

## **We Are Not So Different After All: An Insight into the Novel, Ask Me No Questions**

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### **Introduction/Rationale**

*I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion, and it is the spirit.<sup>1</sup>*

One day in class, I overheard two students talking about their religious affiliation. The young man said, “I’m Catholic” and the girl questioned, “You’re not a Christian?” He told her, “Catholics are Christians.” From these comments, it seems obvious that the topic of religion is usually not discussed and/or commented on in our classroom! In fact the only time that I approach the subject is when we delve into the sixth grade *Culture* unit. Religion is part of the *Culture Wheel* we use as we list examples that depict a person, civilization, or place’s culture. However, we breeze by this by only listing the name/title of a religion. At times students write the words iglesia (church), Dios (God), La Virgen (Virgin Mary) – but not much more. Besides my own personal discomfort stemming from growing up in a household in which institutionalized religion did not play a major role and my limited knowledge of the world’s religions, I am weighted down by the fact that my students are all ELLs who are recent immigrants or migrants and need to simultaneously acclimate themselves to a new school system, country, culture, language, and way of life. There is little time to delve into many subjects. Because they must learn the English language in addition to content area information, I am worried about teaching the basics of the English language including the use of proficient reading strategies and the writing process while weaving in the content area information.

And so began my journey into this seminar. As timid as I was the first time I took a teacher seminar about Shakespeare, I made my way through the required readings of the Koran and other texts as well as the additional pieces I had decided might be of some use to my research. My original thought was that the unit that I would create would be a bridge from the Delaware Recommended Curriculum (DRC) sixth grade *Culture* unit to the seventh grade *Conflict and Cooperation* one. Since I am the sixth and seventh grade social studies teacher for ELLs, I am charged with teaching both of these units. However, after participating so far in the seminar, and learning more about Islamic history and taking into account the unique needs of my students, I have decided that a better fit for the content acquired in this seminar would be to use it in conjunction with a book that we will read in the English Language Arts (ELA) course that I teach for multi-grade (sixth, seventh, and eighth) English Language Learners (ELLs). My students, whom all share Hispanic heritage, usually stay within our school’s transitional bilingual program throughout their middle school years, two-thirds of the students in my ELA class remained with me in the upcoming year. The students are placed according to English language acquisition levels and all take ELA at the same time. In doing so, we are able to move them freely between classes depending on their increasing English language ability levels. I teach the middle level in which most of the students are reading at about a second grade reading level in English. This year’s group is a bit different as we have gone to an inclusion model. Nine of the

24 ELA students are classified as special education. A push-in ELL special education teacher works with us a few times a week.

Keeping all of this in mind, I remembered a book that we presented a few years back at the University of Delaware's Festival of Words, entitled: Ask Me No Questions. The focus is on a Muslim adolescent's struggle after the events of 9/11. There are many similarities between the book's main character and my students: legal status, trying to fit in amongst American teens, struggling with adolescence, family life, amongst others. Our district's second unit in the sixth grade curriculum map's enduring understanding (overarching theme) is: ***Home, heritage, and experience influence our personal growth and sense of belonging***. In this proposed unit, students will focus on the guiding questions: ***How do the concepts of home, heritage and experience influence personal growth and sense of belonging? How are my experiences similar and different to others around me and in texts? How do good readers use the texts to make connections with themselves, other texts, and the world? and How do setting and mood affect the actions and nature of the characters in literary works?*** This book ties into the unit's overarching theme as it enables Nadira, a young, Bangladeshi immigrant girl to use her sense of home and heritage to help her to determine where she belongs and grow as an individual.

In the proposed unit, I would like for the students to spend some of the time listening to me read the novel aloud and building background knowledge about the Islamic culture while spending another part of the time reading the book's chapters in their groups/literature circles. Ultimately, to develop their writing skills in English, students will then apply what they have learned by (1) comparing and contrasting their immigration stories and lives with those of Nadira's family, (2) creating a diary from her perspective to include the information about the Islamic culture that we have showcased, and (3) identifying how the setting and mood affect the actions and nature of the characters in Ask Me No Questions.

## **Demographics**

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a school in the final stages of changing into a science/biotechnology magnet school serving students in grades 6 – 12. This past year it finally housed all of these grades making the school population close to 1000. It is considered an urban school, situated on the outskirts of the most populated city in the state of Delaware. This school houses one of the two middle level transitional bilingual programs (Spanish/English) in our district. At CSS, this special program is indeed a "school within a school" serving approximately 85 students in the sixth through eighth grades. They are the only students in the building who do not need to "choice" into the school by completing an application and interview process since this school is considered their feeder pattern which was established before the transition to a magnet school began. Although it is mandatory for our students to attend this school, it is a very positive learning environment for them. Throughout the transition, there has been an increase in student achievement by all those in the building and improved student behavior. All are recent immigrants from Latin American countries (mostly Mexico) or migrants from Puerto Rico. These students have all of their content area classes – English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, mathematics, and science) with the program's teachers. I am one of these teachers. These native Spanish speaking ELLs face many challenges as they enter middle school: reading pressures escalate due to more demanding texts and they must learn the English language in addition to the content area information.

