

# *A Reading Guide for Educators and Parents to* **I Don't Want To Blow You Up!**

Welcome to the **I Don't Want to Blow You Up!** reading guide for teachers and educators. These materials will be useful to teachers working with children and/or adults who are targets of suspicion and stereotyping, or with children and/or adults whose limited contact with people from other cultures might predispose them to stereotyping or other fear-based behaviors in a post-9/11 society.

These materials have been designed while keeping in mind the curriculum standards highlighted by the National Council for Social Studies. Our hope is that this guide, along with the coloring book, will help readers think critically about ethnic and cultural stereotypes, and will serve as a tool for discussion.

The individual features of this guide may easily be adapted to many levels and taught across the curriculum in **Social Science** [History, Civics, Psychology, Sociology, Political Science], **Language Arts** [English, Writing, Poetry], or **Media/Journalism** educational settings.



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**Credits:** *Reading Guide for Educators and Parents* developed and written by Sandhya Nankani ([www.sandhyanankani.com](http://www.sandhyanankani.com)).  
*I Don't Want To Blow You Up!* written by Ricardo Cortés, F. Bowman Hastie III. Illustrations by Ricardo Cortés.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**WHAT?** A coloring book for kids and adults.

**WHO?** In an age of yellow, orange, and red terror alerts, the book draws attention to the myriad people of different colors and cultures who are living peaceful and meaningful lives.

**WHY?** To counter the terrifying messages transmitted in the name of the “War on Terror.”

**WHERE?** At the airport, on the subway, in a shopping mall, on a playground, in New York City, in the United States of America, in the world.

**WHEN?** In a post-9/11 society. In the words of the authors, “We really just wanted to do SOMETHING to try to temper the terror hysteria that has gripped this country, and especially New York, since 9/11. We also wanted to address the epidemic of identity profiling that affects not just Muslims and Arabs, but an entire suspect community that has developed based on people’s appearance, name, country of origin, or faith.”



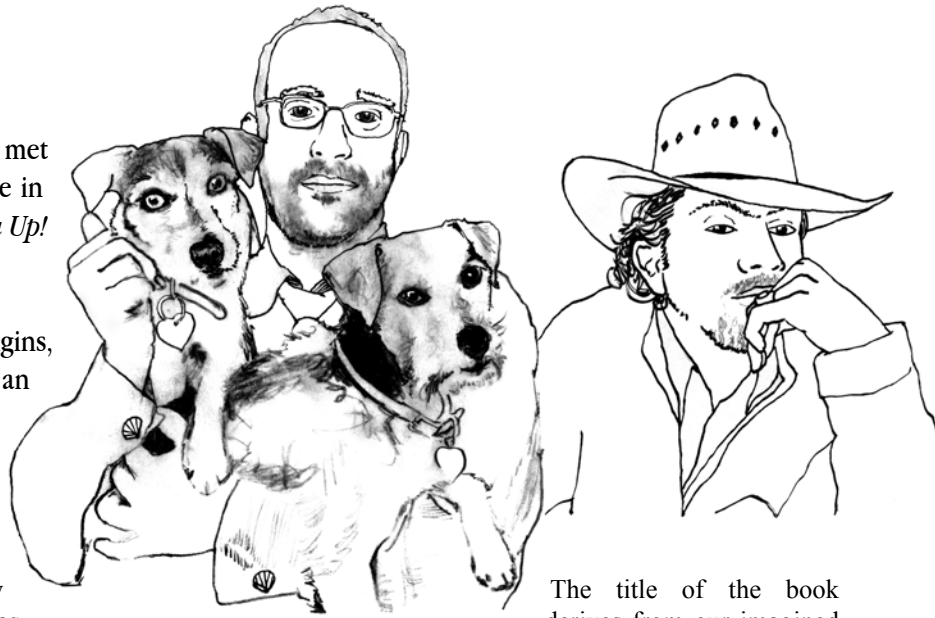
**HOW?** There are children in the U.S. and other western countries who are taunted as “terrorists” and “osama bin ladin” simply because they look Middle Eastern or have an Arabic name. We hope that such children might feel empowered when reading the stories of other inspiring and impressive people like themselves. At the same time, children who have been enlisted into perpetuating the terror myth might gain some new perspective by seeing some of their heroes in a different light, or by discovering new heroes in unexpected places.

