



When a Brown Girl Flees

written by Aamna Qureshi

About the Book

Genre: Young Adult

Format: Hardcover, 336 pages

ISBN: 9781643795058

Reading Level: Grade 6

Interest Level: Grades 9-12

Guided Reading Level: Z+

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: HL 680 L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Conflict Resolution, Cultural Diversity, Dreams and Aspirations, Empathy and Compassion, Families, Realistic Fiction, Forgiveness, Friendship, Muslim Interest, Overcoming Obstacles, Religion and Spiritual (Islam), Responsibility, Southwest Asian / North African / South Asian Interest, Teen Interest, Young Adult/YA interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/when-a-brown-girl-flees/

SYNOPSIS

After Zahra Paracha makes a decision at odds with her beliefs, her mother forces Zahra to make an impossible choice about her future. So Zahra runs away. A train and a plane ride later, she finds herself in New York, where she relinquishes her past in favor of a new future. There, she must learn who she is without the marionette strings of control in her mother's hands. There, she must learn who she wishes to become.

On Long Island, Zahra stays at a bed & breakfast, unsure of her place in the world. Anxious, depressed, and grappling with guilt, she wanders aimlessly. She eventually visits the local masjid, where she is befriended by two sisters and drawn into the welcoming Muslim community there.

It is in this place of safety that Zahra's healing truly begins—but can she create a home for herself when the foundation is built on lies she's spun to protect her from the past? When a family friend recognizes her, will everything come crashing down? As Zahra tries to build a life for herself in this new place, the heart of the matter becomes clear: she can't run away forever. Can she close the rift in her family and truly, fully heal?

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Author's Note from Aamna Qureshi

"I first wrote this book in the spring of 2016, when I was a senior in high school and going through a lot of the aches and pains Zahra is going through. I was dealing with a lot of the same confusions and discomforts that accompany growing up. Everything seemed like a question mark. Everything hurt.

I didn't know how to navigate this world as a teenage girl, as a Muslim, as a Pakistani American, as a hijab, as a daughter . . . as anything. I felt so pressured—as teens on the precipice of adulthood often do—to know everything. Thus the not-knowing, wretched enough, was made twice so by everyone's expectations and my inability to fulfill them.

When I started writing this book, I truly had no idea how it would end. I didn't know what answers to give my main character because I didn't have the answers myself. But somehow, during the process of writing, the answers came to me, and I was able to grow alongside my characters. I hope, too, that this book gives you answers.

This story is a love letter to oneself. It's the type of book I wish I could have read when I was growing up, and it's the type of book I hope brings healing and clarity to whoever reads it. While I took great care in crafting this story and hope that I handled the sensitive topics therein with delicacy, please forgive me if you feel I mishandled any aspect of this book. The last thing in the world I want to do is cause anyone pain, especially with my words

All my love,

Aamna"

A Note Prior to Reading from *When a Brown Girl Flees*

There are themes discussed in *When a Brown Girl Flees* such as depression, anxiety, emotional abuse, physical abuse, self-harm, suicidal ideation, slut shaming, and PTSD that may be sensitive topics for student readers. Consider using plenty of resources to help prepare students for engaging with this title. If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or visit 988lifeline.org for support and resources. You may need to work with your colleagues and administrators to provide district or school materials, as well as engage caregivers.

Discussing Depression & Anxiety with Teens & Young Adults

In *When a Brown Girl Flees*, Zahra experiences depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and self-harm. This might be a topic that students could have difficulty processing and it is important to help students process this during their time reading this novel. American Academy of Pediatrics has resources available for educators on how to support children and young adults (<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/school-health/mental-health-in-schools/supporting-students-with-depression-in-school>).

Crisis Text Line offers resources on how to deal with self harm, anxiety, suicide, depression as well as

where to find help (www.crisistextline.org/topics).

Education Support offers resources for educators on self-harm and working in schools (www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/pyjfy2r3/24-self-harm-in-schools.pdf).

