Muslim population, special attention should be paid to its influence on shaping the minds of young and impressionable people. In today’s contentious climate, positive representations of Muslims and Islam are perhaps more important than ever in countering Islamophobia.

With its focus on authentic and uplifting stories about Muslim children, *Muslims in Story: Expanding Multicultural Understanding Through Children’s and Young Adult Literature* contributes to the discussion regarding the need for diverse books in a timely and crucial way. As authors Gauri Manglik and Sadaf Siddique note, “We felt deeply troubled by the growing anti-Muslim prejudice and vacuum of balanced representation in the media, so we brainstormed on how to facilitate positive engagement to counter the misinformation about Muslims... As we struggled with the growing tensions in the country, we realized that we can use the power of books to create a long-term systemic change in countering Islamophobia” (19, 20). In *Muslims in Story*, Manglik and Siddique spotlight curated titles of children’s and young adult books that feature Muslim youth as protagonists, which as they note, “form a miniscule percentage of the total number of books published every year” (27) and also select books with protagonists of diverse backgrounds, including African American, Arab, South Asian, Malaysian, African, European, and Hispanic, thus countering the idea that Muslims are monolith (28). The curated

books lists also explore the idea of “visual diversity” – illustrations include youth of color and everyday items that are integral to Muslims’ daily lives such as items of clothing including hijabs, foods like falafel, and pictorial markers such as calligraphy. Exposing young readers to positive and diverse stories about Muslims can help to counter Islamophobia, increase understanding, and encourage respect and empathy. In addition to reaffirming stories of Muslim youth and facilitating “thematic discovery of these books,” *Muslims in Story* serves as a pedagogical tool, providing activities and discussion guides that will inspire a proactive approach to teaching these books, therefore aiding educators in engaging students with the characters and themes more effectively (23). The collection is adaptable to a range of educators, librarians, scholars, and parents, and across fields including literature and cultural studies, education, and history.

*Muslims in Story* is divided into two parts. Part 1, “Why Counter Islamophobia through Stories?”, is split into three chapters. In Chapter 1, “An Overview of Muslims in America,” Manglik and Siddique provide a brief introduction on the presence of Muslims throughout American history, outlining the impact Muslims have had on various aspects of American life. The authors draw attention to a narrative that is overwhelmingly ignored in the primary and secondary American history classroom. In Chapter 2, “Islamophobia and Its Impact,” Manglik and Siddique examine the effects of Islamophobia on Muslims, defining Islamophobia as “encompass[ing] a wide range of actions that are rooted in anti-Muslim prejudice” (11). They explain that Islamophobia manifests into three categories, including violence, discrimination and prejudice, and exclusion, and cite actual incidents of each, such as physical attacks on Muslims and instances of discrimination in the workplace. This chapter also includes a section on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim children and children perceived as Muslim based on markers of identity such as skin color, name, and clothing. Manglik and Siddique explain that the United States has witnessed an increase of verbal and physical harassment against Muslim children. One such example includes the case of Ahmed Mohamed, the young boy whose teacher had him arrested because she thought his homemade clock was a bomb (14). Chapter 3, “Using Literature to Create Long-Term Systemic Change,” highlights the importance of diverse books for children and positive portrayals of Muslims within them as a method of challenging Islamophobia.

Manglik and Siddique note that children ages three to eight are most open to learning new knowledge and ideas and that books for children can “expose kids to different worlds” while also allowing Muslim children to see themselves in the books (21). The authors restate this twofold objective throughout their text.

In Part 2, “Reframing the Narrative through Curated Book Lists and Programming Ideas,” Manglik and Siddique curate a list of books around four different themes, including “Muslim Kids as Heroes,” “Inspiring Muslim Leaders and Thinkers,” “Celebrating Islam,” and “Folktales from Islamic Traditions.” Each chapter begins with a brief introduction on that theme. The book lists are categorized into picture books, chapter and middle grade books, and young adult books. For each book in those categories, the authors include an annotation, an image of the book, and a short review. In addition, after each picture book, the authors include “Ideas for Further Engagement” and suggestions for “hands-on” activities as guides toward experiential learning. For instance, after children have read Rukhsana Khan’s *Big Red Lollipop*, they are encouraged to “Find birthday songs and traditions from around the world” (30). Such activities demonstrate to children how similar people are but also encourage them to learn about, respect, and celebrate difference. As for middle grade and young adult books, the authors include sample discussion questions and important quotes to further engage young readers with the themes and ideas in the books. Thus, the authors emphasize reading as an engaging learning process with potential to lead children to other methods of discovery and knowledge. Moreover, Part 2 includes author interviews, which are accompanied by both a photograph of the author and answers to questions like “What inspired you to write about Muslim characters?” and “What is your favorite story from Islamic traditions?” The interviews highlight the diversity among Muslim authors, therefore strengthening Manglik and Siddique’s objective in demonstrating that Muslims are not a monolithic group of people.

