

# Teachers Notes (Secondary)

## by Dr Wendy Michaels

# The Glory Garage

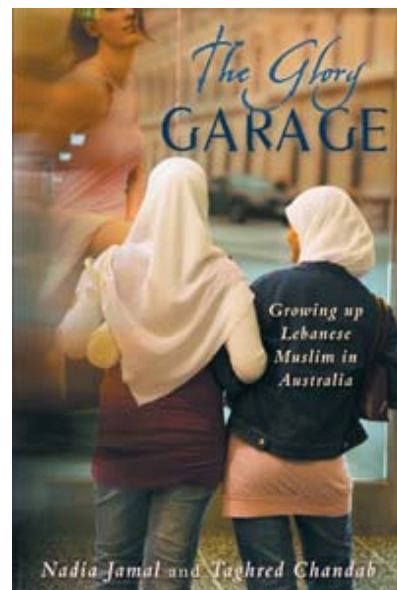
## Nadia Jamal & Taghred Chandab

ISBN 9781741146493

Recommended for ages 14 +

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Glory Garage* is a collection of candid real-life stories about growing up Lebanese and Muslim in Australia. The two authors are reporters who are Australian Lebanese Muslim women. In their foreword they say:

We are writing this book because there have been critical and damaging things written and said about Muslims, especially the Lebanese who follow this religion. We felt there was a need to give you an insight into the everyday dilemmas that some of us face growing up in a secular society....Some of these experiences might ring true even if you are not Lebanese and Muslim. These are stories of real people, although some names and details have been changed.

Indeed, many second-generation Australians will be able to identify in larger or smaller measure with the feeling of living between two cultures. The young people whose stories feature in *The Glory Garage* love and respect their parents, who often cling to the traditional culture of their homeland, but they also see themselves as modern Australians. As they go through their teenage years and then move into the workforce, it becomes more important to them to work out how to be true to the values of their parents while also being true to themselves.

The tone of the pieces is conversational: sometimes funny and sometimes serious. All teenagers will recognise the arguments, anguish and deceitful stratagems these young people find themselves using in conflicts between family values and friendship groups from school.

However, *The Glory Garage* storytellers often add the dimension of looking back on these years from the perspective of their 20-something lives. We see them working towards solutions that will make themselves and their families happy, if possible. Most importantly, the desire to stay true to themselves often becomes less problematic as their sense of self matures and they are able to acknowledge and explore their Muslim heritage.

*The Glory Garage* provides a friendly, Australian introduction to Islam for non-Muslims. These stories will provide many discussions about cultural difference and similarity, the meaning of multiculturalism, stereotyping, growing up in families, personal values and the role of religion in personal and public life.

## BEFORE READING

### THE AUTHORS

The two authors of this work have a background in journalism on both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Nadia Jamal has been with *The Sydney Morning Herald* for the past eight years and is currently night chief of staff. She has had a varied career at the Herald working on the world desk, helping to co-ordinate coverage of major events and editing the daily pages. She has worked as the Herald's education and urban affairs writer and is also studying law.

Taghred Chandab has worked as a journalist for *The Daily Telegraph*. She has also had a varied media career including working as the media and public relations manager for the National Soccer League and as the producer of 2UE's Steve Price show and as a freelance producer at the ABC. More recently she owns a business called Undercover – Modest Clothing for Modest Women. This business, located in Bankstown in western Sydney, specializes in marketing stylish garments for Muslim and other women.

- Have students use the internet to find out more about these two journalists and the kinds of stories that they have written for these two Sydney newspapers. Encourage discussion of the kinds of issues that have concerned the two journalists in their careers to date.

## **STORYTELLING**

Storytelling is as old as human life itself. Recent research into pre-literate cultures has emphasized the importance of oral storytelling to the cohesion of the society and the maintenance of the culture. While some traditional stories have had a didactic purpose, other stories have been part of rituals and festivals. Stories have always been an important way of making sense of our world and of shaping our understanding of who we are in that world.

For some time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries oral storytelling was assumed to be a children-only activity. Today, however, the telling of stories takes place in a variety of contexts and this is not only associated with children and with education. The storyteller in contemporary society has moved into the wider media marketplace. Here, in various formats from current affairs to soaps, stories that help us to define who we are as individuals and as nations are told.

- Encourage students to discuss the kind of national identity that Australians like to project – eg egalitarian, tolerant, multicultural, etc.
- Have students conduct a survey of broadcast television programs to identify how or whether stories told on the various television channels in any one night reflect the reality of Australia as a nation. How many stories, for instance, feature multicultural, tolerant Australia with Aboriginal, Muslim or Asian characters? Which stories project an Australia tolerant of human beings who have fled despotic regimes or suffered the effects of globalisation? Encourage students to discuss the results and implications of their survey – particularly in relation to the image of Australia as a nation.