Physical and Emotional Abuse

There are scenes of physical and emotional abuse in *When a Brown Girl Flees* that can be upsetting and difficult to process for students. It is important to provide resources and help students process these topics during their time reading this novel. Child Help offers resources for teens dealing with physical and emotional abuse (<https://www.childhelpline.org/resources-for-teens/>).

The National Association of School Psychologists offers tips for parents and educators on how to support students experiencing childhood trauma (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/trauma/supporting-students-experiencing-childhood-trauma-tips-for-parents-and-educators>).

PTSD

Zahra suffers a traumatic event that causes her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This could be a difficult topic for students, and it is important to help students process these scenes in the novel, *When a Brown Girl Flees*. The Child Mind Institute offers a quick guide for educators on PTSD (<https://childmind.org/guide/quick-guide-to-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/>).

The U.S Department of Veteran Affairs offers information on how to recognize PTSD symptoms in teens and how to help (www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/teens_ptsd.asp).

The American Psychological Association has resources designed for teachers to respond to students exposed to trauma and who may need support (www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/trauma).

The themes in this story must be addressed and handled with deep sensitivity and open mindedness with the understanding that these issues can occur in any community and are not exclusive to Muslim or Pakistani communities.

Teachers must be aware and prepared that by teaching this novel (and the corresponding topics addressed in it) they may be addressing a legacy of harm and violence, specifically within largely minority and underrepresented socioeconomic groups.

Set the example of what culturally responsive teaching looks like:

- Collaborate with students to establish guidelines early on. This will serve as a reminder for discussion etiquette as thought-provoking topics are developed.
- Anticipate how your students will respond to controversial topics presented in the novel (abuse, suicidal ideation, self-harm, etc). While teachers should encourage students to share their views without fear of judgment, teachers should consider how to respond to emotion, and use this to guide instruction and for future instructional planning.

- Don't be afraid to share your own learning journey as it pertains to cultural identity and trauma. This will create a positive classroom climate and an overall feeling of sameness.
- Aim to include and discuss outside materials that align with the text and essentially address underrepresented groups' experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize their experiences.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What are your dreams? What do you want for your future?
- Have you ever been in a difficult situation where you didn't know what to do? Who did you go to for help? What plan did you come up with to address the situation? How did this situation make you feel?
- What strategies do you use when you're sad or scared? How do you cope with those feelings?
- Ask students what they know about depression. What characteristics do students associate with depression?
- What does it mean to be resilient? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging?
- Ask students to think about what their family and friends mean to them. How is family important to you? How do you interact with your family members? Your friends?
- What does it mean to be powerful? How can you exercise power in different ways? What are ways that power is abused? What people hold power? How can power affect others?
- How does community play an important role in your life?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, table of contents, author's dedication, and author's note at the end. Display the book and read aloud the title.

Book Title Exploration: Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about. What do students think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that? Discuss the cover illustration and have students talk about how the elements of the picture might relate to the title or content of the book.

Encourage students to stop and jot in their notebooks when they: Learn new information, have an

When a Brown Girl Flees

Teacher's Guide [leeandlow.com/books/when-a-brown-girl-flees/](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/when-a-brown-girl-flees/)

emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- the characters' Muslim culture and traditions in the text
- the importance of self-love and self-discovery in this story
- ways that trauma and abuse can demoralize others
- how young people show resilience through difficult times
- how friendship and community play a role in healing
- the complexities of familial relationships

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people and how it might benefit those who have gone through a similar situation and even those who have not.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

kiosk, roti, maghrib, Eidi, Allah, shalwar kameez, Zuhr, dua, iqamah, bakhoor, bismillah, masjid, Bollywood, Canva, Jummah prayer, Ramadan, taraweh, minaret, salaam, beti, dawat, saalan, naan, chicken tikka, pulao, ye kaun, Bechari, dupatta, Kismat, buoyant, halal, desi supermarkets, Junaid Jamshed, coriander, papri chaat, masala fries, poseur, samosas, iftaar, batameez, chalo, kaam karo, wassalaam, Khudahafiz, bile, besharam, sajdah, qibla, adhkar, carina, alhamdulillah, acha, bas, klutz, cannabis, Fajr, wudu, subhanAllah, idhar ao