## Aspects of Islamic Culture

The teaching of the aspects of Islamic culture will be infused throughout our reading of the novel as the information comes up in the different chapters. In this way, my ELLs, who have no prior knowledge regarding Islam will be able to categorize what they learn and connect it to something that they already know. This is essential for all students but in particular these youngsters who are acquiring the English language and content area information simultaneously. I have organized the information they will learn about into aspects such as the Koran, Five Pillars including Ramadan, and Mosque. For each of these mini-lessons, students will be provided with a short non-fiction text about the topic and various video segments. At our seminar leader's suggestion, there will be a listening component added to the unit – music. As ELLs benefit from this activity, it will give them an opportunity to hear the *Call to Prayer*. This will provide students with access to informational texts that correspond with what they are reading in the novel and visuals to help them construct meaning of the new information they are being presented with. I also feel strongly about beginning the unit with information about identity and stereotypes. Many would argue that this is a case for Islam and Muslims. Since the horrific events of 9/11, some have equated Islam with terrorism. For those who may know little about the faith, they have already made many assumptions/stereotypes about the people of this faith. Although Islam is the fastest growing religion at about 2.9% a year and now accounts for approximately 22% of the world's population,<sup>2</sup> many people are still unfamiliar with it and/or have misconceptions. This holds true for my students as well. As recent immigrants of a Hispanic background, others have viewpoints or stereotypes of them and their families.

Although Muhammad is not directly commented on in the novel we will be reading, I can introduce him through a discussion of the historical information in the Koran. In Callope: Exploring World History's volume on the Qur'an, there are a few non-fiction pieces of text for students to read. For example, there is an easy-to-read two paragraph introduction to Muhammad explaining about his birth, childhood, career, and revelations from God's messenger, the angel, Gabriel. This is a format that students will be able to easily follow along with. Muhammad was born in C.E. 570 in the city of Mecca. His father had passed away prior to his birth. At age six, his mother died leaving him an orphan. He went to live with his uncle who was a merchant.<sup>3</sup> He had a variety of jobs over the years yet excelled as a caravan leader on trading missions. He married Kadija, a wealthy widow. Together, their business became extremely successful. Over time, Muhammad became unhappy with the ways of society, with the erosion of tribal values – for example, helping one another. Muhammad received his first revelation from God when he was forty years old and continued to receive them over time in which he recited God's messages into a format known as the Koran (Qur'an).<sup>4</sup> In our seminar, we learned that Muhammad was illiterate at least in a functional sense in that he was unable to read and write. This is plausible, according to Seminar Leader, Fox, because Muhammad was raised as an orphan, and it concurs with the argument for the divine authorship of the Koran. The more illiterate Muhammad was, the more miraculous is the Koran. However, others state that Muhammad was considered a *tabla raza* with no thoughts of his own. Many critics think this is difficult to believe as Mecca, where he grew up, was a cultural, economic, and political powerhouse.

The Koran (Qur'an), the holy book of the Muslims, comprises “114 chapters called suras and 6,236 verses called ayat, or ‘signs’.”<sup>5</sup> The word , Qur'an literally means “a recitation or a collection of things to be recited.”<sup>6</sup> “The teachings are the heart of the Islamic belief, and its

basic message is that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”<sup>7</sup> According to Dr. M.A. Muqtedar Khan, a guest lecturer to our seminar, Muslims believe the Qur’an is the word of God and has not been altered in any way. It is written in Arabic and followers believe it cannot be translated (although it is) because it is not entirely the true word of God when it is translated. Muslims are expected to recite the words in Arabic, including young children, even though they may not fully understand what they are saying.<sup>8</sup> It is considered to be the sacred word of God and “Muslims use the Qur’an to guide their every action and thought. It teaches about many things – God (who “lists 99 names which Muslims can recite and meditate on with the help of a 33-bead rosary”)<sup>9</sup>, prophets, values, morals, virtues, life, and death.”<sup>10</sup> The Qur’an indicates appropriate behaviors that should be exhibited including no lying, stealing, or murdering. Treating others with kindness is important in this life which is considered a test. One will either be rewarded or punished afterwards.<sup>11</sup> Ways of organizing family, society, and laws are included in the Qur’an. The most important message is that there is only one God (Allah) and that people should submit to him.

The word, mosque “is derived through Spanish and Latin from the Arabic word masjid, which literally means a ‘place for bowing down in prayer.’”<sup>12</sup> Mosques are the sacred place where Muslims join together to worship God (Allah). They also serve as community centers including religious education<sup>13</sup> as seen in Ask Me No Questions when Nadira speaks of her Ali-Uncle who is “always at the mosque a few blocks away, where he sits cross-legged on the small carpets and explains the Koran to the little boys gathered around him.”<sup>14</sup> Other functions include: a resting place for travelers, community meetings, safe place for sleep, and a location to receive news.<sup>15</sup> Mosques vary in style – simple to complex – depending on the country in which they are located. Although their styles may be different there are some commonalities between them. These include a tower, or minaret, which has a balcony from which the crier, muezzin, calls Muslims to prayer. “In Arabic, the muezzin calls out, ‘God is great!’ He ends with, ‘there is no god but Allah!’”<sup>16</sup> In modern times, microphones may be used to broadcast the call to prayer.<sup>17</sup> A courtyard with a fountain used for cleansing before prayer is surrounded by four halls called iwams.<sup>18</sup> The walls are adorned with “abstract and geometrical, representing divine harmony. Since Muslims are careful to avoid worshipping other gods, there are no distracting pictures of people or animals in mosques.”<sup>19</sup> There are two additional objects called the mihrab, a niche in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca, the direction they always face while praying and the minbar, or pulpit where the imam (religious leader) delivers the sermons which are given on Friday, an important day for worship.