## **TELLING PERSONAL STORIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT**

Storytelling is also situated within the context of book publishing and a recent publishing trend throughout the world has promoted the publication of personal stories in book form. There seems to be a hunger in the reading public for stories that reflect true life as well as fictional stories. The extent to which this has been stimulated by recent world events is debatable. However, in the devastation of the Twin Towers, considerable public interest and media space was devoted to the voices in those final mobile phone calls to family and loved ones before the towers collapsed, and to the life stories of those who had been killed by the crashing of the planes into the buildings. Similarly, in the wake of the Bali bombings, the media gave considerable space to the personal stories of those who had died and to the personal suffering of the families and friends dealing with their losses. As these stories were presented to us in the media we came to understand and empathise with the characters through their stories – we came to know them as individual people, individual human beings and we came to understand ourselves as citizens of Australia in a globalised world.

However, there has been a flipside to this situation. While the stories of the victims of 9/11 and Bali have been personalized in this way, the perpetrators of these attacks have been presented not as human beings with personal lives but as terrorizing, inhuman monsters. And while their deeds are horrendous, the most unfortunate and perhaps unexpected consequence of this representation in the public storytelling space has been the stereotyping of the victims and perpetrators as a dichotomy of opposites: the victims are innocent westerners while the perpetrators are Muslims. This classic stereotyping process leads almost automatically to all

westerners being classified as innocent and all Muslims or people of Middle Eastern appearance being categorized as terrorists. This has had particularly unfortunate consequences for those asylum seekers arriving on our shores from the Middle East and Afghanistan – and arguably goes some way to explaining the public frenzy over the verdict in the Schapelle Corby case.

*The Glory Garage* addresses such issues head on by telling the stories of young Australians growing up as Lebanese Muslims in contemporary multicultural Australia. These stories show us the daily lives of these young people as they learn to deal with similar kinds of issues to their non-Muslim Lebanese neighbours while trying to stay true to the values of their families and their cultural backgrounds. But it also, unfortunately, shows us a not-so-tolerant Australian society.

The strength of this collection of journalistic stories is the way it invites us to see the situation from the “Other” perspective. The stories meet Klepp’s criteria for “literary journalism” (Entertainment Weekly August 22/29, 1997): “Journalism becomes literature when it tells us not just what happened but what it was like”. These stories show us through the personal anecdotes what it was, and what it is, like for young Muslim Lebanese Australians to negotiate their identities in contemporary multicultural Australia in a time of suspicion of the “Other” as a possible terrorist.

- Encourage students to discuss the notion of stereotypes and how they are formed. What stereotypes do they have of boys, girls, adults, people from other countries and religions, etc? Are stereotypes always bad? How do stereotypes shape our responses to those who are different from us?

## **DURING AND AFTER READING**

### **INITIAL RESPONSES TO TERMS AND THEMES OF *THE GLORY GARAGE***

The stories in *The Glory Garage* concern young Lebanese Muslim women and their experiences of growing up in multicultural Australia. In some ways their experiences mirror those of all young people – establishing their identities within the context of family expectations, cultural values and religious beliefs. Many of these stories also reflect the experiences of the children of migrants living in Australia where parents are shaped by the rituals and traditions of a culture that is linked not only to another country but also to that country in a time that has now passed. While the first generation of migrants cling to their memories and traditions in the new country, their old homeland has also changed – so they are caught in a kind of time warp.

These stories also reflect a contemporary Australian context that is characterized by covert and overt xenophobia directed towards those of “middle eastern appearance” that has been condoned and even sanctioned by some politicians and radio shock jocks. While suspicion of possible terrorism is, perhaps, understandable in the post 9/11 context, such a xenophobic point of view goes against the supposed values of mainstream Australian society – “the land of the fair go”. Arguably, the demonizing of Australian Muslims as “Other” has been facilitated by their appearance – not only physique but also such items of clothing as the *hijab*. A member of the NSW Upper House, and a Christian Minister to boot, even went so far as to declare that Muslim women could hide weapons under their clothing! The stories in this book offer an opportunity for students to go beyond such superficial xenophobia and to work towards an understanding of what is beneath the surface – a humanity that we all share.

- Ask students to consider their immediate responses to words such as Muslim or Lebanese. Challenge them to consider any stereotypical responses and why they

might hold them. What do they know about the country of Lebanon or Muslims? How have their responses been shaped by stereotypes or media-generated hype?

