

Overview (from publisher)

Ali is an eighth-grade kid with a lot going on.

Between the pressure from his immigrant parents to ace every class, his crush on Melissa, who lives in the rich area of town while he and his family live in a shabby apartment complex, and trying his best to fit in with his friends, he feels like he's being pulled in too many different directions.

But harder still, Ali is becoming increasingly aware of the racism around him. Comments from his friends about Pakistani food or his skin color are passed off as jokes, but he doesn't find them funny. And when Ramadan starts, Ali doesn't tell anyone he's fasting because it just seems easier. Luckily he finds solace in putting his feelings into words—and poems. But his father is dead set against him using art as a distraction when he's got schoolwork and a future career as a doctor to focus on.

Ali's world changes when he, his mom and his little brother are assaulted by some racist teens. Ali must come to terms with his roiling feelings about his place in the world, as a Pakistani immigrant, a Muslim and a teenager with his whole life ahead of him. With help from his grandfather, an inspiring teacher and his friend, Ali leans on his words for strength. And eventually he finds his true voice.

Characters

Ali Khan: Primary character (protagonist). Pakistani Canadian Grade 8 teen with immigrant parents who have high expectations for his academic success.

Khan Family

Grandfather (Dada-jaan/Iqbal)

Younger Brother (Danny/Danish)

Older Brother (Sam/Osama)

Father (Sal/Salim)

Mother (Ms. Khan)

Zach: Ali's best friend who is also in Grade 8.

Ms. MacIntosh: Ali and Zack's homeroom teacher.

Melissa: A girl in Ali's class that he has a crush on

Ryan: A boy in Ali's class

Raj: A boy in Ali's class (Hindu)

Darius: A boy in Ali's class (Black)

Adeel: A boy in Ali's class (Pakistani)

Asma: A girl in Ali's class who is a newcomer to Canada.

Ms. Riley: The principal of Ali's school

Mr. Robertson: The manager of the building that the Khan family lives in.

Rebecca Bender: Woman who gives birth is Salim's taxi.

Sergeant Galloway: Police officer who responded to the scene

Edgar and Grace Williams: Retired Fire Captain and his wife who are kind after the attack.

Chapter 1

Summary

Ali sneaks off to the mall at lunch with his friends and crosses paths with an unexpected person.

Student-facing questions

- In his conversation with Al about Mahatma Gandhi, Zach mixes up the countries of India and Pakistan. Why do you think he might have gotten those two countries mixed up?
- In this chapter, there's a lot of talk about food. Al skips the office bologna sandwich and brings a special lunch from home – aloo palak and roti – while his friends eat pizza, pasta, and fries. What kind of food do you like to eat that might be different from what your friends choose? Why do you think food choices can be a big deal?
- Ryan seems worried about what Raj picked for lunch. Why do you think he cares so much? Can you think of any foods you like that other people might not be okay eating? Do some research to find out why some people might avoid certain foods.

Teacher-facing questions

- What is your school's policy on students leaving property at lunch/break? Why are those rules in place? Thinking widely, which students benefit from the rules as they exist? Who is disadvantaged?
- Zach mixes up Pakistan and India and demonstrates confusion about Mahatma Gandhi. Those kinds of errors can be hurtful/harmful to racialized students. How seriously do you take your responsibility to ensure students are both culturally aware and sensitive?
- Most schools have food available for students when they are hungry. What formal or informal policies do you have in place to ensure that students can have unrestricted access to food when they need it? How can you prevent students from wasting or abusing for food available? How do you know that the food you are offering is culturally accessible and appropriate for every student?
- Ali takes time to clean up after his lunch at the mall. Students often leave messes behind after meal/snack time. What strategies and/or messages do you use to encourage students to clean up after themselves? How do you know those strategies/messages are working?

Chapter 2

Summary

Ali talks with his mother after school and to his grandfather about choices and life in Canada. Ali looks after Danny after school.

Student-facing questions

- Think about Al's relationship with his grandfather. Why is it important to have trusted adults in your life? Who do you have in your life that is positive and supportive?
- Al is responsible for caring for his younger brother Danny. What is your experience of looking after a younger sibling or other family member?
- Al talks about how strict his parents are because they are Pakistani. Who do you know in real life that has very strict parents/guardians? How is that the same or different from the rules in your home?
- Al shares that he likes his grandfather's stories a lot. Who do you have in your life who shares great stories of their past?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali's grandfather shares with him the complexity of systemic racism as it applies to his work as a security guard at the mall. What is your awareness of this kind of discrimination against marginalized youth? What have you seen or heard about in your community?
- What is Ali's grandfather's approach to conflict? What can we learn from Dada-jaan approach to managing the conflict with Ali? How might we apply this approach in our teaching practice?
- Consider the range of family rules affecting your students that have surprised you in your teaching practice. Describe rules that seem too strict to you and contrast them to rules that seem too flexible. Why do you feel the way you do about those rules?

Chapter 3

Summary

Ali talks with his mother after school and composes his first poem. He reflects on Zach's secret crush.

Student-facing questions

- Al reflects on the diversity of people who live in his apartment building. How similar or different is that from the neighbourhood or community where you live?
- Al's mother was a teacher and his father was a medical doctor in Pakistan. Because they moved to Canada, they can no longer work in those professions. What do your parents/guardians do for work? Find out if they ever wanted to do a different job and why. Be prepared to share.
- Al shares a room with his brothers and that is where he does his homework and studying. What location do you use to do your homework/studying where you live?
- Al's real name is Ali. His father (Salim), and brothers (Osama and Danish) have nicknames too (Sal, Sam and Danny). What nicknames do you have? Who calls you by those nicknames? What name would you prefer to be called?
- Al uses poetry to help him express his feelings. What kinds of creative ways do you use to express your feelings?

