

Islam and Stories

Key Stage 2

Introduction

In this set of learning activities for KS2 we use stories about people who are Muslim, some set in Muslim lands, some not. Our first practical principle is that 'worldviews starts with people'. In this resource, we present stories about people, as a way to contextualise Islam as it is lived out in real lives. All our protagonists have conflict to deal with, some quite serious. All turn to their faith from time to time in response to specific contexts in their lives.

Michael Sells, an academic who teaches about Islam, reads a story by Tayeb Salih with his University students (Sells, 2003). The story is set in rural Sudan where Islam is the predominant religious tradition. The story is not really *about* Islam, it is about the lives, hopes and experiences of a community of characters, although Islam is a backdrop to the events, such the village mosque or call to prayer. Sells asks his students to identify what is Islamic about the story. He reports that they are not always sure, although they greatly enjoy the geographical and cultural interest in the story. This is a good example of how Islam is woven into human lives which are rooted in times and places. We recommend one of Salih's stories in this resource, and you will find it interesting to identify with your pupils what is Islamic about the tale.

A summary of each story is given, decide which would be suitable for your class. A combination of three stories would offer lots of comparison opportunities. Each story presented with suggested activities to explore the characters, stories and themes. General activities which could be used for any combination of stories are also given. Don't be afraid to use the literacy and language strategies that you are already familiar with to explore these stories.

Reference: Sells. M. A. (2003) 'The Wedding of Zein: Islam through a Modern Novel', in Ed. Brannon M. Wheeler. *Teaching Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stories

- *A Handful of Dates*, 1968, by Tayeb Salih
- *Other Words for Home*, 2019, by Jasmine Warga
- *Not Now Noor!*, 2023, by Farhana Islam and Nabila Adani
- *The Proudest Blue*, 2020, by Ibtihaj Muhammad and SK Ali
- *Wanting Mor*, 2009, by Rukhsana Khan

You will find summaries of each story on the following pages, as well as information about the authors.

Summaries of Stories

A Handful of Dates, 1968, by Tayeb Salih

Tayeb Salih was born in Sudan in 1929. He grew up in a farming community and planned to work in agriculture himself. His family were farmers and religious teachers. He moved to London to attend University. Eventually He became head of Drama at the BBC's Arabic Service. His stories are set in rural Sudan, populated with all sorts of characters. The varied and surprising events of the stories are underpinned by a gentle humour and wisdom.

SUMMARY

In 'A Handful of Dates', a young man growing up in a village in Sudan loves to study and loves his grandfather. While other boys do not care about their lessons in the Qur'an at the mosque, our narrator is intelligent and learns quickly. The Sheikh and his grandfather ask him to recite passages, praising him.

His grandfather is respected in the village and our narrator often accompanies him on his business dealings. His grandfather is tall, white-bearded and religious. Our narrator is his favourite grandchild.

One day our narrator asks about a man in the village, Masood, who his grandfather does not seem to like. He learns that Masood once owned all the land his grandfather now owns, but made poor decisions, spent his money, and had to sell small pieces of land when he needed money. Eventually 2/3 had gone. Grandfather sees Masood as a lazy fool. He plans to acquire the last 1/3 of his land.

Our narrator feels scared of his grandfather and pity for Masood. They go to watch the dates being harvested on the land that was once Masood's. Large quantities of dates are cut down. Our narrator is given a handful to eat by his grandfather. At the end of the harvest grandfather turns to Masood, who seems panicky and anxious, and informs him that he still owes him money. Our narrator runs away from his grandfather, ignoring his calls. He makes himself sick, bringing up the dates.

Not Now Noor!, 2023, by Farhana Islam and Nabila Adani

Farhana Islam was born in Newcastle and now lives in Birmingham. She is a Primary School teacher who tells stories. She loves to share all sorts of voices through her stories.

Nabila Islam designed the images for this book. She lives in Jakarta, Indonesia. She likes to create pictures of people from all over the world.

SUMMARY

Noor is a young girl growing up in a Muslim family. Lots of her female relatives, her grandmothers, mother and sister wear the hijab. Noor does not wear one, she is too young. She wants to know why the other women wear their hijabs- are they to hide snacks? Are they actually spies hiding their identity?