The Five Pillars are demonstrative of how Muslims should lead their lives – how their beliefs should be put into action. (1) Shahadah is the profession of faith. One publically proclaims one’s belief that “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger.” (2) Salah are the five daily prayers that are said in Arabic. Times for the prayers include: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, just after sunset, and after dark. One should wash beforehand to cleanse themselves, remove their shoes, and pray on a mat.<sup>20</sup> “They perform a set of ritual movements, including standing, bowing and kneeling, to show their submission to the will of Allah.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, prayer may be observed by oneself in one’s home or with others – for example, at a mosque. This is more “preferable because praying with others reinforces social bonds within a community.”<sup>22</sup> It is more preferable. However, there are some exceptions. If one is sick or traveling, prayers do not need to be completed. Additionally, if you are unable to pray one can work with out with your spiritual advisor.<sup>23</sup> (3) Zakah or charity, is a Muslim obligation. For those who are able, one

should give a portion of their earnings. This has two purposes: to redistribute wealth amongst the people, to provide for the poorest of the people and to make Muslims focus not only possessions and/or things but the love of God.<sup>24</sup> There is also some leeway in that one can give of their time to the community as well.<sup>25</sup> (4) Sawm means fasting. The Islamic calendar is lunar based, meaning it follows the lunar phases. Ramadan, the ninth month, is a period of religious observation that lasts for the entire month.<sup>26</sup> Since the lunar calendar changes according to the phases, so does Ramadan observance. During this month, Muslims do not eat or drink anything during the day, when there is sunlight. During this time they are reminded that all peoples are equal, they should never overindulge, and that they should study the Qur'an.<sup>27</sup> (5) Hajj, pilgrimage, is a high hope for all Muslims in which they will travel to Mecca once in their lives to visit the Ka'bah, a place of worship built by Ibrahim and his son, Isma'il and restored by Muhammad to worship Allah.<sup>28</sup> This pilgrimage takes place during the twelfth month and consists of a sequence of events, a rite of passage that takes one month to complete. Afterwards, you are able to change your name. If one is unable to go, one must do his best to send someone else.<sup>29</sup> An example of this seen in the Autobiography of Malcolm X in which his strong sister, Ella, helped him with the finances to go to Mecca. He had brought her into Islam and through her real estate sales she had been saving to go on Hajj. Yet, at the time, she believed it was more important for Malcolm X to go.

### **Ask Me No Questions**

This Young Adolescent (YA) book focuses on a teenager named Nadira. She and her family (father, mother, and older sister) came from Bangladesh on a travel visa and stayed past the allotted time limit. At first, they lived in fear, a transient lifestyle, terrified they would be discovered. After time, their fears eased. Their lifestyle became more normal. They purchased things for the apartment they were making into a home, their father, Abba, held on to a steady job of waiting tables in a restaurant in Manhattan. Nadira's older sister, Aisha, excelled in school and looked forward to attending a prestigious college to become a doctor. Nadira, walks between two worlds, the *old world* of her parents, a more traditional view including many of the Islamic ways and the *new world* in which she finds herself with all of the American kids including iPods, computers, and flare-legged jeans. Their paperwork was boggled by one lawyer who was later investigated and then things came to a halt with the events of 9/11. Their family begins to suffer due to the after effects of 9/11 including the anti-Muslim immigration policies. Abba is arrested and detained at the Canadian border when the family tried to flee the United States and ask for asylum in Canada. The family is separated as their mother stays in a shelter near the border prison while the girls drive back to stay with their aunt and uncle's family waiting. Their once strained sibling relationship changes as they form a bond to try and help their parents by writing letters and gaining information from the local mosque to help their father's case. Throughout the book there are various mentions of the Islamic culture including mosque, prayer, the Koran, Ramadan, Allah, among others. In this way, I will be able to introduce my students to the Islamic culture integrating its' aspects throughout the novel study. Mini-lessons of these aspects will help students to be able to relate the new information to the novel's characters as well as their own lives.

As stated previously, a central idea is that students will walk away from reading this novel being more knowledgeable about the Islamic culture and being able to relate to the main character, Nadira, being able to connect with her. My students are about the same age as the

main character (14) ranging anywhere from 11 – 14 years old. Topics that come up in the novel include: adolescent insecurity and not belonging, adapting to a new culture, legal status in the United States, and sibling relationships. I have created a chart that includes these various examples from the text about each of the themes (Appendix B).

Adolescent insecurity is something that my students have in common with Nadira. They are constantly concerned about how their hair looks, what clothes they are wearing, and what others are saying about them. Nadira faces insecurity regarding her weight. Although her mother states she's just a little big for her age, the doctors tell her that she needs to not eat as many sweets. Nadira is the only person in the family who is overweight. She volunteered for an extra period of physical education but the other students just made fun of her when she tried to participate.<sup>30</sup>

Adapting to a new culture, country, and language is another commonality between my students and Nadira. My students strive to be like others in our school. They put on their skinny jeans and pick up on the English words such as *cool*, *lame*, *my friend*, among others. They are always trying to fit in. In Ask Me No Questions, Nadira's sister exhibited this same type of behavior:

She began to study the other kids – especially the American ones. She figured out how they walked, what slang they used. Sometimes she'd stand in front of the mirror practicing phrases like "my mom" or "awesome." The next day she'd come back from school turning the phrase a little differently, shrugging her shoulders in that way that American kids do to show nothing has ruffled them. In sixth grade she figured out which clique of girls she wanted to join. She studied what they wore, their flare-leg pants, their macramé bracelets, and she begged Ma to take her shopping to buy exactly the same things. At first Ma was hurt. Then she figured Aisha's changes might be a good thing if she was going to really make it here.<sup>31</sup>