Teacher-facing questions

- Reflecting on the complexities of Ali's life, how might this affect your expectations regarding the completion of homework? What adjustments/modifications can you make to those expectations to honour the realities of your students?
- When Mr. Robertson is discussing Ali's father's work situation, he expresses frustration and anger regarding his underemployment. However, some of his thoughts — regardless of his intention — were likely hurtful/harmful leading to the awkward silence. What are his missteps? What can we learn about being careful/respectful in these conversations?
- Think about the last time you ignored inappropriate behaviour in your classroom. Reflect on the unintended/unexpected impact of that choice. Despite the impacts, it isn't realistic or possible to respond to every moment of inappropriate behaviour. How do you balance the decision to engage or ignore?

Chapter 4

Summary

Ali reflects on his classroom. He composes poetry on the back of his test while waiting for others to finish writing.

Student-facing questions

- Al is concerned that turning in his math test too soon will make him look like he is showing off. Why do you think he is worried about looking too smart? How are "smart" (academically strong) students treated in your class?
- Ms. McIntosh wants her students to "see themselves" in the stories they read in class. Which materials, such as books, music, videos and posters, in your classes allow you to see yourself? What might you do if you don't see people who look like you in the materials you use in class?
- Al recognizes the sacrifices his family has made to give him the life he has now. What kinds of sacrifices do you think your family has made to help you?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali completes his test early and is struggling for something productive to do. What strategies do you have in your classroom to ensure students are always engaged in productive and positive activities?
- From Ali's perspective, Ms. McIntosh has created a positive, cozy and welcoming student-centred classroom environment. What have you deliberately built into your classroom that contributes to a positive and welcoming environment for your students?
- One key principle of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP) is to ensure that all students can see themselves in the lessons and resources used in the classroom. How are you purposefully ensuring that every student can see themselves in your classroom? How do you know your CRRP efforts are working?

Chapter 5

Summary

Zach encourages Ali to talk to Melissa. The boys reflect on their identities.

Student-facing questions

- Zach makes a lot of comments in this chapter. Some of them may be harmless while others could be harmful/hurtful. Provide examples of comments from Zach that you think are
 - a. jokes/harmless teasing;
 - b. mean/hurtful teasing;
 - c. bullying
- In their conversation, the students have different thoughts about how their families would respond to a failing mark on a test. How would your family react if you had a poor mark on a test or assignment?
- Al says his country is “here” in Canada. How can you know if someone is Canadian or from another country?

Teacher-facing questions

- In this chapter, there are many examples of discrimination and other forms of oppression. Which “isms” can you identify? How might you help students recognize these as problematic behaviours?
- Ali acknowledges Zach’s “nicknames” for Asma but doesn’t seem concerned about them. Does that mean he is complicit in what could be described as racism? Why?
- Zach makes multiple comments in the chapter that indicate he is culturally ignorant. Some of those comments are microaggressions. What actions can you take when students use microaggressions in your presence? How do you respond?

Chapter 6

Summary

Ali’s family attends parent-teacher interviews.

Student-facing questions

- Al talks about once being proud and excited to ride in his father’s taxi. Now it seems that he is embarrassed about his father’s job. How do you feel about the jobs your parents/guardians do? Do they inspire you or embarrass you? Would you feel uncomfortable talking about their jobs with your friends? Why?
- Knowing someone who was very successful at school can sometimes make things more stressful for you. For example, Osama was once the student of the year at Al’s school. How does Al respond to Osama’s success? When you think about the most successful students who have graduated from your school, how does that make you feel: proud, panicked, pressured, overwhelmed, defeated, inspired?
- Al’s entire household attends his teacher-parent interview. Which of your family members do you wish would come to your school to recognize your success? Who do you wish would not visit the school? Why?
- Al’s mother is determined not to be late for the parent-teacher interview. There are lots of different attitudes about being a bit late for an appointment. How does your family feel about being late? How do you feel about being late?
- When Al reflects on watching Osama’s speech for Student of the Year, he recognizes that Sam was nervous. What kinds of activities at school make you nervous?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ms. McIntosh has clearly prepared for parent-teacher interviews. Which elements of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy does she demonstrate? What does she still have to learn? How might you apply elements of CRRP in your own teaching practice?
- Have you ever had an entire family attend a parent-teacher interview? How did/would you respond to that? What might this tell you about the family?
- How do you respond when you have a student who is performing with academic excellence and is a model student but the parents/caregivers are unsatisfied with their work? How does that make you feel as a teacher?
- Different teachers have different approaches to creating a welcoming and positive classroom community. What approaches are you using to ensure that students feel like the classroom is a learning community to which they belong? What evidence-based practices can you use to enhance your classroom community?

Chapter 7

Summary

Ms. McIntosh recognizes Ali's budding talent as a poet and gives him a gift.

Student-facing questions

- Al doesn't seem interested in helping Asma. Why do you think he wasn't helping her? How would you feel if you were asked to help someone new to the school?
- Al experiments by writing a few lines of poetry on the back of his Math test. Have you ever read any poetry? Have you ever written any poetry? Al holds his brother Osama in high regard. Who is someone that you feel sets a high bar for you?
- Al is surprised that Ms. McIntosh thinks of him as a fine poet. Sometimes we don't realize how good we are at something until someone else points it out. What is an example of something like that in your life?
- Mr. James teaches gym and Ms. McIntosh teaches homeroom (which includes math and English). How does your school organize classes?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ms. McIntosh assigned Ali to support Asma as a guide. Why do you think she asks Ali to help Asma? What are the risks of creating these kinds of informal mentorship structures in the classroom?
- Ms. McIntosh offers Ali a journal as a gift. Is this a textbook example of favoritism (teacher's pet)? Why? Have/Would you offered a similar gift at some time to a student?
- Ms. McIntosh makes a comment about Mr. James (PE teacher) not being a "big poetry fan." Is this an appropriate comment to make about a colleague? Why?
- How do we recognize and acknowledge student excellence outside of our areas of expertise?

