

Integration Guide for [Poet Against Prejudice](#), a BYkids film directed by Faiza Almontaser

Context: The September 11 attacks were a series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks committed in 2001 by 19 terrorists associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda. It was the **deadliest** terrorist attack on U.S. soil: nearly 3,000 people were killed. The attacks involved the hijacking of four planes, three of which were used to strike significant U.S. sites. American Airlines flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175 were flown into the World Trade Center's north and south towers, respectively, and American Airlines flight 77 hit the Pentagon. United Airlines flight 93 crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers attempted to overpower the hijackers. The plane was believed to be headed to the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. ([Britannica](#)).

Rationale: After 9/11, many Americans endured hatred, discrimination, and even violence due to rampant **Islamophobia** (dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims). In a film that she both directed and stars in, Faiza Almontaser gives a first-hand account of the bullying and discrimination she experienced as a child. As we watch, let's consider the following questions:

- How can we empathize with those different from ourselves?
- What roles do neighborhood and community play in shaping who we become?
- How can writing be an act of liberation?

Later, we'll consider these same questions through the point of view of Esperanza, the protagonist of Sandra Cisneros' collection of vignettes, *The House On Mango Street*.

POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

Faiza Almontaser is a 17-year-old senior attending the Brooklyn International High School. In 2006 Faiza immigrated with her family to Brooklyn, NY from a small farming town in Yemen. Raised as a religious Muslim, she often struggles to reconcile her cultural background with the realities she meets as a high school student in one of New York City's most socially dynamic neighborhoods.

At age 10, Faiza enrolled in the sixth grade as the only Muslim in her school. She had high hopes for her new education, but was soon discouraged by her minimal understanding of English and the anti-Islamic fervor she encountered among her

classmates. Without the knowledge of language to defend herself, Faiza spent her first few months suffering in silence.

Determined to find her voice, she spent six months learning enough English to begin speaking out against the discrimination faced by Muslims in her community. Now in high school she works as a peer trainer with the Anti-Defamation League, teaching her classmates the dangers and repercussions of racism. Faiza also works to combat her struggle with the written word; through poems and essays she challenges common misconceptions of Islamic culture, and expresses her visions for change and equality.

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Featured Individuals

- Faiza Almontaser, film maker
- Faiza’s parents, grandparent, and other family members
- Miss Merch, Faiza’s teacher from middle school
- Jamil, her cousin-in-law who is a police officer for the NYPD
- Khadija, Faiza’s peer from Yemen
- Imam Shaif Abdul-Mami, a leader in Faiza’s mosque
- Albert Maysles, Faiza’s mentor filmmaker

Essential Questions		
How can we empathize with those different from ourselves?	What roles do neighborhood and community play in shaping who we become?	How can writing be an act of liberation?

Additional Discussion Questions

1. When Faiza and her family immigrated from Yemen to New York City, what were some of the challenges they faced?
2. Khadijah’s family’s story parallels Faiza’s. How does Faiza describe what happened to Khadijah and her family? Why might Faiza have included her friend’s story?

This guide was created by Katie Collamore



3. List the ways in which Faiza experienced interpersonal oppression and discrimination from her peers in middle school.
4. What ways does Faiza suggest to combat Islamophobia? How do Faiza's cousin and her middle school teacher embody some of that change?
5. Imam Shaif Abdul-Mami is a Black, muslim man who is a member of the Cherokee nation. He has experienced discrimination based on many of his identities. What is your reaction to his story of visiting his friend as a young boy?

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