No one has time to talk to Noor, they are all busy. Then her favourite person in the world, her mum Ammu comes home, and can explain to Noor everything she wants to know.

Other Words for Home, 2009, by Jasmine Warga

Jasmine Warga was born in Cincinnati, USA in 1988. Her mother is American and her father is from Jordan. Jasmine was a Year 6 science teacher and now writes books for young people. She lives in Chicago.

SUMMARY

Other Words for Home is the story of Jude, a Syrian teenager whose life is upended by the Syrian civil war. Jude loves her life in Aleppo, her friend Fatima and brother Issa, but her parents are concerned about the increasing violence and decide Jude and her mother will be safer living with her uncle in Ohio, USA. Jude's mother is expecting a baby. Jude's father and brother remain in Syria. The book tells of the first few months of Jude's experiences as a Syrian girl finding her feet in America. It is written in free verse which gives it a dreamy feel, and allows poetic descriptions of Jude's feelings, tastes, sights, memories and experiences.

Jude becomes good friends with a Lebanese family. She finds her feet at school, meeting friends and even earning a part in the school play, despite feeling bewildered and lost a lot of the time. She realises her uncle, originally Syrian, has deliberately forgotten his roots in order to survive in America. She realises her cousin, whose mother is American, feels that she is also missing something in not knowing her father's home language and culture. She realises her mother is refusing to engage with American life for fear she will lose her Syrian identity. Her American friend, whose parents are from Lebanon and who run a cafe where Jude can enjoy the taste of food from home (Syria and Lebanon are culturally and geographically close), does not feel fully American or fully Lebanese and is almost jealous of Jude for being fully Syrian. Jude enjoys the EAL group she attends at school because the other three students are also experiencing the struggle to fit in and find a new identity in a strange world. Their EAL teacher is kind and understanding, and they celebrate each other's small successes. Jude finds many examples of unexpected cultural and linguistic boundaries, overlaps and connections

There is danger everywhere for Jude, in new social situations in the USA, and in her constant worry about her brother and father in Syria and her friend Fatima, now a refugee in Lebanon. However, there is also kindness, fun and new experiences. This is a moving tale of a young woman finding her way in a complicated world.

The Proudest Blue, 2020, by Ibtihaj Muhammad and SK Ali

Ibtihaj Muhammad is an Olympic champion. Her sport is fencing and she is the first American fencer to wear a hijab in an Olympic competition. SK Ali is Canadian-Indian. She writes about social and cultural issues and is a human rights activist.

SUMMARY

In this story, Faizah's sister Asiya is wearing her hijab to school for the first time. It is a gorgeous blue colour. Faizah does not wear a hijab yet, although she wants to, and she wants it to be the same beautiful blue.

At school some pupils do not understand why Asiya is wearing her hijab. Some say hurtful words. Faizah is worried about her sister being bullied and angry at the other children. However Asiya does not care about their words, she is proud of her hijab and her Muslim heritage and refuses to be bullied. Faizah realises that she can also respond in this way and feels proud and happy.

Wanting Mor, 2009, by Rukhsana Khan

Rukhsana Khan was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1962. She moved to Canada when she was 3, where she now lives. Her stories are about different cultures and ways of life. Before becoming a writer, she was a biochemical technician.

SUMMARY

Wanting Mor is set in Afghanistan after the country has been almost destroyed by war. The American and British armies invaded Afghanistan to fight a group called the Taliban, eventually occupying the country for 20 years and trying to rebuild it. Our story starts in the aftermath of this war. Thousands of people are dead, many more have been injured, buildings, farmland and infrastructure have been destroyed.

Our narrator is a young girl called Jameela. The story begins with tragedy, Jameela's beloved mother, Mor, has died. Jameela is left alone with her father. They are very poor and her father has been affected by the war. Life is a constant struggle. To try and improve his life, Jameela's father moves them to Kabul, the capital city, and marries a rich widow. This means slave labour for Jameela who has to work in the house from morning till night, with no kindness, love or guidance in her life.