**WHAT IT’S NOT** This is not a book that is meant to be handed off to a child along with a box of coloring pencils or crayons. Think of it as a tool for addressing a difficult and sensitive topic of discussion with kids who have already indicated some degree of concern or fear themselves, or who have had the experience of being the “suspect.” Say co-authors Ricardo Cortés and F. Bowman Hastie III, “We’re trying to promote the idea that when you meet someone, you should give them benefit of the doubt and assume they’re a good, loving person.”

## Meet the Authors

Ricardo Cortés and F. Bowman Hastie III first met as students at Columbia University. They live in New York City and *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!* is their first collaboration.

The following Q&A sheds light on the origins, purpose, and artistic choices of Ricardo, an illustrator and author of children's books, and Bowman, a writer and assistant to Tillie, the world's preeminent canine artist.



**Q: Isn't there a danger of unintentionally reinforcing the stereotype of Muslims as terrorists with the phrase "I don't want to blow you up"?**

A: Your question almost answers itself, at least in your supposition that a book titled *I Don't Want To Blow You Up!* is about Muslims at all. In fact, there is only one individual in the entire story who is identified as Muslim, and we've found it very telling that people consistently bring up the question of religion before the book is even opened. It reveals an already well-established (at least here in the United States) notion that Muslims are associated with Terrorism. Of course we don't want to perpetuate that stereotype—and neither are we trying to assert that Terrorists don't exist at all—but we think the balance of perception is already tipped far in that direction by many of our government's policies and the media's endorsement of them. Specifically, this book was not created to introduce terrorism to children, but rather to allow a discussion and dismantling of its definition by a generation already steeped in terror hysteria.

**Q: How did the idea for the book first come about?**

A: We were hanging out at the edge of a pier on the Hudson River, some time in late 2006. Neither of us can remember the exact conversation, but it had something to do with life in post-9/11 New York City. We might have been discussing the color coded "Terror Alert" system developed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the growing political concern over "immigration reform"; or the added security measures we've all had to endure at airports. We might have been talking about our own fears, and possibly recounting a personal instance of catching ourselves scrutinizing a person on the subway because for whatever reason, they seemed suspicious. We might have been trying to imagine what must go through the minds of people who have taken the brunt of these suspicions, and even hate, in recent years.

The title of the book derives from our imagined sentiment of someone who

is totally innocent yet still must face this sort of distrust and hostility from so many people they encounter, day in and day out. The statement, as we imagined it, is incredulous and defiant: "I don't want to blow you up!"

**Q. How did you go about selecting your characters?**

A. We chose characters who, because of their name, religion, country of origin, occupation, or some other factor of their perceived identity, might fall into the "suspect community," or because something about them might lend itself to a play on the words in the book's title. We also decided to include Marvin Bush, partly because so many people are unaware of his existence, partly as a sort of nod to the many conspiracy theories that have gained credence since 9/11, and partly because we just thought it was funny to throw him in there.

**Q. Who is the book's audience?**

A. We hope the book can reach a diversity of audiences. We know there are children in the U.S. and other western countries who are taunted simply because they look Middle Eastern or have an Arabic name. We hope those kids might feel empowered when reading the stories of other inspiring and impressive people like themselves. At the same time, the children out there who have been enlisted into perpetuating the terror myth might gain some new perspective about people they have been conditioned to fear. We don't necessarily think we'll be able to open too many adult minds that are already closed—although we do think that the provocative title might spur some people to pick up the book just to see what it is—but we did want to provide a tool that more open-minded adults may use to address this difficult subject with their kids.

## Meet the Authors (page 2)

**Q: Why did you choose to have a narrator for the book?**

A: We felt we needed some other thread—besides the subject of terrorism—to link the book's subjects. We also wanted a device or character that could engage the reader. Naeem is a friend of ours who was in on some of the early conversations that shaped the project. Initially we hoped that he would join us as a co-author, since he has more experience than either of us in political-oriented art, and much of his work deals with some of the same issues that our book touches upon. When Naeem's work took him out of the country he suggested that we carry on with the book ourselves. We initially thought to include Naeem as one of the subjects of the book, which naturally led us to expanding his role from subject to tour guide, or narrator.

**Q: Why a coloring book and not more of a story? Is there something about this style that you think works better in reinforcing a message?**

A: Storybooks can often come across as didactic or romantic, two things we wanted to avoid. We didn't want to burden the reader with too much text, but we wanted the book to be reality-based, which is why we chose to offer this selection of mini-biographies. By making it a coloring book, we're gearing the book toward kids, and also to adults who might appreciate exploring this serious topic without all the grim statistics and tales of injustice that so often accompany it. A coloring book also invites the reader to interact more with the book. To spend more time ruminating, not just reading.