Academic

coaxing, elusive, incoherent, mucking, defiant, poised, melancholy, clamor, caliber, hyperventilating, plausible, hyperawareness, peripheral, perturbed, inquisition, encapsulation, apathy, placid, frenzied, mesmerized, infiltrating, impervious, torpor, insatiably, rancid, exile, exhilarating, perpetually, brittle, sullen, smoldering, disposition, ghostly, mendacious, spontaneity,

mannerisms, merriment, impropriety, unperturbed, disingenuous, disobedience, elation, pretentious, unilateral, conceded, innocuous, haphazardly, transience, absentmindedly, prostration, feigned

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Chapters 1–10

1. What day does Zahra run away? What two choices does Ammi give her?
2. How does Zahra calm herself down when she realizes that she is all alone on this journey?
3. Where does she decide to run away to? What happens at the airport?
4. What is Zahra's experience on the plane? Why does she feel uncomfortable?
5. Why does JFK almost feel like home to her? What does it remind her of?
6. Where does she go when she remembers that it is time for Zuhr?
7. Who does Zahra meet at the masjid? What topic do they discuss at youth group?
8. Who does Zahra run into at Walmart? What is her reaction to seeing this person?
9. What does Zahra realize on the sixth day? What does Zahra do on this day?

Chapters 11–19

10. Where does Haya invite Zahra to go? How does Zahra feel about this? What does Haya convince her to do?
11. What does Zahra observe about Haya's family?
12. What does Zahra overhear the Chaudry family talking about?
13. How does the mall trip go for Zahra? How do Sadaf and Haya help her?
14. What does Zahra discover about herself after taking care of the young kids in summer camp?
15. Who does Zahra run into at the dawat at the Chaudry's place?
16. What does Zahra realize about Auntie?
17. Who is Carlos and how does Haya feel about him?
18. Where does Haya manage to get Zahra a job?

19. What is Zahra saving up for? What is she tired of feeling like?

Chapters 20-29

20. In August, what does Zahra still feel like doing? Why?

21. Who does Zahra run into? How does their conversation go?

22. What dream does Zahra have? What memory is awakened? What is Zahra doing to herself?

23. What does Zahra confide in Haya? How does Haya help her process her feelings?

24. Why is Zahra afraid to talk to Allah?

25. How does going to the masjid help Zahra with her healing? How does Zahra react when Imaan overhears her conversation with Haya?

26. Where does Zahra run away to? Whose voice does she hear?

27. What happens after Zahra talks to Imaan? Why does Zahra say she feels like she has taken the first step towards self-healing?

28. How does cooking play a role in Zahra's healing?

29. Five months have passed, what does Zahra realize about herself?

30. What do Sadaf and Haya tell Zahra about Ahsen?

Chapter 30-39

31. Zahra is back at the airport heading home, how does she feel?

32. Who does she call to pick her up at the airport? What does she notice about Ahsen?

33. How does her mama greet her when she arrives at the house?

34. Why does Zahra realize that she was wrong about Baba and Ahsen?

35. What has Ahsen been doing while Zahra has been gone?

36. How does Zahra react when she sees the boy that she had sex with? How does this empower Zahra?

37. What is missing from her visit with her extended family? Who does she pray to that night?

38. How does the conversation with Ammi go? What does Zahra realize about her mama?

39. What does Zahra wonder about her two lives?

40. What does mama encourage Zahra to do?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What do you think the author's message to the reader is? Read the author's note to understand the motivation to write *When a Brown Girl Flees*.