However this situation ends due to her father's chaotic lifestyle, and things get even worse. Jameela's father takes her to the middle of the city and simply abandons her in the street. Despite the extreme danger she is in, a kind butcher takes her in and finds her an orphanage who will care for her. Jameela has to survive in a tough environment with other orphaned girls, but she is fed and has a safe place to sleep. She learns to cope. She has never been to school as her family were too poor but to her great delight she is educated in the orphanage.

Jameela was born with a hairlip, or cleft palate, something she always tries to hide by pulling her headscarf over her mouth. The lady who runs the orphanage arranges for American soldiers to take Jameela and provide an operation to fix her lip. The operation is a success. This process speaks to the complicated situation Jameela, and Afghanistan, are in. On one hand the war with America and then UK has brought Afghanistan to the brink of collapse, but on the other hand the Western occupiers are bringing huge amounts of money, skills and attention to Afghanistan.

Jameela always makes sure she says her prayers throughout the day. Her mother was an observant Muslim and Jameela often remembers her words of advice about being good, honest and obedient to God. Jameela's life is very hard and her faith gives her stability and hope. She believes that God cares about her and will not abandon her. Ultimately the story ends well for Jameela, but she has experienced extreme suffering and hardship along the way.

In the following pages you will find suggested teaching activities and lines of enquiry for each story on its own, as well as general ideas to use for several stories.

It would be best to teach more than one story to enable a comparison.

Ideas for Exploring 'A Handful of Dates'

- Look at images of Sudan- look for towns, farms, houses and villages. What do pupils notice? Look up Sudan on a map. Read about the geography and climate of Sudan. A paragraph below is given. Find some travel vlogs about Sudan on YouTube. For example, here a Danish man explores the country, people and geography: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaZ8LrdwSCQ>
- Search for 'visit Sudan adverts' to find more polished adverts for tourism in Sudan. Compare the two types of reporting. For example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHvx4f5ww9A> – this is a UN-sponsored video about Sudan. It is 6 minutes long, but you could show the first one or two minutes to gain a sense of the people, buildings, landscape, food and clothes.

Geography and Climate of Sudan

Sudan is a country located in northeastern Africa. It is the third largest country in Africa and is bordered by Egypt to the north, Ethiopia to the east, South Sudan to the south, and Chad to the west. The country is mostly flat and desert-like, with the Nile River running through the middle. The climate in Sudan is hot and dry, with temperatures often reaching over 38 degrees C. The country experiences two distinct seasons: a dry season from October to May and a rainy season from June to September. The rainy season brings heavy rainfall and flooding to some areas, while other parts of the country remain dry.

- Ask each group to suggest 5 words that describe Sudan for them. Are any of the words 'Islam' or 'Muslim'? Talk about the idea of 'folk Islam'. A paragraph is given below. This is where religious beliefs or practices are intertwined with local regional customs and traditions. Can pupils find any examples of 'folk Islam' in the story? A further paragraph is given.

Folk Islam

Folk Islam refers to the traditional, non-orthodox practices and beliefs that are found in many Muslim societies around the world. These practices often incorporate elements of local customs, superstitions, and pre-Islamic traditions, and may vary widely from region to region. Folk Islam can include practices such as the veneration of saints, the use of amulets and talismans for protection, and the performance of rituals and ceremonies for healing or good fortune. While these practices are not officially recognized by mainstream Islamic authorities, they are often deeply ingrained in local cultures and are seen as a way to connect with the divine and seek spiritual guidance. Folk Islam can be seen as a form of syncretism, in which Islamic beliefs and practices are blended with local traditions and customs to create a unique and distinct religious identity.

Folk Islam in 'A Handful of Dates'

There are themes around folk Islam in the story "A Handful of Dates" by Tayeb Salih. The story is set in a rural Sudanese village where traditional Islamic beliefs and practices are deeply ingrained in the culture. The grandfather, who is a respected and wealthy landowner, is shown to be deeply rooted in tradition and the customs of his community. He is also depicted as a devout Muslim who regularly performs his prayers and observes the rituals of his faith. However, the story also explores the theme of the generational divide, as the narrator begins to question some of these traditions and the power dynamics that exist within his society. The story suggests that while folk Islam can provide a sense of cultural identity and spiritual connection, it can also be used to reinforce social hierarchies and maintain the status quo. Overall, the story highlights the complex relationship between tradition, religion, and power in Sudanese society.

