

Teachers Notes

by Lindsay Williams

Jameela

by

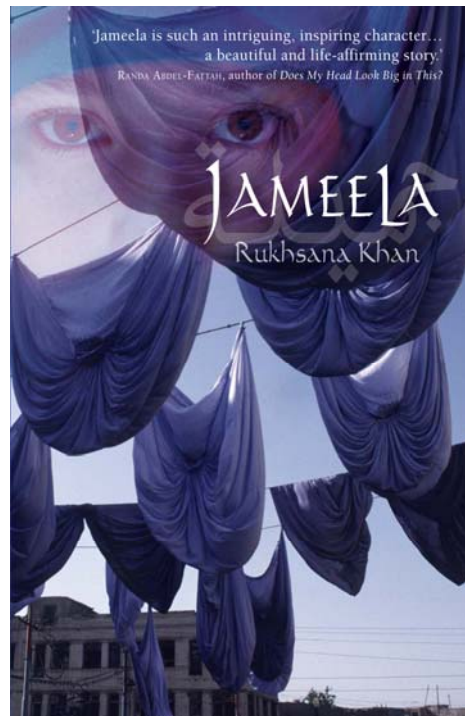
Rukhsana Khan

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Recommended for ages 10-13 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Jameela is an Islamic girl living with her mother and father in a village in rural Afghanistan, a country that has been devastated by foreign invasion, war and the reign of the fundamentalist Taliban. After the death of Jameela's Mor (mother), her Baba (father) - already deeply affected by the violent death of other relatives - decides they will leave the village and re-establish their lives in Kabul. Jameela is reluctant to leave the relative security of village life to face an unknown future, but obeys her father and is initially excited about travelling in a vehicle for the first time in her life.

This excitement quickly dissipates when they arrive in Kabul and go to share a house with a married couple and their family. Although the house is more opulent than anything she has been used to in the past, it is clear from the outset that Jameela is welcome only as a servant. Worked hard by the wife, Jameela is shocked by the way these people – and her own father – seem to flaunt the edicts of a religion that she holds so dear. However, she draws strength from the memory and teachings of Mor.

Eventually, Jameela and her father are forced to leave this home, but he quickly finds a new wife – and stepmother for Jameela. However, the stepmother clearly dislikes Jameela. The fact that she insists on wearing a porani (head covering) – partly to cover her cleft lip – further distances Jameela from the stepmother. After finding her son, Masood, teaching Jameela to read, the stepmother forces Baba to take Jameela to the marketplace and abandon her. Although he appears genuinely reluctant, he does as requested.

Fortunately, one of the local store owners takes pity on her and, although his family does not have the resources to look after her themselves, they take her to a local orphanage. Here, she is educated and even has her cleft lip repaired – ironically enough, by the very same army that has been responsible for so much death and destruction in her country. After some difficult adjustments, Jameela finds her place in the life of the orphanage and her new friends work to turn the tables on her stepmother.

A well paced, engrossing story, *Jameela* explores notions of beauty, tolerance and compassion, survival, family, friendship and the role of piety in the modern world. Despite the confronting and tragic nature of much of Jameela's life, the novel is ultimately optimistic and hopeful.

* * * * *

Randa Abdel-fattah, author of *Does my head look big in this?* has said of *Jameela*:

"I loved the story. Jameela is such an intriguing, inspiring character. I loved how Rukshana treated Jameela's spirituality with such delicacy and respect. It was a beautiful insight into how Jameela's faith gave her the strength and dignity to cope with the utter horror and tragedy of her treatment at the hands of her father. What a beautiful and life-affirming story."

And Deborah Ellis, author of the Parvana books, has said:

"*Jameela* is a beautifully-written story about a girl – and a country – struggling to overcome the devastation of war, an important book that should be widely read."

* * * * *

Jameela (under its North American title, *Wanting Mor*) has been widely and favourably reviewed and was the winner of the Youth Fiction category in the 2009 Middle East Book Awards, USA. The author's website provides links to a number of reviews and interviews: <http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/>.

See 'Other Resources', 'Other Books by Rukhsana Khan' and 'About the Writers', below.