Legal status is another common factor between my students and Nadira's families. Many of them and/or their parents have entered the country and are working on their paperwork. At times one hears jokes about the Migra, taking things a little less seriously than what Nadira seems to feel in the book. However, despite this immaturity perhaps, a few of my students, despite their impeccable grades, will not have an opportunity to attend college much like Aisha's situation. Nadira is affected by these words yet does not fully understand how or why: "*Special Registration. Deportation. Green card. Residency. Asylum. We live our lives by these words, but I don't understand them.*"<sup>32</sup>

All of my students have siblings just as Nadira has a sister, Aisha. My students complain about their siblings just like any other kid their age. There are always stories to hear in the morning about how the sister borrowed her shirt and ripped it or how his brother wrestled him down and he hit his head on the coffee table. Nadira and Aisha's sibling relationship is also strenuous:

Aisha and I, we never hit it off, really. She's the quick one, the one with a flashing temper whom Abba treats like a firstborn son, while I'm the slow-wit second born who just follows a long.<sup>33</sup>

Again, this is seen in how Aisha responds to Nadira:

She slaps the covers. "Come on, Fatso. Let's go." "Where?" "Just get dressed. I'll tell you later." Here I was feeling a little sorry for Aisha, and then she calls me names and bosses me around."<sup>34</sup>

## **Objectives**

Our state's recommended curriculum units are created following the Understanding by Design model based on research and theory by Grant and Wiggins. The overarching idea is to teach for understanding beginning from the end, focusing on what you want students to know. Enduring Understandings are the big ideas of the unit and are vital to students' comprehension of content and concepts. They have lasting value and help to make the content meaningful. However, it is my understanding that the state of Delaware is aiming to change this format to follow Learning Focused. This is "a comprehensive continuous school improvement model that: provides schools with consistent learning and exemplary strategies instruction, and integrates research-based exemplary practices."<sup>35</sup> In practical terms, it is a graphic organizer that highlights many of the same things as the UbD model such as essential questions and highlighted vocabulary to include in the instruction. Students will recognize that home, heritage, and experience influence our personal growth and sense of belonging. In addition, they will realize that a writer uses setting and mood to affect the actions and nature of the characters in literary works using Ask Me No Questions as a model. Moreover, they will understand that readers are able to recognize their own thoughts and behaviors – see themselves – in the lives of others as good readers are able to make connections to the text. Lastly, critical readers learn to locate, evaluate, and use evidence to be able to compare and contrast texts.

## **English Language Arts Essential Questions**

1. How do the concepts of home, heritage and experience influence personal growth and sense of belonging?
2. How are my experiences similar and different to others around me and in texts?
3. How do good readers use the texts to make connections with themselves, other texts, and the world?
4. How do setting and mood affect the actions and nature of the characters in literary works?
5. How do critical readers learn to locate, evaluate, and use evidence to be able to compare and contrast texts?

## **Strategies**

Incorporating literacy skills into each lesson is essential to my students' success. This is especially true for adolescent ELLs who are reading well below grade level. If students receive additional reading instruction in the content areas, they will be able to transfer these skills to the

other subject areas. I have seen this occur in my own classroom in which I am responsible for English and Social Studies instruction. The literacy skills students learn in English class are successfully transferred to their other content courses and vice versa. My ultimate goal is to enable students to be successful both linguistically and academically when they are mainstreamed into a regular education classroom.

### Proficient Reading Strategies

About one-third of the students have already been in our class. However, many, if not all, will need assistance to become proficient in the use of or familiar again with the reading strategies. They are able to learn these strategies by having a teacher explain, demonstrate, and apply them while reading. I have been doing this during the beginning of our school year/time together. In the novel, Ask Me No Questions, students will be able to connect to many of the happenings, especially the ones about family life and school. It is vital to allow for opportunities to practice the strategies with the students, providing feedback and time for discussion. ELLs' use of proficient reader strategies (predicting, making connections, questioning, inferring, visualizing, determining the main idea, and summarizing) to assist them before, during, and after reading is critical to their comprehension of complex texts. All of these strategies can provide ELLs with the tools they need to construct meaning from the complex texts that they are required to read in all of their content area classes.

### Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary development activities help to highlight the most important words for text comprehension. These activities help to change students' understanding of the meanings through direct instruction and context. Children learn the majority of their vocabulary indirectly in the following three ways: conversations with adults, adults reading to them, and reading on their own. Explicit instruction in vocabulary is critical to increase ELLs text comprehension and content knowledge.

As a teacher, one becomes aware of a variety of barriers to vocabulary development. These include the complexity of the English language, word poverty, and lack of background or prior knowledge. All of which present issues for teachers. In addition, ELLs' parents are not proficient in English and are unable to help in the home. Despite this, there are some tips for teachers in regard to vocabulary development. First, start with what students already know, build new terms and concepts on this information. Second, provide students with multiple exposures to new terms and concepts. They need varied activities to remember the words and their meanings. Third, include discussion as one of the vocabulary activities. Lastly, teaching vocabulary words through the content is more effective than teaching in isolation. Vocabulary needs to be taught explicitly and be part of the daily curriculum. This is especially true in this unit in which the content vocabulary associated with Islam will be unfamiliar. Words such as Qur'an and mosque are new to them yet their concepts are not. Using prior knowledge of concepts will be helpful in that students will be able to attach meaning to "foreign" words more easily.

### Graphic Organizers



A graphic organizer is “a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships among facts, terms, and ideas within a learning task.”<sup>36</sup> In my classroom, two of the first words students learn in English are “graphic” and “organizers”! Using graphic organizers helps to make content more supportive for students, scaffolding the information to be learned and giving them access to content that otherwise might be too difficult for them. This also helps to organize complex information into a much easier-to-read format<sup>37</sup> which is helpful to ELLs. In our case, we will use graphic organizers to organize the general information pertaining to biography so that they can get a visual picture of the important concepts related to biography. Additionally, they will create graphic organizers to take notes, compare and contrast themselves with a main character and complete their writing pieces.