- What can pupils say about the age gap between our narrator and his grandfather? What are the narrator's activities and interests as a young man, what are his grandfather's as an older man?
- Do pupils pick up any information about how Grandfather is treated as a rich, elderly, religious man? Are there any signs that he is to be treated with respect? Do pupils identify any similarities to how the elderly, as well as rich and successful people, are treated in the UK?
- Draw a think bubble labelled 'Grandfather'. Write inside how he perceives Masood. Draw a think bubble labelled 'narrator' (or the name you have given him, see below), write the ways he perceives Masood. Which person has a more positive view of Masood? Do pupils think this could be a source of tension between the narrator and his grandfather?
- Our narrator runs away from his grandfather. Ask pupils to discuss if they think this is disrespectful. Do pupils think Grandfather would find this rude, or would not mind. Draw another think bubble, write inside why the narrator runs away after discussing in groups or pairs.
- Suggest reasons for pupils to get them thinking: *because he wanted some exercise after sitting down for so long, because he didn't like what his grandfather said, because he didn't want to be associated with him, because he doesn't like dates, etc.*
- Give our narrator a name- give a selection of Sudanese boys names and choose. These are 10 popular boys' names in Sudan: Mohamed, Ahmed, Ali, Omar, Hassan, Khalid, Adam, Mustafa, Abdullah and Hamza.
- Dates play an important role in Sudan, as well as Islamic culture more widely. If you want, use the paragraph below to give pupils more information about the importance of dates. Ask pupils to identify the role of dates in the story- do they think dates could be symbolic?
- Teach the class that many Muslim cultures all over the world end the day's fast by eating a date during the month of Ramadan. It is seen as something that Muhammad himself used to do. Does this give the date fruit more resonance in the story?
- Bring in dates for children to try. If there are Muslim children in your class, invite them to talk about food containing dates in their families.

The fruits of the date tree in Sudanese society

The fruits of the date tree are important in Sudanese society. Dates are a staple food in Sudan and are widely consumed throughout the country. They are a rich source of nutrients and are often used in traditional Sudanese dishes, such as porridge, bread, and sweets. Dates are also an important part of Sudanese culture and are often served to guests as a sign of hospitality. In addition to their culinary uses, dates have many other practical applications in Sudanese society. For example, the leaves of the date palm are used to make baskets, mats, and other household items, while the wood is used for construction and fuel. Overall, the date tree is an important and valued resource in Sudanese society, providing food, materials, and cultural significance.

Ideas for exploring *Other Words for Home*

- *Other Words for Home* is unusual in that the author writes the book in poetry rather than prose. Jasmine Warga uses a type of poetry called 'free verse'. This does not follow a pattern of rhyme or meter. Ask pupils to say how this book felt to read- did they like the free verse or did they find it confusing? Did they find it easier to understand than regular prose, or did they find it harder to understand?
- Choose around a page of text. Print it out, cut up the lines and put into an envelope. Ask children to reassemble in any way they like, adding new words and phrases if they like. Stick their jigsaw poems in a page and give them a title.
- Food is a major theme in the book. Brainstorm all the places in Jude's life where food plays a part, such as the food she remembers from home, the food her aunt serves in her kitchen in America and the food in the Syrian cafe.
- Ask groups to create a 'menu' to describe Jude's life: a starter, main course and desert. They can research and draw the dishes they choose, such as Syrian and American dishes mentioned in the book.
- What role does food play in the book? Discuss with the class all the different meaning food seems to have. A paragraph is given below if you want to use it.

Themes of food in *Other words for Home*

1. Cultural identity: Food is a way for the characters to connect with their cultural identity. Jude misses the food from her home in Syria and finds comfort in cooking traditional dishes with her aunt. She enjoys eating Lebanese food with her new friend Layla.
2. Nostalgia: Food is also a way for Jude to remember her home and her family. She remembers the meals she shared with her mother and the flavours of her favourite dishes.
3. Hospitality: Food is a symbol of hospitality and generosity. Jude's aunt and her family welcome her and her mother into their home and share their meals with them.
4. Differences in culture: Food also highlights the differences in culture between Jude's home in Syria and her new home in the United States. She struggles to adjust to the new foods and misses the flavours of her home country.
5. Family: Food is a way for Jude to connect with her family and build relationships with her new family in the United States. Cooking and sharing meals together brings them closer together.