IN THE CLASSROOM: SOME ADVISORY NOTES

A number of aspects of *Jameela* may be regarded as controversial in some school communities. Before using this novel in the classroom, you may wish to read through the advice offered on the following Victorian government website:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchcontroversial.htm>

In addition, many schools in Australia will contain students who are refugees and who have suffered the trauma of war and/or natural disaster. Some students will have lost their parents or been separated from their natural families. Teachers should be sensitive to the fact that *Jameela* may bring to the surface uncomfortable, even traumatic memories and feelings for these students. You are advised to consult your school guidance officer or psychologist if you believe you may be teaching such students. This on-line fact sheet may provide further, useful information of a general nature:

<http://www.studentsfirstproject.org/documents/Traumaquickfactsheet.pdf>.

Teachers may also be interested in *The Australian Muslim Student* by Manar Chelebi, listed in Other Resources, below.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Jameela is recommended for students aged 10 to 13+. Consequently, these notes are aimed at upper primary and lower secondary classrooms (or the Middle Years of schooling as it may be termed in some locations). The activities are designed to be used mainly as part of an English program, although given that the book tells the story of a Muslim girl growing up in war-ravaged Afghanistan, there is also a strong SOSE component.

The English activities have been designed to take account of the three strands of the proposed Australian English curriculum:

- Literature – the activities focus on developing appreciation of a novel which has the potential for enriching students' lives and expanding the scope of their experience
- Language – the 'Thinking like an author' activities suggested for After Reading are designed to develop students' knowledge about how the English language works
- Literacy – the blackline masters (the Vocabulary Wheel and the Questioning Circle) are designed to help students become more effective readers.

While some activities clearly belong to one strand or another, many of the activities also draw upon these strands in an integrated manner.

BEFORE READING

FINDING OUT ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

Using Google Maps, students locate Afghanistan. Using the re-sizing slide on the left hand side, students should find out where Australia is in regard to Afghanistan. With teacher assistance, students can also interpret the satellite and terrain views. Students

should also locate Kabul – although Google Maps only labels the city with the Arabic form of the name, so a little research may be required.

Once students have a sense of Afghanistan’s geography, they can locate images of people and places. There are also interesting videos available on the web, but these will require careful screening by teachers as some may be quite distressing for younger students; in addition, some videos bring up links to other, unsuitable videos. Further research can be carried out as required. Using PowerPoint, students could assemble a digital montage of images, sounds and information about Afghanistan and Kabul.

KNOWING ABOUT ISLAM

Ask students to use a table such as the one below in order to brainstorm what they know about Islam, and what they think they need to know. (The final column is completed when students have finished the unit.)

What I know about Islam	What I think I need to know about Islam	What I learnt about Islam during this unit

Once students have had the chance to discuss what they know, write a list of questions that reflect what they still need to know (the teacher may need to suggest ones that cover aspects of *Jameela*). At this stage, it may be worth inviting a guest from the Islamic community (e.g. parents or representatives of a local mosque) to come and address students about the basic tenets and practices of Islam. Students can also do a web search to find out more. (Warning: unguided forays onto the Internet using very general search words will produce a confusing plethora of unrefereed sites.) Some of the following websites might be a useful starting point:

<http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/carolrb/Islam/islamintro.html>: an introductory site, designed for UK primary students and written by a non-Muslim teacher; this is an amateur site with no endorsement from educational or Muslim authorities. Contains a balance of images and concise text (often in dot points) but accuracy is not guaranteed.

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/Islam.htm>: Apparently the result of a homework exercise for American students, this page contains concise answers to a series of basic questions about Islam, but again, accuracy is not guaranteed.

VOCABULARY

Before beginning the novel, draw students' attention to the glossary beginning on p. 181. This contains definitions of Arabic and Pushto words used through the text. To reinforce or clarify understanding of some of the key words, students could be asked to complete a number of Vocabulary Wheels (individually or in small groups) – see Blackline Master One.

In an interview, Rukhsana Khan has said: 'I wondered at first if I should allow Jameela to express herself in such religious terms all the time, but I found that they were just part of her vocabulary. She couldn't help it. Then I thought of how I approach books with lots of foreign words in them. Most of the time I just gloss over them if I'm hooked on the story. I thought the word 'Mor' would be easy for Western readers to become accustomed to, but I was worried about the other phrases, but then I thought if we can get used to other culturally grounded words like "chutzpah", "gezundheit", and "schlep" why should I balk at including culturally appropriate words that my character would definitely say and think under the circumstances? And I made sure it was never absolutely crucial that the reader knew what they meant. I wanted the reader to be able to get the gist of them without bothering with the glossary if they were lazy about things like that – like I tend to be.'