The various chapters in part 2 introduce books that feature protagonists who are Muslim, and whose faith either serves as a backdrop to their day-to-day experiences or is explicitly showcased and celebrated. Chapter 4, “Muslim Kids as Heroes: Connecting Across Cultures,” includes books whose protagonists face universal dilemmas, like Sophia who struggles to fit in at her new high school in Sophia Al-Maria’s *The Girl who Fell to Earth*, or stories that represent

the reality of many Muslim children's lives around the world, such as how war affects Lina and Feroza's friendship in Karen Lynn Williams's *Four Feet, Two Sandals*.

Chapter 5, "Inspiring Muslim Leaders and Thinkers," challenges the assumption that "Islam is backward and Muslims have not contributed to modern society" (83). This misconception shapes the contemporary discourse on Muslims as "unprogressive" and "oppressive," particularly to women. This chapter therefore introduces readers to biographies that highlight the various contributions made by scholars, inventors, philosophers, and contemporary Muslim visionaries who have contributed to the sciences, arts, music, and literature. The biographies draw attention to a rich history of cultural and intellectual exchange, emphasizing a positive narrative and a different kind of history than the one that is propagated to benefit racist, deep-rooted prejudice against Muslims.

Chapter 6, "Celebrating Islam," curates books that combine the details of Islam with the various plots and characters. The authors select texts that "expose readers to the diversity within Islam and examine the idea of many different Islams" (130). This is a commendable move that validates the various histories, traditions, and practices of Muslims from around the world. The books in this chapter range from stories about different celebrations and festivals in Islam, which encourage understanding and respect, to interfaith texts that promote co-existence and highlight the importance of community, such as Karen Gray Ruelle's *The Grand Mosque of Paris*, a story about the Muslims who helped Jews escape during the Holocaust. Moreover, the young adult list in this section explores stories that feature protagonists who navigate both the social pressures of being teenagers as well as their Muslim identities. For instance, in Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, protagonist Amal faces typical generational issues such as friendships and crushes, while also struggling to wear the hijab in a Western society that represents Muslims through the dehumanized stereotypes of the other. In today's hostile political climate, it is increasingly difficult and dangerous to be a visibly Muslim woman in the West. Stories like Amal's draw awareness to the political and institutional forces at work against Muslims, while also humanizing and validating their identities and bodily autonomy.

In the final chapter of the book, "Folktales from Islamic Traditions," Manglik and Siddique include folktales and "ancient" legends from Islamic traditions. American children are

typically introduced to orientalist retellings of folktales from non-White cultures. Therefore, Manglik and Siddique have “attempted to reclaim orientalist tellings of these tales by featuring writers who take inspiration from their ethnic traditions” (169). The books in this chapter provide windows into fantastical realms shaped by the diverse beliefs, customs, and traditions of the Islamic world and prove refreshing and imperative additions to a children’s literature fairy and folk tale canon.

In the conclusion of the book, the authors make a few final statements about the need for diverse books in our tumultuous times. As they note, “Each of the books reviewed in this volume is an invitation to fight fear with knowledge” (207). Manglik and Siddique also include five appendices. For instance, “Frequently Asked Questions about Islam” helps to debunk fallacies and provide further knowledge about Islam. In addition, “Guidelines to Evaluate Muslim Children’s Literature” aids in evaluating the authenticity and quality of new books for inclusion in the classroom. Moreover, a list of educational resources—a “Time Line of Muslims in America” and a glossary of Arabic words—are useful for educators and researchers. *Muslims in Story* is a significant contribution. Nonetheless, while the authors have carefully selected their texts based on quality, authenticity, and theme, books about Muslim characters by non-Muslim authors should nonetheless be approached with caution. One interviewee wrote that their research included, “read[ing] everything I can about my subjects, look[ing] at many, many pictures of their environment, read[ing] what they have written themselves... and listen[ing] to music from the countries I am writing about”; this does not make one an expert on any given cultural, racial, ethnic, or religious group (96).

Despite this questionable aspect, *Muslims in Story* belongs on everyone’s bookshelf. It is a much-needed resource for educators, librarians, and scholars. Books that feature Muslim protagonists are overwhelmingly ignored in the classroom and in children’s literature scholarship. It is imperative to circulate, read, study, and analyze these books, particularly at a time in which Muslims, and especially Muslim youths, are put in the harsh spotlight, scrutinized, bullied, and excluded. Books are a powerful tool through which we can counter fear, encourage constructive dialogue, and foster empathy and inclusiveness.

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