- Language is also a major theme in the story. Here are some ideas as to exploring this theme. A paragraph is given below. Draw a picture of Sarah, Michelle, Amma, Uncle Mazin and Jude. Pretend pupils can ask them questions about their experiences- write these questions and share so each group has at least one question for each character. Give the characters speech bubbles and let them answer the questions. Some examples:

For Mazin: *why do you not speak Arabic? Why have you not taught your daughter to speak Arabic?*

For Sarah: *Would you like to learn Arabic? What is it like to have your dad have a different cultural and linguistic identity to you?*

For Amma: *Why do you not want to learn English? Are you worried you will forget about Syria?*

For Jude: *What was the most confusing aspect of America when you first arrived? What do you think of this now, it is less confusing?*

- Ask the class to think of times when Jude's EAL class helped each other. How do they actually do this? They all speak different languages and have different experiences- how do they manage to support each other?

Themes of language in *Other words for Home*

1. Identity: Language is a crucial part of the characters' identity. Jude speaks Arabic and English, and her ability to speak both languages shapes her experiences and relationships in the United States.
2. Communication: Language is a tool for communication, and the characters in the book struggle to communicate with each other due to language barriers. Jude's mother, who speaks very little English, has a hard time communicating with others, which leads to misunderstandings and frustration.
3. Assimilation: Language is also a way for the characters to assimilate into American culture. Jude takes English classes and practices speaking English to fit in with her classmates.
4. Connection: Language is a way for the characters to connect with each other. Jude's aunt teaches her new English words and phrases, and Jude teaches her aunt Arabic. This exchange of language helps them build a stronger relationship.
5. Power: Language is a source of power, and the characters in the book are aware of this. Jude's mother feels powerless because she cannot speak English well, while Jude's teacher uses her knowledge of English to control and manipulate her students.



Ideas for Exploring *Not Now Noor* and *The Proudest Blue*

- Focus on the art in these two books, a prominent feature of the way each story is told. Do pupils prefer to see the visual world created by the artist? Do pupils prefer to imagine people and places for themselves?
- Make a blank template to fill in, including: colours, emotion, characters and backgrounds. In each space, ask groups to think about how the artist tells the story using these elements: what sort of impression is created with the colour palette; how are peoples' feelings conveyed through the illustrations; how are the characters brought to life and what backgrounds are given, and how do these also tell the story?
- Choose one book and as a group create an extra page in the same style. This could be the start or end of the story, or an additional scene in the story.
- Photocopy a page and invite pupils to add speech bubbles- what are the characters thinking? What questions do they have? Show these in the speech bubbles.
- Watch this TED talk by Hayley Levitt about the meaning of art:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoXyw909Qu0> ('who decides what art means, Hayley Levitt')
- The first minute asks us to think about how we interpret art. You could explore these questions; what do pupils think the artists are saying, what do pupils think the authors are saying, and how do pupils themselves make sense of the books? For example, in *the Proudest Blue*, a boy in the playground shouts at Asiyah. This upsets Faizah but she realises her sister feels protected by her hijab and is not really that upset. Talk about the artist and author's intentions - why do pupils think they included this scene? How do pupils interpret this scene? Talk about whether it is ok for readers to take a different meaning to what the artist and author intended.
- The video carries on. If you want to share this, a summary is given below. Pose the two questions to pupils: *does the artist give the only meaning, or can any meaning be made?*

Who Decides What art means? TED talk by Hayley Evitt

In the mid-20th Century, literary critic W.K. Wimsatt and philosopher Monroe Beardsley argued that the artists' intention is irrelevant. They called their argument the Intentional Fallacy. A 'fallacy' is when we get something wrong. Wimsatt and Beardsley called their idea a 'fallacy' because we are wrong to try to understand what the artist intended in creating their art. Wimsatt and Beardsley based this on two separate points.