- Have students research and discuss key terms and labels that are essential to understanding the context of these stories and empathizing with the characters: eg culture, religion, Islam, Muslim, Lebanese, Koran, *jihad*, Mecca, *abaya*, *hadith*, *haji*, *umrah*, *salat*, Ramadan, etc
- Encourage them to discuss the distinctions between terms and words whose meanings are often conflated in the public arena – eg Muslim and Lebanese.
- Have students visit the website: <http://islamicsydney.com> . This website is run by volunteers and contains useful information about Islam that helps to dispel some of the many misconceptions about the religion and those who embrace its message of peace in the world. Encourage them to explore the information that is available on this site and discuss why such a site might be necessary in the contemporary world.

### **CANDID REAL-LIFE STORIES/TELLING THE TRUTH**

The authors of *The Glory Garage* frame these stories with a preface and afterword. In these two sections they position the reader to understand the nature of the stories that they are telling. In the preface they talk about the things that they have “never” done because of their culture and religion. In the afterword they return to these “nevers” and elaborate on the significance of them as well as introducing the notion of the “firsts” that they have achieved in their families and their culture.

- Have students make a list of the things they, themselves, have “never” been able to do and identify why they are restricted from doing them. Encourage discussion of the significance of their “nevers” and compare them with those of the authors. Have students list things that are “firsts” for them in their families and compare their firsts with those of the authors.
- Why are the authors able to say they didn’t miss out even though they have never done some things?

### **FAMILY TRADITIONS**

One of the threads running through the stories is the importance of the family and the traditions associated with family life. The traditional Lebanese family in the stories is a patriarchal one and this creates particular issues for adolescent girls in a contemporary Australian society that has recently been re-shaped by the ideas and values of feminism. Many of the stories illustrate the ways in which the expectations of the parents, particularly the father, are often at odds with the behaviours and expectations of the adolescent girls and their friends.

- Have students make a list of the main rituals that their own families engage in. These might include such everyday activities as the evening meal or less frequent celebrations such as birthdays or religious festivals. Encourage them to talk about what these rituals mean to the family and how they would feel if they were to migrate to another country and leave these rituals behind.
- Have students use the internet or other sources to research the rituals and traditions associated with other cultures and other religions – eg Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and so on.

- Have students read the stories "Keeping it in the family", "My Dad" and "My Mum". Encourage them to discuss the way in which the family is depicted in these stories. Point out that the families here are migrant families who have brought their cultural and religious values with them to a country that represents itself as tolerant and multicultural. In what ways are the concerns of these families similar to or different from the concerns of their own families? Have students consider how the composition of these families places the children in situations where they "live in two worlds ... torn between two cultures" and have to negotiate their way through both. Have students consider how they might respond/have responded in this kind of situation.
- Point out that some Australians might suggest that these migrants should leave these values and rituals behind and adopt "mainstream" Australian values. What might stimulate this kind of response in an Australian? Is this a fair and just response? Ask students to consider how they might feel if they had migrated to another country and were put in such a position?

## **MARRIAGE**

Many of the stories address the question of marriage and its associated traditions and rituals. The social institution of marriage differs in different cultures and religions and even in the same culture and religion differences occur over time as well as within different sections of the society. The title of this collection of stories – *The Glory Garage* – reflects the importance of preparing for marriage and its cultural and religious significance. In Australian society in the earlier part of the twentieth century young girls also prepared for their marriages by collecting a "glory box" – usually a special cupboard or chest in which they stored the household items they would need when they eventually found the "right man". Engagements were usually long affairs during which the couple saved up for their first home and continued to collect the things that they would need for their life together.

- Encourage students to identify the traditions and rituals associated with the marriages of their parents and grandparents. How are these similar to or different from their own views of and expectations about marriage?
- Have students read some of the stories that explore ideas about marriage – eg "The Glory Garage", "You'll Die a Virgin", "The Teenage Bride", "The Marriage Ceremony" and "Women Only". Encourage them to discuss the traditions and rituals associated with marriage for these girls. In what ways are they similar to or different from their own expectations? How do these marriage rituals position these young people in multicultural Australia?

## **RELIGION**

The stories in this collection concern Muslims – i.e. those who are followers of Islam. The word "Islam" is an Arabic word which means "submission to the will of God". This word comes from the same root as the Arabic word "salaam", which means "peace". The religion of Islam teaches that to achieve true peace of mind you must submit to God and live according to His divinely revealed Law as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and set down in the Koran. The word "Muslim" means one who submits to the will of God, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic background. Despite having a huge following on all continents of the world, Islam probably remains one of the most misunderstood of religions.

- Have students research the teachings of Muhammad and compare these with the related religions of Judaism and Christianity. They could also research the Interfaith

Forums that aim to bring young followers of these religions together to discuss their similarities and differences.