2. Zahra thinks in both Urdu and English. Why do you think Zahra thinks in both languages?

- What do you think she thinks about in Urdu? What do you think she thinks about in English? Do you think in any other language besides English? How does that make you feel?
3. Zahra is battling through different emotions throughout the story. What pushes Zahra to make the decision to go to the train station? What two choices had Ammi given her?
 4. What does Zahra remind herself during the first few days of her journey away from home? What brings her comfort in uncomfortable moments? What brings you comfort during moments of uncertainty?
 5. What is Zahra in search of when she decides to run away from home? What is she missing? What does she wish for?
 6. What coping skills does Zahra practice as she is deciding where to run away to? How do these coping skills help her? What coping skills do you use in moments of stress? How do they help you?
 7. What is Zahra's relationship with her religion? How does her relationship with her religion evolve from the beginning of the book to the end? How does her relationship change?
 8. What is Zahra's first experience like at youth group? What topics do they discuss at youth group? How does this make Zahra feel? How does youth group help Zahra reconnect with herself and her religion?
 9. How do Haya and the rest of the Chaudry family change Zahra's life? What does she learn from the Chaudry family? How is the Chaudry family different from her own family? Why did the author show the dichotomy between the Chaudry family and the Paracha family?
 10. What is Zahra's initial reaction when she overhears the Chaudry's talking about her current state? What do they say? What does she feel? What voice does she hear in her head?
 11. How does food help Zahra reconnect with herself? How does food help develop the different relationships in her life?
 12. What do Haya and Sadaf teach Zahra about self-esteem? What voice does she hear as the girls are talking about modesty and confidence? What voice does she decide to replace it with?
 13. How does Haya support Zahra's transition in Long Island? What does Haya help Zahra with? What does her support look like at the beginning of the story? How does it change throughout the story? What does her support look like at the end of the story?
 14. What about Haya and Sadaf's relationship resonates with Zahra? How does their relationship make her think of Ahsen? Why does Sadaf sympathize with Ahsen? What pressures do first born siblings have to deal with?
 15. The masjid is the center of the Muslim community. Why is the community important to Zahra's healing? What does she learn and realize in attending this masjid?
 16. When Zahra runs into Fareeha she is worried about what will happen next. What does Zahra realize about Auntie that she respects? What are the differences between Auntie and Mama?
 17. How does Zahra deal with the fallout with Haya and Sadaf after they discover that Zahra had

not been honest with them about Zayn? What does she dream of that night? What memory does this dream awaken? How is Zahra treating herself?

18. Zahra shares a traumatic event with Haya. What does Zahra share about how her mama treated her? How does Haya help her process this? What does Zahra realize?
19. Why is Zahra afraid to speak to Allah? What does she realize about her strength and self-worth?
20. How does Zahra change the way she tackles difficult issues? How does her problem solving change from the beginning to the end of the story? What is she doing differently?
21. What does Zahra do to lay a better foundation for her life? How does this provide her clarity? Who is there to help her lay a better foundation? How do these things help her life “fall into place”?
22. What encourages Zahra to return home? What information do Haya and Sadaf share with Zahra? How does her arrival at home go? How does her family react?
23. What helps Zahra get through the days after her arrival at home? Who or what does she lean into? What coping skills does she practice?
24. How does Zahra’s relationship with Ahsen evolve throughout the story? What is their relationship like at the start of this story? What is it like at the end?
25. What is Zahra’s relationship with her mama like? How does their relationship change throughout the story? What does Zahra realize about her mama? What does she realize about herself? How does her mama change throughout the story?
26. What does Zahra think of her Baba once she returns home? How did he deal with her leaving home? How does he play a role in her healing and in repairing her relationship with Ammi?
27. Baba shares with Zahra that he thinks that she changed Ahsen. In what ways has Ahsen changed? What does Zahra notice about Baba and Ahsen’s relationship? How has this also affected Baba’s relationship with Zahra?
28. What does the reconciliation between Ammi and Zahra look like? What is the secret to a Pakistani mother’s heart? What does Zahra remind herself of?
29. What do you think of the ending of *When a Brown Girl Flees*? How does this make you feel? What is Zahra’s life like? What does the relationship with her family look like? Is she pursuing her dreams? How does she feel?
30. What does the title *When a Brown Girl Flees* mean to you after reading? Why do you think the author chose this title?