- 1) Many of the artists we love are no longer alive and did not state their intentions in creating each piece of art. We simply do not know their intentions so there is no point finding out.
- 2) Even if we do know what the artist intended, this could distract us from our own enjoyment of the artwork. When you eat a pudding, you don't need to know what the chef intended to enjoy it. Moreover, you might love the taste while your friend does not. Whatever the chef intended is irrelevant to both your reactions, which are personal and subjective.

Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that what the artist intended is just one way of interpreting the art among many others.

Two art critics who disagreed are Steven Knapp and Benn Michaels. They argued that the artists' intended meaning is the *only* meaning, as they are the creator and therefore they give meaning.

Ideas for exploring *Wanting Mor* by Rukhsana Khan

- The author, Rukhsana Khan, talks about her inspiration for the book here: <https://rukhsanakhan.com/wanting-mor/>. Rukhsana lives in Canada, and sponsored a library in an orphanage in Afghanistan. The orphanage sent Rukhsana a report of some of the children, which is where she heard about a girl in their care. What happens to Jameela in the book really did happen to the young girl: her mother died, her father remarried, her stepmother did not want her and she was abandoned in the marketplace.
- Rukhsana speaks widely of issues about family, children, conflict and inequality, you might not want to show your pupils the whole video but a clip. If you decide not show your pupils the whole video, it is good background information for you as a teacher.
- In the first chapter of *Wanting More*, the author quotes her own father, reflecting on how hard his life has been in some ways, but how he never gave up. Her father said that humans are made out of clay; God fashioned Adam out of clay and we are the children of Adam. A clay pot has to be fired to become strong. A pot that has been taken out of the fire too early will crack and be useless. Rukhsana's father experienced his hardship as his 'firing'; the process that made him strong. This is the theme of *Wanting Mor*; Jameela is going through her 'firing', to emerge without cracking and being useless.
- Take a clay pot and explain this theme to pupils. Ask them to write on small pieces of paper all the hardships that Jameela has to go through, and place them in the pot. Do pupils think this is a good metaphor? Does it help them to think about how they cope with hardships in their lives? Rukhsana says that although Jameela lives in a particular time and place everyone has to go through 'firing', do pupils agree?
- The backdrop to *Wanting Mor* is the fallout of the American and Allied invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 in 2001. This is why the country is in ruins, why so many people have died, and why American soldiers are supporting orphanages. Teach a little bit about this conflict. It will be upsetting for pupils but it is an extremely formative piece of global history and therefore important. This Newsround clip is helpful: <https://www.bbc.com/newsround/15214375>

(If the link is broken search Newsround or BBC Teach for information about the post- 9/11 invasion of Afghanistan).

- Take the pot with Jameela's hardships in. Ask groups to brainstorm all the times Jameela's faith helped her, such as keeping up with her prayers, or a sense that God cares about her. Do pupils think that having faith could help Jameela stay strong and survive her 'firing'? Talk about this.
- Is Jameela conflicted about the role of the American soldiers in performing her operation? It was the USA and UK who destroyed the country in the first place, who are now trying to rebuild and help the Afghan people. Talk about the characters in the story who encourage Jameela to have the operation, such as the orphanage director Khalaa Gul, and those who persuade her to say no, such as her friends. What lies behind these viewpoints? Do pupils think they would be conflicted, or would they accept the operation?

- Focus on prayer, a theme running through the book. A paragraph below sets out the themes of prayer and what they point to in the story. In more child-friendly language, these are the themes addressed by prayer: (1) having faith in God, (2) having hope, (3) growing as a person, (4) bringing people together, (5) being grateful, and (6) being forgiven. Put these words on a large piece of paper on different tables. Ask if pupils can walk around and add written notes when prayer allows Jameela to explore these ideas, such as when she feels that she will be forgiven, when she gains hope from prayer or when prayer brings people together.
- Ask pupils to summarise for themselves how prayer helps Jameela cope with hardship and what prayer offers her. An additional paragraph about prayer times is given if helpful.
- Pull these ideas together for a piece of art. Draw a cycle of the sun's movement around the edges of a piece of paper, labelling the prayer times as the sun rises and sets. You could prepare this in advance and give to each pupil. Inside the sun's cycle, ask pupils to show how Jameela's relationship with prayer. They can draw, sketch or write.