Share this quotation and discuss its implications for reading the novel. Read the first chapter of the novel together and talk about ways that the context can be used to work out the meaning of words, e.g. on the bottom of p. 2, Khan uses the expression *Khaala* then, in brackets, Jameela states: 'She's not really my aunt but I call her Khaala for respect.'

Included on the author's own website (which uses the Canadian title – *Wanting Mor* – is a teachers' guide written by the author herself. The guide contains a good collection of photos demonstrating some of the Afghan vocabulary used in the book.
<http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/teacherguides/Wanting%20Mor%20Teacher's%20Guide.PDF>

STRUCTURE

Students should be made aware of the importance of the first chapter of a novel in terms of setting the plot in motion, establishing the characters and setting (in time and place), and foreshadowing future events and the overall message of the novel. After reading the first chapter of *Jameela*, students can brainstorm what they have discovered and make predictions about the course of the novel. Upon completing the entire novel, students can be asked to reflect again on the significance of first chapters – and perhaps take a closer look at the first chapter of other novels.

DURING READING

BOOKMARK

Before students begin reading the book, they can create a bookmark. On one side, they can draw (or paste) Islamic designs. These are always non-representational (see <http://www.patterninislamicart.com/>). On the other side, students can keep lists of characters under different headings, e.g. Jameela's family; The step-family; The orphanage etc. This may assist them to keep track of the multitude of characters, some of whom will have names which are unfamiliar to many students. Alternatively, students could use the bookmark to record page references of favourite scenes and quotations.

BLOGGING

As students read, encourage them to use on-line resources to keep a summary of what's happening and record their unfolding thoughts, feelings and understandings.

Alternatively, teach students to write a double entry journal. Lesson plans and resources are available from: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/guided-comprehension-making-connections-228.html>.

Extension: As students read the book, they can take turns recording and up-loading video diaries to a class or school website.

PERFORMING THE BOOK:

As an alternative to chapter questions, students can work in groups to create freeze frames of key scenes and events from each chapter. Perhaps a different group could have responsibility for each chapter. More information about this drama strategy (and others) can be found at: http://www.ite.org.uk/ite_topics/drama_at_KS1-2/027.html.

AFTER READING

Note: A number of these activities quote from an interview with the author, Rukhsana Khan. The full interview (worth reading in full) can be found at:

<http://umakrishnaswami.blogspot.com/search?q=rukhsana+khan>.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE:

Write a letter to Jameela telling her how you felt after reading her story. Alternatively, address the letter to the author.

THINKING ABOUT THEMES:

One of Mor's sayings that Jameela lives her life by is: 'If you can't be beautiful you should at least be good. People will appreciate that.' In what ways does this come true for various characters in the novel, especially Jameela? Explore this theme further using the Questioning Circle (Blackline Master Two).

THINKING LIKE AN AUTHOR (PART ONE):

The novel is written in the first person from Jameela's point of view. Discuss **why** Khan might have made that choice. What is the effect of relating the events from her perspective only? What is gained and lost in this decision? To assist students in thinking about these questions, try these two activities:

- Re-write one or more significant sections of the novel in third person. Initially, the teacher can model how to do this using a sample extract and then the students and teacher can try a joint re-writing. Once students are familiar with how to do the task, they can work in small groups, with each group assigned different extracts. At the conclusion, share the re-writes and compare them to the original. Discuss the implications of the changes made.
Extension: Try re-writing extracts in the second person.
- Choose a significant scene from the novel and re-write it from the perspective of a different character. As with the previous activity, make sure there is modelling and guided practice before students attempt this in small groups or individually.
Extension: The novel is also written in present tense. Try re-writing extracts from the novel in past tense and discuss the effect/s of the change.

THINKING LIKE AN AUTHOR (PART TWO):

One of a writer's tasks is to encourage readers to identify (even empathise) with and like some characters. In *Jameela*, this is a tricky task as she is quite a judgmental character and her decision to act very piously may not be well understood by some readers.

Discuss how Khan manages to help readers understand and even like Jameela; identify specific strategies and find examples of these strategies in the text. For example, the story is told in first person and so we know everything she is thinking. Also, the circumstances of her life are very hard and she is only young, yet she tolerates all of these without complaint. Finally, other characters say positive things about her: after the operation on her lip, Fyma offers to do Jameela's chores for her saying: 'Well, there were a lot of girls you helped out' (p. 117).