Chapter 8

Summary

Ali helps his father with a medical emergency in his cab.

Student-facing questions

- Have you ever used a tutor? What subject area would you like to have additional help in?
- Anxiety around father. Who causes you to feel more anxious in your life?
- "Silent with your eyes to the front" Have you ever had your parents give you instructions that seemed confusing you later understood were designed to keep you safe?
- Al identifies the number on the building to help his father direct the ambulance. Have you ever had to help an adult in an emergency? Share that story.
- How did Sal and Al give her Rebecca privacy and dignity?
- Al seems to doubt his father's ability to deliver a baby. Why? How are his doubts founded?

Teacher-facing questions

- The dispatcher calls Salim a Good guy when he agrees to pick up a customer on his off time. Salim does not seem very happy with that statement. What are the different motivators Salim may have had to agree to this customer pick up while with Ali?
- Ali's father uses the expression "something wrong in their head." What language are we using to talk about mental health?
- In many ways, Salim's conversation with Ali is a version of "the talk" that marginalized parents have with their children. What other versions of these nuanced safety conversations or unwritten rules have you heard of?

Chapter 9

Summary

Ali's father is celebrated as a hero for helping in a medical emergency.

Student-facing questions

- The officer says that he is putting Sal for a “civilian citation.” What does that mean?
- Al's grandfather says “Modesty is beautiful.” What does that mean? Do you agree? How might you apply that saying in your own life?
- Have you or your family ever been on TV, Radio or newspaper or other publication?
- Officer Galloway says that Sal is a hero. What do you think makes a hero?
- How did you get your name? What does it mean? Why does Rebecca give her son the middle name Salim?

Teacher-facing questions

- When Jen Miller arrives from the press, she is eager to talk to Salim and Ali. What is your board's policy regarding speaking to the media?
- “How often does a cabbie deliver a baby?” Why is Jen confused?
- Jen calls Mr. Khan ‘Salman’ and Sergeant Galloway corrects her. Think back to a student you had whose name posed a challenge for you to pronounce? What strategies did you use to remember the name and the correct pronunciation of it?
- Almost all teachers are university educated which results in a bias towards formal tertiary education and the careers they offer. How do we deliberately and systematically honour the wide range of job options that students can pursue?

Chapter 10

Summary

Ali tries to make sense of his differences. Ms. McIntosh encourages Ali to find his own voice in his poetry.

Student-facing questions

- Are you aware of words that “reflect racist attitudes or prejudices?” Have you heard or used language like that?
- Al says he ignores discriminatory language. What do you do when you hear this kind of inappropriate language?
- Principal Riley says, “I believe that racism comes from a lack of exposure, empathy and understanding.” What does she mean by that? Do you agree?
- It seems that Taylor doesn't intend to insult Al's home; however, Ms. McIntosh says the language she uses is “derogatory and demeaning.” This suggests that Ms. McIntosh thinks that Taylor may have caused harm. Who was harmed? How?
- Think about the last time you were embarrassed and/or ashamed. What happened? What did you do to help yourself feel better?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ms. Riley says, “I believe that racism comes from a lack of exposure, empathy and understanding.” Do you agree?
- Ms. McIntosh is modelling “calling out” an inappropriate comment. What is the effect of doing so? Is this an appropriate approach to addressing this kind of behaviour? What evidence-based practices could she have employed to be more effective in this approach?
- Ms. McIntosh provides a gentle critique of some of Ali's poetry by pushing back against negative stereotypes while encouraging him to find and own his voice. How do we empower/embolden students to use their voices to tell their stories? How do we make it safe for them to do so? What instructional practices do you deliberately engage to make that possible?

Chapter 11

Summary

Ali and Zach attend a study group at the home of their wealthier friends. Ali considers his religious identity while dealing with discrimination.

Student-facing questions

- Zach and Al get to ride the school bus. How do you usually get to and from school each day? What is your trip like?
- Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims where they fast from sunrise to sunset each day. What else do you know about Ramadan? How could you find out more? Have you ever had to fast (i.e. go without food/water)?
- On the bus, the kids are talking about Haggis. What foods are a part of your culture that you do not enjoy eating?
- During the conversation on the bus, Ryan seems to be making fun of Al but says “I’m just joking around.” Based on Al’s reaction, how does he feel about the jokes? What might Ryan think about how Al is feeling?
- Melissa seems embarrassed and upset by the things her grandfather says during her study session with her friends. Why is she upset?
- Both Al and Melissa have grandparents who live with them. Would you like to live together with extended family members such as grandparents, uncles/aunts and/or cousins? Why?

Teacher-facing questions

- If one of the students riding the bus, shared the nature of the conversation with you the next day, what might be your next steps in addressing the problematic nature of the comments?
- While it is true that Ali is surprised by Melissa’s home, it seems Zach is also caught off guard. They seem to be surprised by different aspects of the experience. What are the differences and why might that be so? What insights might you take from this complex interaction?
- Ali seems committed to keeping his religious practice secret. Who is responsible for educating students and the wider public about important religious practices? How can it be done better?
- Melissa’s grandfather might defend his comments by arguing that he was complimenting immigrants. This connects to the concept of the Model Minority myth. How would you address parents/caregivers who expressed these ideas to you?

Chapter 12

Summary

Zach and Ali debrief their recent experiences. Zach challenges Ali regarding being embarrassed about fasting.