- Have students conduct a survey of their peers or family and friends to discover what they know about Islam. Students should be alert to any misunderstandings and misconceptions that arise. Encourage discussion of their findings.
- Have students read the stories "From Fast to Feast", "Call to Prayer", "What's in a Name", "The Road to Conversion", and "From Sydney to Mecca". Have them discuss the issues that these stories raise about Islam and its teachings and rituals such as Ramadan.

## MODESTY OF ATTIRE

One of the key issues for young Lebanese Muslim women arises from the cultural and religious traditions associated with modesty in dress. *The Glory Garage* explores this dilemma through some of the stories and it is reflected in the cover design of the book with the juxtaposition of images of a scantily clad model with two Muslim girls wearing headscarves. The wearing of particular attire is a badge of identification – a label that signifies membership of a group.

- Have students discuss examples of attire that identifies group membership – eg school, police, nursing, fire service uniforms etc. How do members of particular religions signify through attire their religious affiliation – eg crucifix, orange robes and sandals, star of David etc.
- Encourage students to think about how "dress codes" may be applied in particular venues or on particular occasions – eg clubs, funerals, weddings etc. Have students consider how young people also identify sub-group membership through the particular clothes they wear or through hairstyles – eg particular styles or labels. Encourage them to explore what motivates people to display membership in these ways – eg pride in membership, need to identify and be identified as insider, need to belong, etc.
- Have students read the story "Embracing the Hijab". Encourage them to discuss the issues it raises about modest attire for women. Consider particularly the issues raised on page 43 about the wearing of the *hijab*:

Although most Islamic scholars hold the view that the hijab is compulsory after puberty, there is debate about whether the Koran specifies a head covering. A hadith .... says the Prophet indicated that after puberty nothing should be seen of a woman but her hands and face. However, there is a highly controversial modernist view that such hadith should be taken in the context of the time and place in which it was said and that it should not apply in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Underpinning this view is the notion of modesty. The Macquarie Dictionary gives several meanings for the word "modesty", one of which is "regard for decency of behaviour, speech or dress".

- Have students explore the notion of decency or modesty as it might apply to "behaviour", "speech" or "dress". Does modesty necessarily imply dowdiness? Have students research the company Undercover – Modest Clothing for Modest Women. This company, owned by Taghred Chandab, specializes in stylish garments for Muslim and other women. It stocks labels such as "Pretty Covered" which makes *abayas* in a range of fabrics and styles for a younger generation of Muslim women. A recent

fashion parade of these items attracted media attention and an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (May 28-29 2005).

- Have students read the stories "Undercover", "Brotherly Love" and "Keeping my head above water". Discuss the issues about dress, modesty and religion that are raised in these stories.
- Have students research recent media representations of issues relating to Muslim women and dress – eg Yasamin, the student from Auburn High School who chose to wear an *abaya* to school in contravention of school rules and the incident at Olympic Park Pool explored in the story "Keeping my head above water". Encourage students to discuss how the media represented these issues – noting particularly the extrapolations from the incident to xenophobic stereotypes. Encourage students to consider why these xenophobic representations were tolerated and even condoned in a tolerant multicultural Australia.

### **CONTEMPORARY MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA/TRANSFORMATION**

While the stories in *The Glory Garage* highlight issues of identity for young Muslim girls, they also reveal that Australia is sometimes less than tolerant of difference. These issues are of particular importance for Australians given their situation in relation to Asia and in particular Indonesia – our closest neighbour in the region and a Muslim country.

- Have students discuss their responses to reading *The Glory Garage*. Has this book broadened their understanding of other cultures and religions?

### **ABOUT THE WRITERS**

#### **DR WENDY MICHAELS**

Dr Wendy Michaels is a lecturer in the School of Humanities at the University of Newcastle on the Ourimbah Campus. She teaches courses in Children's Literature, Creative Writing, Gender Studies and Education. Her research interests are in emerging genres in young adult fiction, representations of gender in children's literature, interanimation of word and image in picture books and writing for performance.

Dr Michaels is a former English teacher and English Inspector at the NSW Board of Studies. She has published a number of books for students and teachers and has authored teachers notes for Allen & Unwin on *Jinx*, *A Step from Heaven*, *Parvana*, *And what about Anna*, *Njunjul the Sun*, *Pankration*, *Wolf on the Fold*, *Guitar Highway Rose* and *By the River*. Her own published writing for children includes the genres of poetry, drama script, prose fiction and the picture book, *Secret Smiles*.

#### **NADIA JAMAL & TAGHRED CHANDAB**

For biographical information about the authors of *The Glory Garage*, see the beginning of these notes.