To provide the contrast to Jameela, Khan encourages readers to distance themselves from some characters. Referring to various characters, discuss the strategies used to achieve this. For example, on pp. 174-175, when Baba comes for Jameela, readers must understand why she would make the decision to stay in the orphanage instead of going with her father. While Baba seems keen to be reunited with Jameela, the reader is told: 'His hands are shaking. He pats the breast pocket of his kurtha and I hear the sloshing of some liquid in a tiny bottle.' He also starts smoking and there is the suggestion that he is considering hitting her.

Extension: One interviewer has remarked that 'The book in fact is a lot about shades of grey and judging others'. So, for example, despite the generally dismal and unsympathetic portrait of Jameela's father, on pp. 50-51 readers are given an insight to his past: he saw one of his aghas (uncles) blown up and helped gather up the body parts. Jameela says: 'my father has never been the same since'. Discuss other characters where 'shades of grey' are evident.

WRITING ACTIVITY:

It's ten years after the events of the novel. Write an extra chapter for *Jameela*: What is Jameela doing now? What about Arwa, Soraya and Masood? Has she heard from her father? Students should use their imaginations, but they should ground their speculations in what happens in the book – in particular, they should note the hopeful tone of the last couple of pages. Students should also emulate the language of the novel as much as possible, including the use of first person.

PANEL DISCUSSION:

Have students form a panel and discuss whether or not Khan achieves her purpose with *Jameela*: to write an 'engaging story that happens to be set in Afghan culture.' To add some complexity to the task, students could take on various roles on the panel, including the author herself, a Muslim cleric, an Australian soldier who has fought in Afghanistan etc.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:

As a class, students can collect stories from real people who have survived difficult situations (war, an accident, natural disaster, leaving home and so on). Stories should be recorded digitally, and associated photographs along with other artefacts (such as newspaper articles and letters) collected. These can then be collated and exhibited. Where possible, set up an electronic exhibition along the lines of one of these sites:

<http://www.victoriansatwar.net/>

<http://redfernoralhistory.org/>

<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/index.shtml>

PowerPoint and free software such as PhotoStory 3 are also excellent for these sorts of projects.

WRITING ACTIVITY:

Jameela's story provides a different perspective from the one Westerners normally read about Islam or the war in Afghanistan. In an interview, Rukhsana Khan has said that: 'In figuring out Jameela's character, I looked at some of the other books coming out of Afghanistan...And I thought that these books are all written from the perspective of people from Kabul, and Kabuli people do not accurately reflect the majority of Afghan culture. Kabuli people tend to be more westernized and educated and secular. The world is getting a skewed perspective of Afghan culture. They're only hearing one side of the story...'. She goes on to say that 'I know no better way of really understanding other perspectives than writing from them.'

Students should choose a familiar situation and write from a perspective that they are not used to taking. A simple example would be an argument with a sibling or parent from that person's point of view. They could also attempt something more challenging such as a homeless person's perspective on city life, or a current conflict from the point of view of a group not receiving much media attention (or negative media attention). Whatever is chosen, students should be encouraged to do some research, be sensitive and avoid stereotyping – they should try to achieve the 'shades of grey' that Khan achieves in her book.

OTHER RESOURCES

Rukhsana Khan's official website is: <http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/>

This site includes further information about *Jameela* (released as *Wanting Mor* overseas) and other books by Khan. Included on the website is a teachers' guide written by the author herself. The guide contains a good collection of photos demonstrating some of the Afghan vocabulary used in the book.

<http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/teacherguides/Wanting%20Mor%20Teacher's%20Guide.PDF>.

Rukhsana blogs at <http://blog.rukhsanakhan.com/>

A lengthy (but older) profile of Khan can be found at:

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/cm/profiles/khan.html>

You can also discover how your class (or school) can help support orphanages like the one in which Jameela lives through the Libraries in Afghanistan project:

<http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/articles/librariesinafghanistan.html>

If your class is interested in humanitarian work occurring in Afghanistan, visit the International Committee of the Red Cross website:

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/afghanistan>

The Australian Muslim Student by Manar Chelebi

Available via the Diversity Connect website, which says: 'Written for non-Muslims who work with young Muslims in educational settings, this book gives a balanced, readable introduction to Islam...[and provides] a series of activities that may be used with non-Muslim students to develop their knowledge of Islam and Muslims and gives a recommended list of resources for educators.'

http://www.diversityconnect.com.au/australian_muslim_student.htm

Wikipedia has articles on Islam in Afghanistan and Islam in Australia that may be useful.