Student-facing questions

- Al describes doing his homework with music on. For some people, that is a distraction. What helps you to concentrate when you are trying to get work done?
- Al suggests that there is a difference between jokes that come from Zach and Ryan. How can you tell when something is just a joke?
- Zach comments that Melissa may think that because he didn’t eat anything, Al didn’t like the food at the study session at her house. That means that there can be unintended consequences to not telling the truth. What is your experience with that?
- Al chooses to share his poetry with Zach. What are the risks/benefits of sharing something private like that?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali shares his poetry with Zach. Zach prefers the poems that seem familiar to him but are not the poems that Ms. McIntosh prefers. What lesson can we draw about peer reviews from this moment?
- Zach tells Ali that he shouldn’t be ashamed of fasting; yet, he also makes inappropriate comments about Ali’s culture. What can we learn from this interaction?
- Teaching students about healthy relationships can be difficult. We encourage people to forgive each other but we also need to encourage people to end unhealthy relationships or implement boundaries that ensure they feel respected and safe within relationships. What advice do you provide students with regarding this?

Chapter 13

Summary

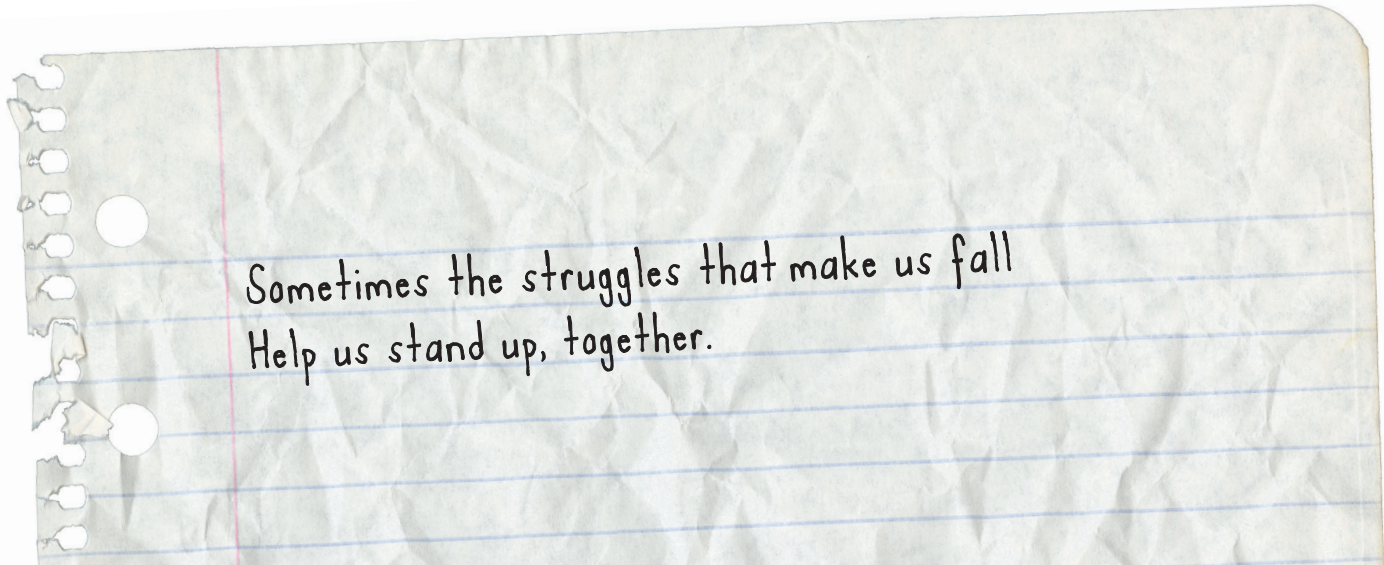
The school hosts its Festival of Friends event. Jokes on the court cause harm and anger.

Student-facing questions

- For the Festival of Friends event, students are wearing traditional clothing. Do you have traditional clothing that you only wear to special events? How do you decide what to wear to school each day?
- When Asma confronts Al about inappropriate name-calling, he tells her “Don’t be so sensitive.” How do you feel about that response? Why?
- Asma reminds Al that his real name, Ali, means something. What does your name mean? If you are not sure, how can you find out?
- Al chooses to walk away even though he feels like hitting someone and crying. What are things you do to manage your anger?
- Raj suggests that Al should not be playing basketball while he is fasting. How can you figure out what activities your classmates should be doing when they have religious or medical restrictions?
- Al has angry thoughts about how he would retaliate for this bullying on the basketball court. He writes those thoughts down as a poem. Is that an appropriate way to deal with angry thoughts? Why? Or Why Not?

Teacher-facing questions

- Schools sometimes hold events such as Festival of Friends or Multicultural Days as a way to honour the diversity of student cultural experiences. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these events? What are the risks?
- Asma displays a sophisticated awareness of many cultural elements despite her status as an English Language Learner. What can (and must) we learn about assumptions regarding newcomers?
- Clothing is one aspect of culture. What assumptions are we carrying about the tensions between traditional clothing and contemporary clothing? How can we challenge our expectations around what types of clothing are appropriate and representative of particular cultures?
- Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy requires teachers to prepare students to be respectful of diversity. What is/would be your approach to educating students about the positive inclusion of Muslim students during Ramadan?



Sometimes the struggles that make us fall
Help us stand up, together.

Chapter 14

Summary

Ali realizes his anger has led to an academic mistake. His relationship with Zach is strained.