### Collaborative Learning/Groupwork

Students need to learn how to work together to accomplish goals – those set by the teacher and by themselves. This is a basic requirement for many positions or jobs that they will hold in the future. Working together, relying on each other helps to build team working skills. In collaborative learning, each group member is accountable to each other, dependent upon each other and contributes the established goals. Everyone has some strength to share.<sup>38</sup> Together, more is accomplished. Opportunities to learn about each other before and while working help to promote the camaraderie and cohesiveness necessary to work well together. Individual and group evaluations are necessary to monitor the group’s work (product) and their progress in teamwork.

### Literature Circles

Student discussion is vital in this unit. Students need multiple opportunities to read, re-read, and discuss texts with each other. Literature circles provide ELLs with opportunities to use the English language in meaningful ways while being supported by their peers. They may be unable to do this in whole class situations because they are self-conscious and do not want to look foolish in front of a large group of their peers. Due to the smaller group size, students are able to have more turns to participate in a conversation, and experience less anxiety about speaking in front of others. In Literature Circles, students co-construct meaning by using good literacy practices such as questioning, clarifying and connecting new information to what they already know.

### Compare/Contrast

The ability to compare and contrast characters, texts, among other items is a skill that is necessary for students in their academic studies as well as life. This type of exercise helps students to “make connections between texts or ideas, engage in critical thinking, and go beyond mere description or summary to generate interesting analysis”<sup>39</sup> Students will compare and contrast their lives and immigration stories with the main character, Nadira, of Ask Me No Questions. In doing so, students will practice this important skill by focusing on the similarities and differences between themselves and Nadira. They will develop a better understanding of not only Nadira’s life but of their own as well.

### **Classroom Activities**

Lesson One – Understanding Self to Better Understand Others (adapted from the Islam Project)<sup>40</sup>  
*What is my Identity? How is my identity alike and different from those around me? What does this mean? How does understanding my identity help me to better understand others?*

Anticipatory Set: Have students read and reflect on a poem about identity. They will discuss the following questions with their group members: What is identity? How can we define it? Groups will present their ideas of identity.

Directed Instruction: Explain various definitions of identity, categorizing these for students (categories could include: job, family roles, nationality, family roots, racial background, religious affiliation, club memberships, age/stage in life, etc.). Then, the teacher should model his/her own identity for the students enabling them to better understand the complexity that consists of internal and external forces, as well as cultural and social aspects.

Activity: Have students create their own lists. Ask if some of the items on the list are more important to them and why? Have students share with others what they have learned about themselves.

Assessment: Students will list the top three categories from their lists that they consider to be most important. They will choose one of these and write a brief explanation as to why it is important to them and why other people should be understanding of this aspect of themselves.

Lesson Two - Misunderstandings (adapted from the Islam Project)<sup>41</sup>

*What does the word stereotype mean? How does one stereotype others? What is the harm that is associated with this and why?*

Anticipatory Set: List the following words for the students: athletes, Republicans, immigrants, Muslims, and homeless youth (young people). Have students watch the “Fitting In” section of the video, American Muslim Teens Talk without sound. After viewing this section, have students talk with a partner to determine which choice they made about the common identity of the youths in the video.

Directed Instruction: Explain to students that “they rely on visual cues to make deductions about people they do not know.”<sup>42</sup> Use advertisements, media examples, and political cartoons to demonstrate how stereotypes are reinforced. Emphasize to students that a stereotype limits us to only one of our facets of our identities.

Activity: Have students view the film clip (Fitting In) – again, with sound. Show the film clip (Misunderstandings) also. Students should take notes during the film clip on the provided graphic organizer, citing examples of (1) how the students had difficulty fitting in, (2) Stereotypes about Muslims, and (3) Misunderstandings and (4) questions they may have about Islam.

Assessment: Completed Graphic Organizer and a *Check for Understanding* in which students need to compare and contrast their own situations with the students in the video.

Lesson Three – Muhammad, the Messenger

*Who was Muhammad and how did he become the messenger of Islam? What is his lasting legacy?*

This introductory lesson gives students an overview of Islam and focuses on its’ founder, Muhammad.

Anticipatory Set: Have students review a vocabulary list of words that are pertinent to Islam (Allah, Gabriel, hajj, Islam, Ka'aba, caliphs, Mecca, minaret, mosque, muezzin, Muhammad, Muslims, Pillars of Islam, Qur'an, Ramadan, Shari'ah, Sufism, and Sunni) and brainstorm what they know/what they think they know about them. Have students talk with each other about their thoughts. It is anticipated (at least in my current teaching situation) that most, if not all the students, will have extremely limited knowledge of any of these words.

Directed Instruction: Review the vocabulary words using a PowerPoint presentation including the vocabulary words associated with their visual representations. This will aid students in their understanding, especially ELLs who need a visual clue to words that may be difficult for them to conceptualize. Students will take notes to compare with their table partners afterwards.

Clarifications will be made after students have had the opportunities to view the PowerPoint, take notes, and converse with others to help construct meaning.

Activity: Two videos will be shown with viewing guides: McDougal Littell's World History: Medieval and early Modern Times/*What is Islam?* and the Public Broadcast System (PBS) Home Video/*Islam: Empire of Faith*. Students will work with their group members to read two short informational pieces about Muhammad. Together, they will (1) answer the focus questions and (2) discuss what they understood from the videos/readings and what they still need to understand better using a T-chart to organize this information.