ON-LINE ACTIVITIES

Free, on-line tools for exploring literature can be found at the excellent ReadWriteThink website, jointly managed by the National Council for Teachers of English and the International Reading Association:

http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Important: Teachers should note that *Jameela* carries a recommendation for children 10 to 13 yrs (and it is certainly likely to appeal to older, as well as younger, readers). The books listed below provide follow-up reading for children across a range of reading abilities and maturity levels. Consequently, teachers and parents are strongly advised to preview these novels before recommending them to specific children.

***Boy Overboard* by Morris Gleitzman**

Jamal and Bibi, two children growing up in war torn Afghanistan, dream of playing world cup soccer. However, their lives are uprooted when their parents make the difficult decision to flee their home after receiving death threats. The novel follows the family on a dangerous journey that ends when they arrive in Australia as refugees.

***Chinese Cinderella: the secret story of an unwanted daughter* by Adeline Yen Mah**

This is an engrossing autobiography of a Chinese woman looking back on her childhood. Yen Jun-ling is born when her mother dies. After remarrying, her father turns from the five children he had by his first wife and her three brothers and sister despise Jun-ling for being the cause of their own neglect. Set against a background of life in Japanese-occupied China and the civil war between the communists and nationalists which followed Japan's defeat at the end of the Second World War, this is a true story of survival and resilience. Although it has a female as the main character, it also has strong appeal for boys.

***Only the Heart* by Brian Caswell and David Phu an Chiem**

Toan, Linh and their family are forced to flee Saigon by boat shortly after the Vietnam War. This is quite a challenging novel written from multiple perspectives. However, David Phu an Chiem writes from personal experience and the novel gives fascinating insight to the motives and lives of a different era of 'boat people' – also displaced as the result of a Western war.

The Parvana books by Deborah Ellis

Parvana, *Parvana's Journey* and *Shauzia* follow a young Afghani girl as she struggles to survive life under the Taliban and the fall of her own family from the educated Kabuli middle class to bombed-out unemployment, dispersal and eventual reunion of the survivors in a refugee camp. These are an example of the kind of books *Jameela* was partly written to counterpoint: Parvana survives by dressing as a boy and rejecting the path her society has taken; Jameela survives by working within the constraints and opportunities of her society.

***Diego, Run and Diego's Pride* by Deborah Ellis**

In Bolivia, the children of prisoners can live with their parents in prison but come and go

as they please. Young Diego makes money for his family by running errands outside for other prisoners. But his attempt to get rich quick goes terribly wrong when he finds himself a virtual slave in the coca pits that fuel the cocaine industry. On his escape, he shelters with a peasant family whose livelihood depends on growing coca – just when government troops are cracking down as part of the war on drugs. Deborah Ellis's books are about the tenacity and strength of children forced to survive in the social devastation wrought by politics and war.

***Mahtab's Story* by Libby Gleeson**

Follows Mahtab and her family as they flee from Afghanistan, through Pakistan, and eventually to Australia as refugees.

***Persepolis: The story of a childhood* by Marjane Satrapi**

This is a highly regarded graphic novel/memoir set in Iran (or Persia). It tells the story of growing up a girl before and after the Iranian revolution. Visually striking, it has also been made into a movie.

***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini**

A book for more mature readers, this is a story about friendship, betrayal, and the price of loyalty. Set in Afghanistan from the final days of the monarchy to the present, Hosseini tells the tale of a friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul. Although growing up in the same household, their backgrounds are very different. As much as anything, this novel can be seen as reinforcing the power of reading and storytelling, and in the possibility for redemption. The book was made into an Oscar-nominated movie.

For stories set in Australia which pick up on similar themes and issues, students could try the following.

***Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara)**

After being taken from their families, three young Aboriginal girls are resettled 1600km from their home and families. However, the girls manage to escape and follow a rabbit-proof fence back to their home. A true story of survival and determination, this is a novel that will give students insight to a controversial era of Australian history which resonates with the story of Jameela.