Student-facing questions

- In his conversation with Zach, Al says that it is wrong to call someone a Paki or the N-word. They both agree that the N-word is inappropriate but they disagree about the word Paki. What do you think?
- Tests can be stressful. Think about a time you had difficulty completing a test or missed a question. What happened?
- Ms McIntosh says “A person is weighted by their speech and valued by their action.” What do you think that means?
- Why do you think Al feels he cannot talk to his parents about what happened on the basketball court and how it affected his test?
- Al’s grandfather says that Zach is still Al’s friend even after what happened on the basketball court. Can you stay friends with someone who was unkind or has bullied you in a public way? Why?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali tells Zach “It’s different when I use it” in reference to the term Paki. Is this an appropriate response? How do we respond when kids use this argument about epithets?
- Looking through a test with the class before students begin writing can be an excellent way to ensure that no one misses any questions. How do you prepare students to complete the test? What strategies do you use to help reduce test anxiety when students first begin an evaluation?
- Maintaining open contact with the parents/caregivers of students is important. How do you assess Ms. McIntosh’s decision to call Ali’s parents after his test. Given what she knows about his parent’s high expectations, what do you think her argument is for doing so?
- Ms. McIntosh allows Ali to complete his test. Do you agree with this approach? Why?
- When Ali’s grandfather hears him reciting his poetry and questions him about it, Ali dismisses claims “it’s nothing.” Grandfather responds with “It’s not nothing.” What can we learn from his grandfather’s response? How can we apply the “it’s not nothing” principle in our educational practice?

Chapter 15

Summary

Ali is proud of his completed poem about his father. His poetry results in conflict between him and his father.

Student-facing questions

- Al knows he made a mistake and apologizes for it to his father; yet, his father doesn’t seem to forgive him. How do you think this made Al feel?
- Al seems surprised that his father has looked through his private book. His father responds by explaining that he has the right to do so because the book is in his home and Al is his son. How do your parents/caregivers treat your privacy?
- Sal tells Al that poetry is “just wasted words.” and by the end of their conversation, expresses that he never wants to see Al with the poem book again. When you disagree with your parents/caregivers, what are some steps you can take to try to share your perspective?

Teacher-facing questions

- Imagine that Ali is a student in your class and reports his conversation and interaction with his father the night before. What are your next steps as a classroom teacher?
- Salim Khan is incensed that Ali is spending his time working on poetry when he needs to focus on academic excellence. What are some of the reasons he may feel so strongly about this? What explanations have you heard from parents/caregivers in similar situations?
- Many families see limited value in engaging in the arts; instead preferring to focus on skills required for career success. Based on your knowledge, research and lived experience, what value is there to studying the arts (including visual, musical, performing)?

Chapter 16

Summary

Ali and his family become the victims of a targeted racist attack.

Student-facing questions

- Al's family gets some of their groceries from a store that sells South Asian foods. Where do you get your groceries? What jobs do you have (or do you wish you had) regarding groceries?
- Al says that the most important thing for immigrant families is to make your family proud. Do you feel the same way? Why?
- Why do you think Al wants Danny to speak to him in Urdu? Why is that important to him?
- The three people who attack Al and his family seem angry and upset. Based on their words and actions, what do they seem upset about? Is it fair for them to be frustrated?

Teacher-facing questions

- It can be a challenge trying to work with students whose first language is not English. What strategies do you employ in honouring first languages while working to develop the required abilities in English?
- Ali tells Danny to tuck in his legs as a courtesy to the people trying to get by them outside the store. How can we support the development of courtesy, respectfulness and empathy in students? What strategies have worked for you? How do you know they work?
- Ali and his family are subjected to an anti-Muslim racist attack. From the description, the attack is both verbal and physical. Considering this incident from a trauma-informed lens, what other negative impacts might result from this type of attack? How do you support your students who are dealing with racial trauma?

Chapter 17

Summary

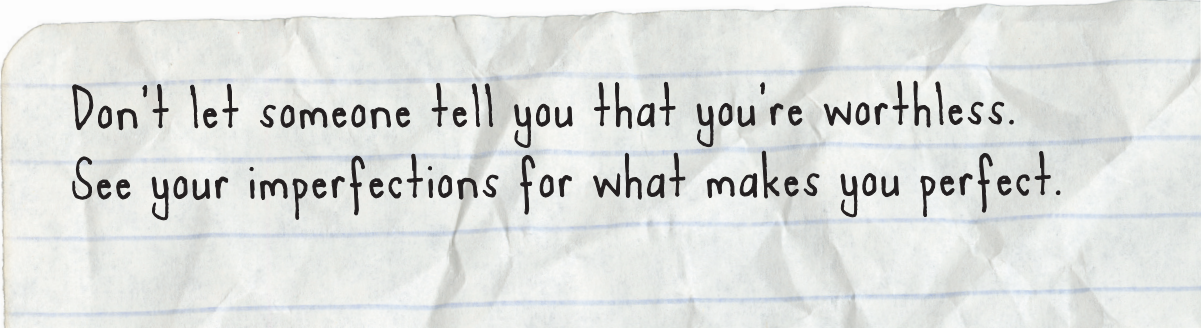
Community members demonstrate care and compassion after the attack.

Student-facing questions

- Grace says the three people who attacked Al and his family are cowards. However, they don't seem particularly cowardly (in fact, they seem very bold!) during the attack. Why do you think she describes them that way?
- Edgar says that every kid wants to be a firefighter at some time in their lives. Is that true for you? What jobs have you considered doing in your adult life?
- Edgar says he would have "taken care" of the people who attacked Al. What do you think he was proposing he would have done? Do you think that would have been a more effective response to the situation?
- Grace and Edgar encourage Al's mother to call the police regarding the attack. Why?