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their

written work.

1. Select one of the characters from the book and analyze the character. How does this character contribute to the story? What characteristics do they have? Students may select Zahra, Ammi, Haya or any of the characters (regardless of their real or perceived importance to the storyline).
2. Imagine you were hired to write a "what happens next" book about one of the main characters in the book. Write a draft of your ideas, including a graphic organizer to help outline your ideas.
3. Identify at least one cultural connection you found in the book and compare it to something in your life.
4. Tell a story about a lesson you learned from your family. You might pick a story about discrimination, identity, or family as shared in the book.
5. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *When a Brown Girl Flees*? Why did you make those connections?
6. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world, such as on television or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
7. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? What is your takeaway from this book? What would you tell a friend about this book?
8. What do you think author Aamna Qureshi's message is to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Aamna Qureshi's intentions to write the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers?

Multilingual Learners Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are multilingual learners (ML).

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the sections of the book in order and have students summarize what is happening in each section.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they think Aamna Qureshi's message is in *When a Brown Girl Flees*.

5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of a word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Have students take note of all the Arabic words and their meanings mentioned in *When a Brown Girl Flees*.
7. Consider consulting www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org/ for more ideas on how to support Multilingual Learners.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Throughout the story Zahra struggles to understand herself and identity. Why is it important to give yourself the time and energy to discover who you are and what you want? Make a list of all the things about yourself that you love and what you want for your future.
2. How does Zahra demonstrate persistence and resilience throughout *When a Brown Girl Flees*? Identify a scene from the story that exemplifies how Zahra is persistent. What made you choose this scene? How did it affect you and what did you learn from Zahra after reading *When a Brown Girl Flees*?
3. How did Zahra deal with her depression? How did people in Zahra's life support her when she needed help? What did you learn about dealing with difficult feelings from Zahra's experience?
4. Have you ever felt pressure to be perfect? What does this pressure feel like and what strategies do you use to overcome the feeling?
5. Zahra experiences many emotions, and sometimes those emotions manifest physically. What are some healthy and unhealthy ways of dealing with emotions? In times of stress, what are different ways you can express yourself?
6. There are many kinds of families in the world. How does *When a Brown Girl Flees* show different families and family dynamics? What are the different ways people show respect and care

for one another in families? Students can brainstorm ideas on chart paper that are presented and accessible for the whole class.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Challenge students to explore the characters more deeply with writing tasks that require perspective-taking.** Write a letter from one character to another (i.e. from Zahra to her mom, Zahra to Ahsen, Haya to Zahra). Have students read/share their letters with the class.
- **Identify three major themes of the story.** Use details from the novel to support each theme in an analytical essay about *When a Brown Girl Flees*.
- **Assign students different characters from the book and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and also have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **Write an alternative ending to the story that is different from the one the author wrote.** Ask students to think about the following questions: What would you change about the ending? What would you change about the characters? Why did you write the ending in this way?
- **Have students read *Thirty Talks Weird Love* (leeandlow.com/books/thirty-talks-weird-love/) which is a coming-of-age story about a Mexican girl who must learn to love herself and use poetry to find her voice in the midst of tragedy.** As students reflect on the story, ask them to compare it to *When a Brown Girl Flees*. What are the differences and similarities between Zahra and Anamaria? What does each story demonstrate about family and friendship? What does each story reveal about the value of poetry and storytelling?