***Tomorrow when the war began* by John Marsden**

While a group of teenage friends is out in the bush camping, Australia is invaded and their parents are imprisoned in a concentration camp. This classic Australian novel for older children and adolescents – the first in a lengthy series – follows the story of a group of teenagers who are forced draw on their own strengths in order to survive.

***Taronga* by Victor Kelleher**

With shades of *Mad Max*, this post-apocalyptic Australian novel is well worth revisiting. After wide-spread catastrophe affects the world, Australian society breaks down and anarchy breaks loose with gangs taking control of what is left of the country's devastated cities. The story follows the life of a boy, Ben, who tries to survive the dangers and chaos of a world overturned. Although first published in the mid 1980s, contemporary readers will find much to like about Kelleher's novel.

***A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* by Glenda Millard**

Skip is a street kid when an unexplained war breaks out in a city very like Melbourne. He teams up with Billy, an old man, and takes on the care of Max, a lost boy, Tia, a teenage dancer, and her baby, Sixpence. Skip's new 'family' shelters in an abandoned fun fair but how long can such a group survive when war grips the city? The background war is the

setting for a moving exploration of the human gift for connection and love, and of the power of the imagination to help us survive.

OTHER BOOKS BY RUKHSANA KHAN

Forthcoming: *The Big Red Lollipop* (Viking Children's Books, 2010)

A New Life (Groundwood, 2009)

Many Windows: Six Kids, Five Faiths, One Community (Napoleon, 2008)

Silly Chicken (Viking, 2005)

The Roses in my Carpets (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2004)

Ruler of the Courtyard (Viking Children's Books, 2003)

Muslim Child (Napoleon/Whitman, 1999, 2002)

King of the Skies (Scholastic Ink, 2001)

Dahling, If You Luv Me Would You Please, Please Smile (Stoddart Kids, 1999)

Bedtime Ba-a-a-lk (Stoddart Kids, 1998)

ABOUT THE WRITERS

RUKHSANA KHAN

Rukhsana Khan is an award winning author and storyteller with ten books published and others under contract. She was born in Lahore, Pakistan and immigrated to Canada at the age of three. She has a down-to-earth, humorous style of presentation. Some of her presentations tackle serious subject matter such as child refugees, but she does so with a light touch that engages listeners without trivialising the situation.

Rukhsana has appeared on television and radio numerous times and presented at communities all across Canada and the US. Rukhsana has also been featured at various international conferences in Denmark, Mexico, New Orleans, and South Africa. Her books tell tales of India, Persia and the Middle East as well as her own stories, and they include *The Roses in my Carpets* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2004), *Muslim Child* (Napoleon/Whitman, 1999, 2002), *Silly Chicken* (Viking, 2005), *Many Windows: Six Kids, Five Faiths, One Community* (Napoleon, 2008) and *A New Life* (Groundwood, 2009).

Rukhsana has four children: three girls and a boy. All three of her daughters are married and she has two grandchildren: a girl named Maryam (the Arabic name for Mary) and a boy named Eesa (the Arabic name for Jesus). She lives in Toronto with her husband and family. One stimulus for the writing of *Jameela* was her desire to understand her daughters' decision, despite being born and raised in Canada, to cover their faces in public – something she herself does not do.

Rukhsana's website is at <http://www.rukhsanakhan.com/>

Rukhsana blogs at <http://blog.rukhsanakhan.com/>

LINDSAY WILLIAMS

Lindsay Williams taught in state and private schools for 25 years, teaches pre-service English teachers at universities in Queensland and has an educational consultancy business. He has also written the two volume *English Teaching Survival*

Manual; on-line resources for Screen Australia's digital learning site; the curriculum package for the ACTF's *Lockie Leonard* series; and teacher notes for other Allen and Unwin publications – Odo Hirsch's *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool* and *Worldshaker* by Richard Harland. Lindsay has been a member of a number of committees advising on state and national curriculum and is currently Vice President of the English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ) which presented him with The Peter Botsman Memorial Award for contributions to quality English education in Queensland. His website is www.englishteacherguru.com.

Blackline Master One Vocabulary Wheel

Write the word in a sentence:

Synonym/s

Antonym/s

Word

Part of speech

Examples

Other forms

Draw or paste in an illustration of the word:

Blackline Master Two

Questioning Circle

Text and World: In our world, do people like Jameela or her stepmother tend to be rewarded? Is this desirable? Is Jameela a good person? How might she be treated if she went to our school or lived in our suburb?