Teacher-facing questions

- "Go back to where you came from!" is a particularly common rallying cry of White Supremacy. There are many reasons why this is such a problematic expression. What strategies can we employ to ensure that White Canadians understand their history fully enough to recognize the hypocrisy of the statement?
- Grace and Edgar try to help after the anti-Muslim racist attack. Their actions are generous and kind. How can we ensure that our intentions to be generous and kind do not cross the line into a White Saviour complex?
- Grace and Edgar encourage Ali's mother to contact the police. What are some reasons she might be reluctant to do so? What could be some negative effects of police involvement in this kind of situation?



Don't let someone tell you that you're worthless.
See your imperfections for what makes you perfect.

Chapter 18

Summary

Ali and his grandfather debrief the attack. His grandfather shares some of his own historical context and challenges.

Student-facing questions

- Al seems to be experiencing a lot of strong emotions at the start of the chapter. Why do you think he is reacting this way?
- To be a police officer you have to be brave. Al wonders if police officers are ever worried or afraid. How might you find out the answer to that question in real life?
- Al's grandfather reveals that he named Al when he was a baby. Who gave you your name? If you don't know, find out.
- While Al's grandfather is sharing his stories with Al, he becomes emotional and tearful. When was the last time you saw an adult cry? What caused that emotional response?
- Al's grandfather shares some difficult stories with him about his family and cultural history. What do you know about your family's history? What about your cultural history?
- Al's grandfather reminds him that we have to forgive our enemies and that "the first to forgive is the strongest." Does that make sense to you? Why?

Teacher-facing questions

- At the start of the chapter, Ali yells at Danny to "Slow down." This is the first time we see Ali react harshly to his younger brother; he is usually kind and caring towards him. Why might he be reacting this way? If you were witnessing this reaction, how might you approach the conversation?
- Ali, Danny and their mother all experience the same act of racial violence. Ali's grandfather recognizes that he is troubled but Danny appears to be unaffected by the incident. What can we learn from this regarding trauma? What best practices can you implement for someone like Danny?
- This chapter highlights Iqbal's strong spiritual fortitude. Many students (and teachers) do not subscribe to a religion. What approach would you take to help students understand these spiritual values?
- Despite our social progress, Canadian society is heavily patriarchal with people like male athletes being held in high esteem. Athletes are often celebrated for their toughness, truculence and collegiality in "protecting" their teammates. How can we help students understand Iqbal's perspective of forgiveness over violence?

Chapter 19

Summary

Under pressure and anger, Ali abandons his poetry and his friendship with Zach.

Student-facing questions

- Al tells Zach not to wait for him after school but he does anyway. Is that ok? Why?
- Al says he was surprised at how fast he became angry toward Zach. Why do you think he was so quick to blame Zach for what Ms. McIntosh knew about the attack?
- When Ms. McIntosh asks Al whose words he was repeating, Al says that he doesn't know. Why do you think he is initially reluctant to tell her that his father had said those words?
- On their walk home from school, Zach and Al talk about the people who attacked his family. Zach says, "At least they didn't hit anyone. It was mostly just saying things." Can words be acts of violence? Why?
- Al says that Zach will never understand because he is "too white." Do you think that is true? Those words seem to hurt Zach. Was it wrong of Al to make that statement?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ms. McIntosh tried to encourage Ali to talk about or write about the violent incident he experienced. What are the best practices for supporting a student who has had a traumatic incident? At what point might you choose to refer a student to a more formal support such as a guidance counselor, or school social worker?
- To a certain degree, Ali is right about Zach never understanding the experience of someone who is racialized. How can we ensure that marginalized students know that they are seen, heard, respected, honoured and loved in our classrooms and schools?
- Zach quotes the traditional saying, "Sticks and stones can break your bones but words will never hurt you." How do you see this aphorism playing itself out at school? How might we help students understand the power of their words — both for good and for bad?

Chapter 20

Summary

Ali has a surprised guest visit him at home. The family is rocked by horrible news.

Student-facing questions

- Ms. McIntosh comes to Al's house to drop off his writing book. Has a teacher ever come to your house? How would you feel about them visiting you?
- When Al's mother discovers that Ms. McIntosh is visiting their building she immediately welcomes her and offers her something to eat. How do you think your parents/caregivers would respond to a teacher showing up at your home unannounced?
- Al hears his mother say that Ms. McIntosh was a good teacher but he also knows that his father does not believe that to be true. What are some things your parents/caregivers disagree about?
- Osama interrupts Ms. McIntosh's visit with news of a tragedy. How does your family deal with bad news on TV or social media?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ms. McIntosh visits Ali and Julius at their homes. What is your school board's policy about home visits? Why might they be valuable? What are the risks?
- Ms. McIntosh reads through Ali's book of poetry and admits to violating his privacy. Is it an actual violation of privacy? Why? Would you feel differently if she had looked at his phone or laptop?
- Trying to be culturally sensitive to all of the students and their families can seem like an insurmountable goal. What are strategies you can use to help you learn more without becoming overwhelmed?

Chapter 21

Summary

Ali and his family deal with the direct impact in the aftermath of an international terrorist attack.

Student-facing questions

- After the incident at the mosque, Al stays home from school. The attack did not happen in his community. Why do you think his parents agreed to allow him to be away from school?
- Al is clearly feeling overwhelmed by everything that has happened recently. He chooses to write poetry about it. What are strategies that work to help you feel calm when you are overwhelmed?
- Al's grandfather says, "It is important to listen to your father, but sometimes more important to listen to your heart." What does that mean? Does it mean you should ignore what your parents/caregivers say and do what feels right to you? How do you decide when to be guided by your own feelings and beliefs?
- Al's grandfather says, "Tears come from many places and for many reasons." What does that mean?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali is an excellent student; however, he has missed multiple days of school. It is clear that attendance is positively connected to success. How do you accommodate students being away from school for extended periods?
- Ali and his family are Muslim which sets the foundation of Iqbal's beliefs. How can we help students learn important lessons of peace and forgiveness even when they do not have religious beliefs?
- Think about a time when you had to choose between the guidance and expectations of the caring adults in your life and your own feelings and beliefs. What advantages are there to sharing stories like this with students? What are the risks?