Assessment: Students' *Check for Understanding* will ask for them to explain (1) who was Muhammad and (2) of his many accomplishments, which is the most influential for Islam?

#### Lesson Four – The Koran (Qur'an)

*What is the Qur'an and what is its importance to Islam?*

Anticipatory Set: Make a list of the books and/or documents that are important to you? What documents are important to your/our country? Why? As a whole class, compile a list and the reasoning behind their examples. Explain to students that they will be learning about the Qur'an, the most important book of Islam.

Directed Instruction: Students will be given historical information about the Qur'an – about how it came into existence – through a PowerPoint presentation. Students will take notes on a graphic organizer. After viewing the PowerPoint presentation and taking their notes, students will first compare these notes with each other and then the teacher should model for them her notes to ensure that students have the correct information written down.

Activity: Students will partner read a short, non-fiction piece of text about the organization of the Qur'an. Additionally, partners will be given a chapter from the Qur'an to read and summarize for their classmates.

Assessment: The *Check for Understanding* will have students listing 10 Important Facts about the Qur'an.

#### Lesson Five – The Five Pillars

*What is the importance of a pillar? What are the five pillars of Islam and how are they essential to better understanding the faith and its people?*

Anticipatory Set: Show photographs of pillars. Have students analyze the photos, write down what they think they are and their significance. Students can talk with a partner about their thoughts.

Directed Instruction: This lesson is a bit lengthy in that each of the pillars must be addressed. This will occur through a variety of means including: videos, books, non-fiction pieces of text, and chunks of the novel, Ask Me No Questions.

Activity: Pillar One – Shahadah (non-fiction piece of text and video *What is Islam?*); Pillar Two – Salah; (illustrated non-fiction piece of text and book/Mosque); Pillar Three – Zakah (non-fiction piece of text); Pillar Four – Sawm (non-fiction piece of text and children’s literature book about Ra,adam); and Pillar Five – Hajj (video *Seven Wonders of the Islamic World*)

Assessment: Diary Entries from the main character’s (Nadira) perspective about the Islamic faith.

These lessons will be injected throughout the unit study of the novel, Ask Me No Questions. Before beginning to read the novel, students will be introduced to the first two lessons. In this manner students will not only be able to develop an understanding of identity to reflect on who they are but also focus on the negative aspects of stereotypes. Being able to make personal connections to this content is essential to them to comprehend not only the humanity issues involved but the historical information about Islam. After students have obtained a foundation on Islam, the follow up lessons will focus more on the novel including the setting, mood, and character development.

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Bowker, John. *Beliefs that Changed the World: The History and Ideas of the Great Religions*. London: Quercus Publishing plc, 2007. An overview of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Indian, Chinese and Japanese religious belief systems are explained through a historical lens. Time lines are included.

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Budhos, Marina. *Ask Me No Questions*. New York: Ginee Seo Books, 2006. This Young Adolescent piece of literature is the book on which this unit is based. It tells the story of what happens to Nadira, an undocumented Muslim immigrant from Bangladesh and her family after the 9/11 events.

Cole, W. Owen. *Six World Faiths*. London: Cassell Publishers Limited, 2004. This text provides rich background knowledge about Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism, and Islam. Teachers will be able to gain a wealth of information from the concise overview of Islam (in addition to the other five religions) including the meaning, the mosque, the sources of Islamic law, among others.

Elias, Jamal, J. *This is Islam*. Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group LLC, 2011. This book is an excellent resource providing an easy-to-read overview of Islam. This would be beneficial for teachers to read. Middle and high school students could also read this non-fiction text.

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Meredith, Susan. *The Usborne Book of World Religions*. London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 1995. This is an easy-to-read text for young and/or struggling readers that provides factual information about the various world religions.

*Seven Wonders of the Islamic World.* Directed by Faris Kermani. 2008. This DVD tells the story of six young people from around the Muslim world. Their journeys to Mecca are recorded for others to experience.

Steele, Philip. *The Middle East.* New York: Kingfisher, 2006. This volume includes websites, book lists, colorful photographs and illustrations about the beliefs and cultural aspects of the many countries located in the Middle East area. Students will love the short pieces of text accompanied by many vivid photographs, artifacts, and maps.

*The Islamic World: World History A.D. 600-1500.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2005. This visual delight of photographs about the history of Islam shows National Geographic's talents at its best. Students will enjoy the easy-to-read text and visual cues helping them to better comprehend the information.

"*The Qur'an.*" New Hampshire: Calliope: Exploring World History, December 2003. The publication is excellent to use with middle school students. It offers good information in a "magazine type" format. There are also a variety of photographs and illustration which assist struggling readers.

*What a Billion Muslims Think.*

[http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/inside\\_islam\\_what\\_a\\_billion\\_muslims\\_really\\_think](http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/inside_islam_what_a_billion_muslims_really_think) This production can be streamed on-line and gives insightful information to what Muslims are thinking about a wide variety of topics.

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X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* London: Penguin Books, 2001. This book includes a chapter of his pilgrimage to Mecca.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

DE ELA Standard One: Use written and oral English appropriate for various purposes;

DE ELA Standard Two: Construct, examine, and extend the meaning of literary, informative, and technical texts through listening, reading, and viewing.

DE ELA Standard Three: Access, organize, and evaluate information gained through listening, reading, and viewing would be addressed in this unit.

DE ELA Standard Four: Use literary knowledge accessed through print and visual media to connect self to society and culture.

