

Author: Safia Elhillo
Title: *Home Is Not a Country*
Genre: Young Adult Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Zahra V., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: July 5, 2022

Summary:

Author Safia Elhillo invites readers to explore the story of 15 year old Nima, who struggles with discrimination, loneliness, and the possibilities of roads not taken. Nima is a Muslim immigrant who came to the United States with her mother after their father's death. The move and the loss of her father has put a large toll on Nima, who yearns to learn about her past and her home country. Living in the prejudiced suburbs she resides in, Nima wishes more than anything to be Yasmeen, the girl her father wanted her to be. Before he died, Nima's father wanted to name her Yasmeen. After his death, her mother could not bear the pain and named her Nima instead. This causes Nima to have an existential crisis in which she wonders what life would be like if she were Yasmeen. Her father would be alive, she would be fluent in Arabic, she would know her roots and be close to her family. Most of all, she would be the beautiful, graceful, and intellectual being that comes with having a name such as Yasmeen. In reality, Nima is the opposite of Yasmeen. She is anxious and sticks out like a sore thumb in her new town. Her best friend Haitham is her only place of refuge, but after they are attacked following 9/11, she loses them too. Being a Muslim immigrant following the terrorist attack on 9/11 made life increasingly hard for Nima and her mother. She constantly faces Islamophobic harassment from her classmates and begins to resent her identity while simultaneously yearning for it more than anything. However, whenever she tries to learn about her background, Nima is only given scraps of information from her mother who just wanted to forget the land where she lost her love. Overall, this is a story that delves into how our past choices influence our identity and our sense of belonging in the world.

Questions:

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

Yes, the plot of this novel kept me interested because it was told in three parts. I thought of this approach and the inclusion of poetry within the book to be unique. It also helped me further understand Nima's character and her struggles as a Muslim immigrant.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

I think the pace of this book was just right. However, the plot did seem a little disjointed at times because it was told in three parts, but I liked the overall progression of the characters.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I believe this book is appropriate for all readers in 6th grade and up. While it does describe acts of violence and harassment towards Muslims and Nima throughout the book after 9/11, I think it is important to read about because these are actual experiences of many Muslims in America.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book for readers who enjoy young adult fiction and people who are interested in the mystery aspect of the novel in which Nima learns about her home country, her father, and herself.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

I believe it is important to understand Nima's struggles as a 15 year old girl in the age of extreme Islamophobia. After 9/11, many Muslims and people who looked like Muslims faced immense prejudice for their religion. Reading about the visceral harassment Nima felt on a daily from her classmates pulls at your heartstrings and makes you understand how Nima struggles in America and why she longs to learn about her family's past in their home country.

Rating:

5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!

Overall, I really enjoyed this book because it successfully addressed a variety of important topics while still maintaining an interesting plot line. I especially enjoyed reading about Nima's relationship with her single mother, as she still grieves the loss of her husband and works hard for her daughter despite the obstacles they face.