Chapter 22

Summary

Ali returns to school in the aftermath of the attacks. His family has a plan to bring the community together. He has a disruptive conversation.

Student-facing questions

- Eid al-Fitr is the celebration marking the end of the month of fasting called Ramadan. It is celebrated with a party with lots of food. What kinds of celebrations do you and your family enjoy?
- Something about Al's return to school feels different. What evidence can you find that things are different than they have been in the past?
- Principal Riley knows a lot about Malcolm X and Muslim culture. There is no indication that she is Muslim. How do you think she became so knowledgeable?
- Principal Riley says that turning points “happen when you least expect them. Keep your heart open.” What do you think that means? Do you agree?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali notices that Salim seems to be behaving differently towards his children. How might this be an example of a trauma response?
- Have you ever attended major cultural high celebrations like Eid? If not, why not? What are the risks/benefits of doing so?
- How does believing in “turning points” influence your practice as a teacher? How do you know?

Chapter 23

Summary

Zach and his class present Ali with an unexpected gift. Ali returns to his poetry.

Student-facing questions

- Gift-giving is a common way to celebrate. Al shares that his family gives gifts to celebrate Eid. What are some special events time when people in your family give gifts? What is a gift that you really liked getting or giving?
- It took Al a long time to give Zach his invitation to the Eid celebration. Why do you think that was?
- Can you think of a time when you were really hungry? Can you imagine going the entire school day without something to eat or drink? How do you think Al's classmates felt about fasting for the day?
- Al changes some of the lines in his poem. Some people might judge him for those changes because the original words expressed the way he was feeling when he wrote them. Is changing his poem a betrayal of those feelings? Why?

Teacher-facing questions

- The entire class chooses to fast to share an important cultural moment with Al and the other Muslim students. What strategies could you use to ensure that all students participating in events like this are doing so of their own choice and not because of peer pressure?
- Some might argue that having a class fast during Ramadan could be a form of cultural appropriation. What do you think? How can you be confident that you are not engaged in that subtle form of racism?
- Rapper Lazarus is also Medical Doctor Lazarus. How can we use a story like this to help students realize that they can maintain interests in multiple — and seemingly opposing — areas at the same time?

Chapter 24

Summary

Ali and his family host an Eid celebration. Ali is encouraged to publicly share his first poem.

Student-facing questions

- Zach suggests that Al's mother should teach his mother how to make biryani. Why do you think he doesn't suggest cooking lessons for himself?
- Al's grandfather says that fasting helps Muslims "better themselves... and each other." What activities do you do that you feel help to better yourself and others?
- Al's grandfather says "Even the best of friends hurt each other at times." How have you hurt one of your friends or family members? What actions can you take to help heal that hurt?
- Al nervously performs his poem in front of a large group of people. What helped him to have the courage to do this? Can you imagine yourself performing (music, art, dance or in some other way) in front of a group? Who would you want to be present to help boost your courage?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali's grandfather says "The secret to undo the wrong is to admit to our errors." This is an important principle of conflict resolution. What best practices of conflict resolution are used in your classroom and/or school?
- Bringing together a large group of people after the horrible acts of racism and discrimination experienced by the Khans seems to be helpful to them. What can we learn from this? How might you implement similar practices without causing unintended harm?
- In this chapter, Ali is able to see that he has the support of his father for his poetry. This is a happy ending to a difficult family tension. How can we help prepare students for the reality that not all conflicts end well?

Chapter 25

Summary

Ali earns an important recognition and performs his first poem.

Student-facing questions

- Al is thinking about going to high school. Moving classes or schools can be terrifying. What things can you do to prepare yourself for your next academic step?
- Al discovers that many successful people are interested in science and the arts. Which famous people do you know who are successful in multiple areas? How might you discover others?
- Al chooses not to read one of his poem; rather he chooses to perform it. What is the difference between these two approaches to sharing his poetry?
- At the end of Al's performance, Ms. McIntosh is in tears. Why do you think she is crying?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali is supporting Asma's English development while she supports his Urdu. When languages other than English are spoken in the classroom, it can feel exclusive and cliquy. What strategies can you use to encourage the use of multiple languages in an inclusive way?
- Ms. Riley encourages Ali to share a poem in class if he is comfortable. It is clear that Ali is not comfortable and is feeling anxious. What strategies or best practices can you use to develop performance confidence in your students?
- Reflect on a hard-fought battle you have engaged in to help a student truly inhabit their identity. How can you leverage that success story to build a stronger teaching practice?