In this unit students will be viewing and reading (ELA #2) various types of texts (fictional and informative) which they will have to organize the information acquired about the characters in a fictional piece as well as the historical information about Islam (ELA #3) to make connections to themselves (#4). They will write an essay to compare and contrast their immigration stories and the lives with those of the main character, Nadira's family, create a dairy from Nadira's perspective to include the information about the Islamic culture (ELA #1). Lastly, they will identify how the setting and mood affect the actions and nature of the characters in Ask Me No Questions (ELA #2).

Appendix B

Ask Me No Questions Examples Chart

Page	Commonality	Example
44/45	Borders	<p>“Borders!” he yells. “What do you know of borders! Do you know what happened to my grandmother when she fled West Bengal? They murdered her! Neighbors turned assassins! Those Hindu mobs, they came upon her in the road, and they killed her. And not just her, but two of her children. Little boys, younger than you! What about that? You think you can just start again? I see you there! Sitting around, fat and lazy! What are you going to do? “Please, Uncle-“ “I tell you what we have to do. We have to stop asking Allah for so much. Because everything we ask for on this earth, every home we beg for, it is always taken from us.”</p>
1, 9, 61, 69, 77, 80/81/82, 90, 102, 151 and 152	Legal Status	<p>In my head, words keep drumming: <i>Special Registration. Deportation. Green card. Residency. Asylum.</i> We live our lives by these words, but I don’t understand them.</p> <p>8/9 After 9/11 New special registration law: Every man over eighteen from certain Muslim countries had to register. Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh. Some did, and were thrown in jail or kicked out of the country. More and more we heard about the people fleeing to Canada and applying for asylum there, instead of going into detainment.</p> <p>Ever since we came to America, there’s been a chain of mistakes about our visas that has only gotten worse with time. First Abba found a lawyer to help us file for residency. Every time we visited his office, though, he kept losing our files or was confused about where things stood. One day when Abba called, his number had been disconnected. Soon after that, Abba received a letter from the government that said our lawyer was being investigated for fraud. Turned out the man made all kinds of mistakes, filing for people in ways that weren’t allowed.</p> <p>All through social studies class I keep having this weird vision of a police officer showing up at school. I see his visor tipping down as he pushes through the door. He and Mr. Laird huddle together, and then their eyes comb me over. The other kids are snickering, laughing, and my neck grows sticky with sweat as they pull me away from everything I know.</p> <p>Besides the letter to our congressman and the Homeland Security director, Aisha’s gotten on the phone and called Abba’s boss and asked him to write a nice letter about Abba. We’ve even put in our school records to show what good kids we are, and Ali-Uncle has written a letter about the fund.</p> <p>Uncle being taken to the station by Immigration (82) His words hang in the air, vibrating like an electric wave. <i>We know what they mean. You’re illegal, and we can push this further. Don’t make a fuss. We hold the cards.</i></p> <p>Since we’re illegal we never get to go back to Bangladesh. We talk to our</p>



		<p>grandparents once a month on a phone card, and their voices sound far away, as if they could fade into the wire.</p> <p>“I keep having this dream,” she whispers. “Every time I go up on the stage, these policemen come and tell me, ‘You don’t belong here.’ Then they take me and lock me up in a cell with no light.”</p> <p>GRADUATION SPEECH ...referring to 9/11...they broke my father’s heart. And they broke mine, too.</p>
8, 57/58	Not Drawing Attention	<p>The thing is, we’ve always lived this way – floating, not sure where we belong. IN the beginning we lived so that we could pack up any day, fold up all our belongings into the same nylon suitcases. Then, over time, Abba relaxed. We bought things.</p> <p>When we came to America, though, we didn’t know what the right thing was. Here we lived with no map. We became invisible, the people who swam in between other people’s lives, bussing dishes, delivering groceries. What was wrong? We didn’t know. The most important thing, Abba said, was not to stick out. Don’t let them see you. But I think it hurt him, to hide so much.</p>
3, 59	Sibling Relationships	<p>Aisha and I, we never hit it off, really. She’s the quick one, the one with a flashing temper whom Abba treats like a firstborn son, while I’m the slow-wit second-born who just follows a long.</p> <p>She slaps the covers. “Come on, Fatso. Let’s go.” “Where?” “Just get dressed. I’ll tell you later.” Here I was feeling a little sorry for Aisha, and then she calls me names and bosses me around.”</p>
7	Families’ Work ethic	<p>Once we got here Abba worked all kinds of jobs. He sold candied nuts from a cart on the streets of Manhattan. He worked on a construction crew until he smashed his kneecap. He swabbed down lunch counters, mopped a factory floor, bussed dishes in restaurants, delivered hot pizzas in thick silver nylon bags. Then Abba began working as a waiter in a restaurant on East Sixth Street in Manhattan.</p>
12, 109	Feeling Like You Do Not Belong	<p>When I see those pictures, I want to press myself inside. Just like I want to go to Disney World and Las Vegas and play the slot machines, though Ma would freak. One day I was watching The Simpsons and they did this really funny show about Epcot Center. But I can’t even laugh at places like that because first I have to go there. Then I can laugh and be sort of above it all. That’s how you can tell the immigrant kids from the ones born here. We don’t laugh about those places. We just want to go.</p> <p>The first time Aisha came home crying from grade school because the kids were making fun of her head scarf, Ma said firmly, “Don’t wear it, then.” Ma got a lot of flak from her friends for that and for other choices she made with Aisha, like letting her go on an overnight trip to Washington, D.C. “let them peck like old chickens,” Abba laughed, “We know who we are.”</p>
32/33	Prayer/Koran	<p>Ali-Uncle is not my real uncle; we just call him that, like we do for all my parents’ male friends. He’s not as old, either, as all my other uncles, but he likes to wear a long kurta and he has a beard and he prays five times a</p>