Text and Me: How would I have reacted in Jameela's situation? Do I have any advice for Jameela, her father or stepmother?

Text: In what ways does Jameela discover that being good is more important than being beautiful?

World: What are some of the different ways of being 'good' in our society?

Me: Do I value beauty or goodness? Do I treat people whom I don't consider beautiful (or good looking) differently?

World and Me: How do I feel about the comparative value we place on 'beauty' in our school, town and culture? What other options do I see for the treatment of others who may not be regarded as 'beautiful' (e.g. old people, people with disabilities) or people who dress differently or appear 'different' from 'us' (whoever 'us' might be)?

Dense question: What can we learn from the example of Jameela (and others around her) about the comparative value of being 'good' or 'beautiful'? Is it true that beauty is only skin deep?

Excerpt from speech to International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress

N. B.:The author uses the Canadian title – *Wanting Mor*

Freedom of Speech Versus Cultural Sensitivity: Balancing the Right to Create Freely vs. the Need of People to be Respected

On a personal note, it grieves me that there are so many children's international bestsellers written by mainstream authors, about young Muslim heroines where the only solution the mainstream author could come up with is to have her dress up as a boy and run away.

What message do you think that sends to Muslim girls? In these novels, the fact they're Muslim is perceived to be the problem. Basically Islam is the conflict. Dressing up as a boy and running away doesn't reflect Muslim reality. Frankly it's insulting.

Like I said, the first instinct for most ethnic authors is to ignore the stereotype and write about positive cultural situations.

To all the ethnic authors who are trying to get your work known internationally, I say this is not necessarily the right approach. Call me cynical but you will probably limit your audience. That's not what they want to read.

Instead you could take up such stereotypes as a challenge.

Elizabeth Laird did this quite effectively when she paired up with Sonya Nimr and wrote *A Little Piece of Ground*. The way Ms. Laird took Israeli punishments that many of us have heard about in the news, and made them hit home was remarkable. You could feel the children's claustrophobia while being confined to their homes. You could feel the frustration and rage of the refugees when they're confronting the Israeli tanks. And underneath it all, you could understand how these boys just wanted a pitch, a little piece of ground, to play soccer.

Walter Dean Myers also took on the challenge when he wrote his amazing book *Monster*. He tackled the black-teen-hoodlum-in-trouble-with-the-law stereotype and turned it on its head! After reading *Monster* I had hope that perhaps I could do this too.

For years I wanted to tackle the stereotype of the oppressed Muslim heroine but I couldn't find a legitimate story with which to do so.

And then one day I read a report on Children in Crisis focusing on some orphanages in Afghanistan that I help to sponsor through the royalties of one of my books. This girl's story broke my heart. It was just a small paragraph buried in the report. Her mother had died during the war, her father had remarried. The stepmother didn't want her, so the father took her to the marketplace and left her there. She ended up in the orphanage I sponsor.

At first I didn't want to write this story. It was too stereotypical. And yet stereotypes exist because they are common. In fact the same scenario was playing out within my own extended family in Canada. One of my relatives died of breast cancer. A year before she was diagnosed her husband ran off with another woman. Her kids are left with a dead-beat dad.

What would it feel like to be abandoned like that?

And so I decided to write the story. I resisted the urge to find out too much about the girl in the orphanage. I wanted to write this on my own terms.

The first thing I asked myself was where does this Afghan girl come from?

All the stories out of Afghanistan are from the perspective of the people of Kabul and yet the people from Kabul are not like the rest of the country. They are very westernized. The world is getting a skewed vision of Afghan culture. I know this because my sister in law's family is from Kabul and my son in law's family is from Kandahar.

So I decided that the girl in my story would be from Kandahar. And because all three of my daughters, despite being born and raised in Canada, decided to not only wear the head scarf but to also cover their faces like they do in Kandahar, I wanted to understand their decision better. So this girl would be from Kandahar and she would wear the burqa, and she wanted to keep on wearing it. I had to know why.

I began this novel for all the best reasons. Not to further any political agenda, but to find out what would happen to this poor girl.

What surprised me the most was that the burqa actually worked its way into the plot! That novel is coming out next spring and will be called *Wanting Mor* – M-O-R, that's the name of her mother.

Rukhsana Khan, 31st IBBY Congress, Copenhagen, Denmark. September 2008
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