Themes of prayer in *Wanting Mor*:

1. Faith and spirituality: The book delves into the importance of faith and spirituality in the lives of the characters. Prayer is portrayed as a means to connect with a higher power and find comfort.
2. Hope and resilience: Prayer is depicted as a source of hope and resilience for the characters. It provides them with the strength to endure hardships and face challenges with determination.
3. Personal growth and self-discovery: Prayer is shown to be a catalyst for personal growth and self-discovery. Through prayer, the characters reflect on their actions and strive to become better.
4. Community and unity: The act of prayer brings people together and fosters a sense of community. It is portrayed as a shared experience that transcends individual differences and brings people closer.
5. Gratitude and thankfulness: Prayer is used as a means to express gratitude and thankfulness for the blessings in life. It encourages the characters to appreciate what they have and find contentment in the present moment.
6. Healing and forgiveness: Prayer is presented as a tool for healing and forgiveness. It helps the characters find inner peace, reconcile with their past, and let go of resentment or anger.

Prayer Times

In Afghanistan, the prayer times follow the Islamic tradition and are based on the position of the sun. The five daily prayers are as follows:

1. **Fajr (dawn):** before sunrise, typically around 4:30 am to 5:00 am.
2. **Dhuhr (midday):** after the sun has passed its zenith, usually around 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm.
3. **Asr (late afternoon):** afternoon, typically around 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm.
4. **Maghrib (after sunset):** immediately after sunset, usually around 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm.
5. **Isha (evening):** after the twilight has disappeared, typically around 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

General Literacy Ideas

Character Graph: Choose a character in the story. Decide on 5- 10 key events. Plot these on the x- axis of a line graph. Once the graphs have been created, ask pupils to choose emotions to put on the y-axis. Offer alternative words for 'happy' such as 'content, satisfied, overjoyed, pleased, delighted', etc. Give alternative words for 'sad', such as 'gloomy, melancholy, desperate, anxious, broken' and so on. Once pupils have added their emotion words, ask them to design an emoji to express this word if they want. Finally, plot the character's emotion graph; how do they feel at the events on the x- axis.

Create three or 4 graphs for different character in one group and compare.

Use this as a basis for writing in the first person. Give out blank postcards. Ask pupils to choose on event in the character's story. Draw this event on the front of the postcard, describe how they felt about the event on the other side.

Alternative title: Choose an alternative title for the story, write out and decorate to show why.

Glossary of Islam: Collect words that describe Islamic beliefs or practices, or Arabic words. Make a glossary as you go. At the end of the story go back over the Islamic or Arabic words- can pupils remember what they mean? Ask each group to choose a word, write out and decorate, to make a dictionary for future reference.

Aftermath: Create new endings. Discuss as a class where the story ends in the book. Is there anything more pupils want to know? Brainstorm together. Ask pairs or individuals to write an extended ending- what happens next. Call it 'Aftermath'.

Story Map: Create a map for the story. Discuss as a class the places in the landscape of the story- whether buildings and streets, or desert, fields or farmland. Discuss landmarks. Write all this on the board for pupils to use. Add any names, such as the names of buildings or streets. Give out graph paper. Create a map. Give out coloured tissue paper and card to add colour and texture to the map.

Where is the Islam? Each book features a young, Muslim protagonist. The characters are living in different contexts, in different times and places. Some are in a Muslim region, some live where Islam is a minority faith. Some experience challenges directed at their Muslim identity, some experience other types of challenges, such as poverty or conflict.

Ask pupils to think about all the times when 'Islam' is visible in the stories. You might want to spend some time defining 'Islam'. What do children think it actually is? Is it about a set of beliefs, is it about how to act, is it about culture and custom, or all three?

Stick a copy of the front cover of the book in the middle of a page, ask children to write around the edges all the times Islam is mentioned. Copy out key phrases from the book.

Does Islam Help? Find examples of when faith helped the protagonists.

What is 'Islam'? Using the paragraph and pupil's discussions, ask groups to define 'Islam' for themselves.