		<p>day. Abba and Ma, they do some of the holidays, like they fast for Ramadan, but it's been a long time since I've seen Abba pull out the prayer rug from the closet. Ali lives by himself in a room over a dray cleaner's. In the mornings he works at a discount electronics store, moving boxes in the stockroom. Afternoons, he comes here to watch the register, and then stack the newspapers and shut down the place. When it's time for him to roll out his little rug in the back alley and do his evening prayers, I stand at the cash register and help gather the last papers. The rest of the time he's always at the mosque a few blocks away, where he sits cross-legged on the small carpets and explains the Koran to the little boys gathered around him.</p>
26/27	Insecurity	<p>My weight is a sore subject in our house. Ma says I'm just a little big for my age. But the clinic doctor says I have to cut back on candy and milk sweets and get more exercise. Nobody else in our family is fat, and sometimes I feel like I've been beamed in from another genetic planet. I took an extra period of gym, though most of the time the black girls pushed me around and laughed me off of the basketball court. I'm not good at any of that stuff. I'm kind of clumsy, and I get too winded when I run.</p>
24, 91	Adapting to Culture – Becoming American	<p>She began to study the other kids – especially the American ones. She figured out how they walked, what slang they used. Sometimes she'd stand in front of the mirror practicing phrases like “my mom” or “awesome.” The next day she'd come back from school turning the phrase a little differently, shrugging her shoulders in that way that American kids do to show nothing has ruffled them. In sixth grade she figured out which clique of girls she wanted to join. She studied what they wore, their flare-leg pants, their macramé bracelets, and she begged Ma to take her shopping to buy exactly the same things. At first Ma was hurt. Then she figured Aisha's changes might be a good thing if she was going to really make it here.</p> <p>I look over at Aisha, who's nervously palming her hair down. That's when I realize Aisha let me into her life because she's feeling left out of her own. She's known these girls since freshman year; they're like a tribe that's stuck together. They've climbed up all the honors and AP classes together, swapping notes, doing study sessions. It's from them that Aisha figured out how to be the girl she became – how to stay smart, what words to use, how to act in the school halls, especially when the tough girls give her a hard time for being so smart. But now she's not the same as they are; she's falling away into a corner. And she only feels safe with me, who knows what's really going on.</p>
18	Zeitoun Connection	<p>Abba loves this country in his own way; it's like this bowl he carries in his heart – so full, so ready to trust. And right now, as we head to the highway, all I can hear is the sound of his heart shattering.</p>
72	Mosque	<p>The mosque is dim and smells of leather and stale sweat. I push my scarf over my head and follow Aisha past the room where men are praying into a little office where Ali-Uncle is sitting at a desk.</p>

79	Allah	I think about what Ma said, how I'm patient and that one day people will see my slow, steady strength. And I keep thinking about Ali-Uncle, how he never hurries himself, and he always knows in advance what he's going to do or say. He once told me that every action, every word of his, is watched by Allah. If I say a word that is angry, he explained, then I should never be surprised by the harm. And if I say something good, then it is like watching my own garden grow, and that the greatest pleasure ever.
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<sup>1</sup>Brainy Quotes Website N.D. Khalil Gibran.

<sup>2</sup> Religious Tolerance.Org. Islam: How Many Muslims Are There in the U.S. and the World? [http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl\\_num.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_num.htm) (accessed January 5, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Calliope, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,10.

<sup>6</sup> Jamal J. Elias, This is Islam, 80.

<sup>7</sup> Inside Islam, Milliken Publishing Company, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Jamal J. Elias, This Is Islam, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Inside Islam, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Marina Budhos, Ask Me No Questions, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Jamal J. Elias, This is Islam, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Inside Islam, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Jamal J. Elias, This is Islam, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Inside Islam, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Meredith, The Usborne Book of World Religions, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Jamal J. Elias, This Is Islam, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Fox Lecture, September 9, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Calliope, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Fox Lecture, September 19, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Inside Islam, 34

<sup>27</sup> Susan Meredith, The Usborne Book of World Religions, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Fox Lecture, September 19, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Marina Budhos, Ask Me No Questions, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/> (accessed July 13, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.studygs.net> (accessed July 13, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center,

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/comparing-and-contrasting>  
(accessed on January 5, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Islam Project, <http://www.islamproject.org/>, accessed on December 30, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Curriculum Unit  
Title

*We Are Not So Different After All: An Insight into the Novel Ask Me No Questions*

Author

Barbara Prillaman

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

*Home, heritage, and experience influence our personal growth and sense of belonging.*

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

How do the concepts of home, heritage and experience influence personal growth and sense of belonging?  
How are my experiences similar and different to others around me and in texts?  
How do good readers use the texts to make connections with themselves, other texts, and the world?  
How do setting and mood affect the actions and nature of the characters in literary works?  
How do critical readers learn to locate, evaluate, and use evidence to be able to compare and contrast texts?

**CONCEPT A**

**CONCEPT B**

**CONCEPT C**

Identity and Stereotypes

Islam

Setting and Mood

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

What is my identity?  
What is a stereotype and how are people affected by one?

What is the history of Islam?  
What are the Five Pillars of Islam and how are they essential to understanding this faith and its' people?

How does the setting influence the characters' actions?  
How do characters' actions make a reader feel – how they help to create the mood?

**VOCABULARY A**

**VOCABULARY B**

**VOCABULARY C**

Identity  
Stereotype

Islam  
Five Pillars: Shahadah, Salah, Zakah, Sawm, Hajj  
Mosque  
Qur 'an

Setting  
Mood  
Tone

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**