Chapter 26

Summary

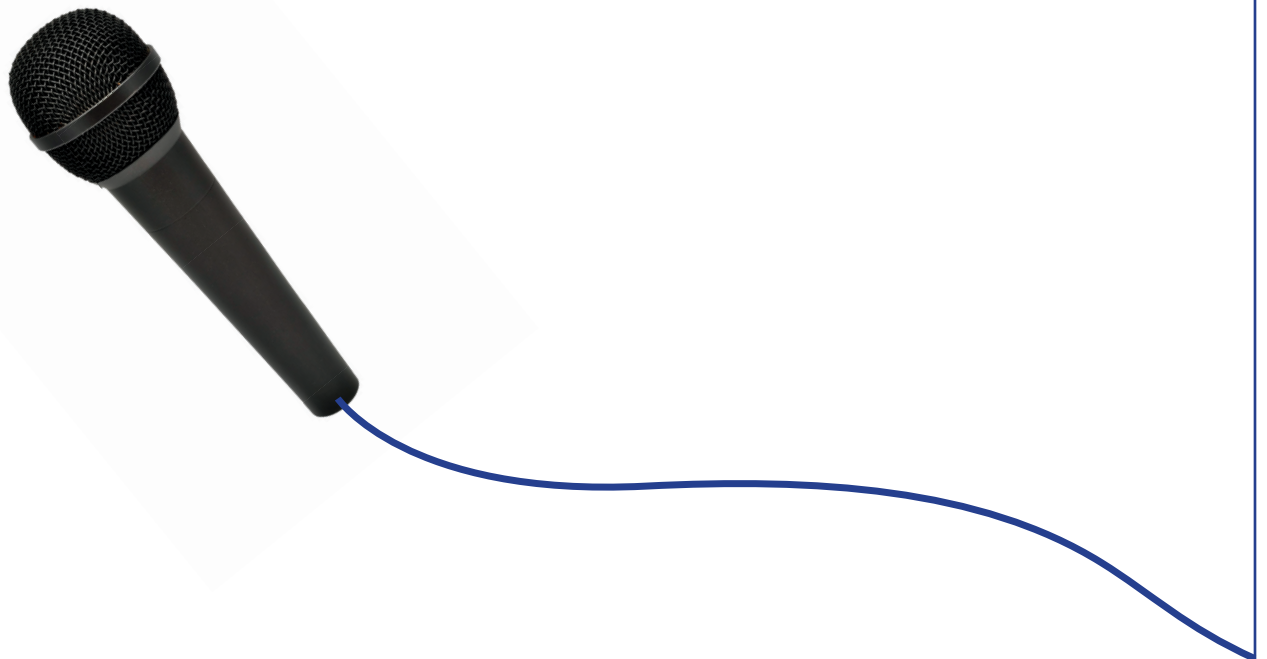
- Ali is reminded of the importance of his own voice and shares that authentic voice with his school.

Student-facing questions

- Al summons all of his courage to tell Melissa he likes her. Families have different expectations about romantic relationships (including crushes/dating) in school. What does your family think about this?
- Schools have lots of different ways they celebrate graduation. How does your school celebrate? What else do you wish they did?
- Al says that “waiting is the hardest part.” Think about a time you had to wait for something important. How did you keep yourself calm and focused?
- When Al tells Ms. McIntosh he is nervous before his performance she replies, “That’s fantastic.” How can being nervous be a good thing? The next time you are feeling that nervous, what are the important things to remember?
- Al makes a last-minute change to his poem. What were the risks and benefits of doing so? If you were in the same situation, what would you do?
- In Al’s final poem, he uses the following line: “I know you wanna change the world, but first you gotta change you!” What does that line mean? How can you apply it to yourself every day?

Teacher-facing questions

- Ali acknowledges that it is important to honour both where you are and where you have come from. How can we empower this kind of identity-affirming celebration for every student?
- What is the greatest gift you have ever received from a student? How can you use that gift to support you on your hardest days?
- In Al’s final poem, he uses the following line: “I know you wanna change the world, but first you gotta change you!” What does that line mean? How can you apply it to yourself every day?



Extension Activities for Cross-curricular and Integrated Learning

The Ontario Curriculum identifies the importance of cross-curricular and integrated learning strategies for improving student academic outcomes.

Cross-curricular learning is understood as “a variety of overarching perspectives, themes, and skills are intentionally incorporated by educators, on an ongoing basis, into teaching and learning across all subjects and disciplines of the curriculum” while integrated learning “engages students in a rich learning experience that helps them make connections across subjects and brings the learning to life. Integrated learning provides students with opportunities to work towards meeting expectations from two or more subjects within a single unit, lesson, or activity.” Both approaches to learning encourage students to develop the skills to transfer knowledge and skills from one subject area to others and facilitates meaningful critical thinking.

Transferable Skills

Critical Thinking and problem-solving; Self-directed learning; collaboration; communication; global citizenship and sustainability

Cross-curricular and integrated learning

Social-Emotional Learning;

Grade 7 History

A. New France and British North America, 1713-1800

A1: Application: Colonial and Present-day Canada

- What social attitudes permitted slavery to exist in colonial Canada?
- In what ways are the lives of elderly people different now than they were in the past? What are the main reasons for the differences?
- In what ways would the experience of immigrants to colonial Canada have been different from that of present-day immigrants to this country? What accounts for some of these differences?

A2: Inquiry: From New France to British North America

- Why would French colonists, English colonists, and First Nations have had different views about the arrival of the Loyalists?
- What are petitions? Whose perspectives would they reveal? How might you find out if there are any petitions on the issue you are investigating?
- Why is it important to consult multiple sources when examining a historical event, issue, or development?
- What have you learned from looking at this event from different perspectives? Do you think all the perspectives are equally valid? Why or why not?
- Which format is best suited to communicating the results of your inquiry in an engaging and meaningful manner? Why?

A3: Understanding Historical Context: Events and Their Consequences

- What were some of the challenges facing Loyalists on their arrival in Canada? Did all Loyalists face the same challenges?
- What impact did rivalries among European powers have on the relations between French and English colonists in Canada?

B. Canada, 1800-1850: Conflict and Challenges

B1: Application: Changes and Challenges

B2: Inquiry: Perspectives in British North America

B3: Understanding Historical Context: Events and Their Consequences

- What was the experience of different Loyalist groups? What challenges did these groups face? Why did some Black Loyalists choose to return to Africa? Why did some Black Loyalists choose to stay in Canada?