- **Write a letter to your future self or to your younger self.** What advice would you give? What are your hopes for that version of yourself? Have students refer to the dialogue that Zahra has with herself throughout the book.
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Aamna Qureshi.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a book? How did she come up with her idea to write *When a Brown Girl Flees*? What was it like to write the book? How has the book changed from the first draft to the final copy? Consider contacting Aamna to learn more about school and library visits (aamnaqureshi.com).
- **Examine the different literary elements that author Aamna Qureshi uses throughout *When a Brown Girl Flees*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc). How do literary elements look different in a novel? How does the artwork help convey the literary elements, such as foreshadowing or a flashback? Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *When a Brown Girl Flees*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? Discuss how the artwork and literary elements work together to support the story's themes and messages. See PBS's "Literary Elements and Techniques" video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>).
- **Have students identify a place in the story where Zahra's character changes in *When a Brown Girl Flees*.** Why do students think that was a point where Zahra changed? How does Zahra feel before the change, what causes the change, and then how does he feel and act after? Create a graphic organizer with a column on the left that says "Before," a column in the middle that says "During," and a column on the right that says "After." Afterward, have students write an essay using evidence from the text to support their findings about Zahra's character change.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Interview a family member about family history.** Create a T-chart that compares your family's culture and traditions by generation. What was it like for your parents? Grandparents? Your generation? Are there similarities? Stark differences?
- **Food plays a big role in *When a Brown Girl Flees*.** Have students consider how food played a role in healing her relationship with herself, her friends and her family. Students can research the different foods Zahra made and create recipe cards for those foods.
- **Encourage students to learn about the religion Islam.** For older students, consider teaching a unit about Islam and its history. PBS has a unit, "Access Islam," that contains lesson plans about the different historical elements of Islam (<https://www.thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam/lesson.html>). Learning for Justice also has a lesson, "Debunking Stereotypes about

Muslims and Islam," that can be used and adapted for students (https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_debunking_misconceptions_0.pdf).

Arts/Performing Arts

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Citing textual evidence, select a theme portrayed in the novel, *When a Brown Girl Flees*.** Create a visual presentation with illustrations, drawings, and any other creative materials to reflect how this theme is developed over the course of the text.
- **Have students illustrate a feeling one of the characters experienced in the story. What do they want to convey?** Students can think about a particular scene that stood out to them from *When a Brown Girl Flees* featuring the character of their choosing. What kinds of materials do they want to use? Have students share their pieces with a partner, small group, or whole class.
- **Have students reimagine the cover to *When a Brown Girl Flees*.** What would they change? What would they keep? If time allows, have students illustrate a new book cover.

School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Ask students to create portraits of their close friends through drawing, collage, or photography.** In writing, students should describe what actions and qualities they admire about their friend/s. Students can write in prose or submit a poem or song.
- **Encourage students to interview family members about a favorite or impactful childhood memory.** How did that event influence the family member? How did it affect the person's life moving forward? Consider having students, if comfortable, share their findings with a partner, a small group, or whole class.
- **Interview a family member about the history of their family.** Why is it important to understand your family history? Why is it important to know the different parts of the world where your family is from? If students do not know their family history, have them interview someone about the history of your town or city.



Ordering Information

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aamna Qureshi is a Muslim Pakistani American who adores words. She is the award-winning author of the YA fantasy novel *The Lady or the Lion*. She grew up on Long Island, New York, in a very loud household, surrounded by English (for school), Urdu (for conversation), and Punjabi (for emotion). Much of her childhood was spent being grounded for reading past her bedtime and writing stories in the backs of her notebooks. When she's not writing, she loves to travel to new places where she can explore different cultures, or to Pakistan where she can revitalize her roots. She also loves baking complicated desserts, drinking fancy teas and coffees, watching sappy rom-coms, and going for walks about the estate (her backyard). She currently lives in New York. Look for her at aamna-qureshi.com.

REVIEWS & AWARDS

Best Children's Books of the Year Winner 2024, Bank Street College of Education

"Amidst a backdrop of complicated familial love and found friendship through a faith-based community, Zahra's story paints a powerful and poignant tale of coming into one's own and finding hope in new beginnings." - **Christina Li**, author of *Ruby Lost and Found*

"Both heartwarming and heartbreaking, *When a Brown Girl Flees* is a poignant story about how finding your community can help you heal and learn to love yourself." - **Adiba Jaigirdar**, author of *Hani and Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating and The Henna Wars*

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