**Q: Did either of you have any personal experiences that provided a context for being able to write the book from the point of view of your subjects?**

Ricardo Cortés: When I was 12 years old, my family took a trip to Italy. It was during a time of tension between the U.S. and Libya, if I remember correctly, and there had been incidents of terrorism including hijackings and armed attacks at the airports of Rome and Vienna. I almost refused to go on the trip—that's how terrified I was of terrorists harming me; I was certain they would be on the plane to get me.

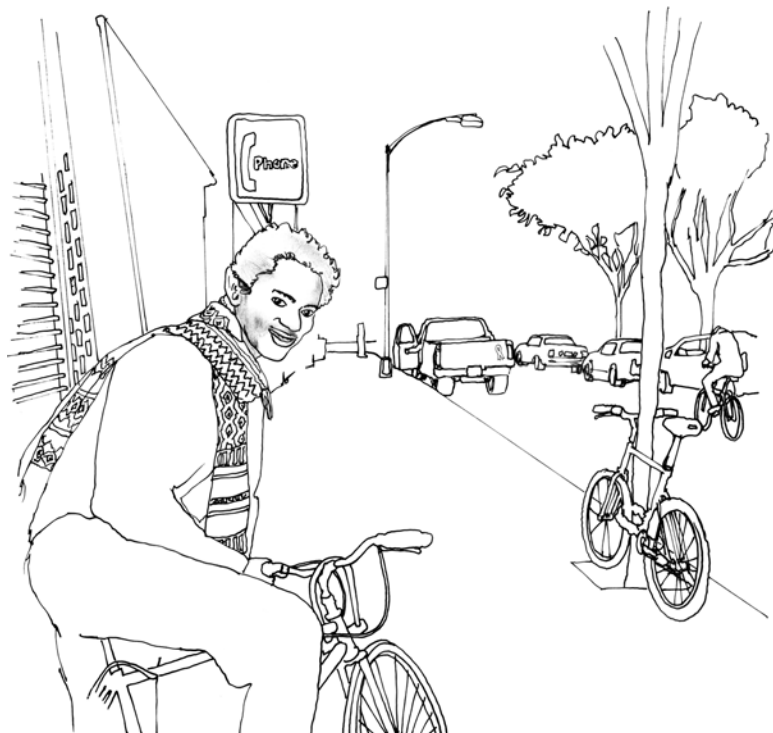
Well, my parents forced me to go, but I had my eyes peeled for any individuals that I considered suspicious along the way. Ironically, my father, who is Mexican, has the appearance of a Middle Eastern man, and I was relieved when we were stopped at the airport gate and taken aside for extra scrutiny. It was my firm belief that anyone who looked like my father should be considered dangerous, and I was only too happy to submit to the suspicions of the security detail. That incident showed me how even a well-adjusted, educated, non-bigoted child like myself could harbor incredibly irrational fears in the throes of terror hysteria. And how those fears could be misguided to the point of self-doubt and the sacrificing of one's own identity.

**Q: What have reactions been to the book?**

A: The response has been overwhelmingly positive. There are surely people out there who will find the book problematic, or even objectionable. But these objections are important, too, in generating thought and discussion, which is really what we are trying to do.

**Q: Have you got kids yourselves? And have they been busy with the coloring pencils on this?**

A: Neither of us has kids. But that hasn't stopped us from having fun coloring this book!



## LESSON PLAN: Elementary School (ages 5-9)

Here are some suggestions for a guided reading of *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!* The emphasis is on moderating a child's interaction with the book so that there is ample opportunity to discuss fears and experiences in a safe space—and to place this book in the context of recent history. A block of 40-50 minutes should be enough time to work with such a lesson plan. Children ages 5-9 are the group most likely to appreciate the coloring experience of this book. Encourage students to share their thoughts by seating them in a circle and having each one share his or her thoughts aloud.

### BEFORE READING

- Ask children: Do you know what 9/11 is? Are you ever afraid that it is going to happen again? Who do you think would try to attack Americans the next time? Has anyone ever told you that someone you know is not a good American and that he or she wants to hurt others? These questions will allow for understandings, fears, and impressions to emerge—and will allow you to guide the conversation in a meaningful direction.
- Ask children: Do you know what a terrorist is? Use these questions to draw out stereotypes of terrorists and fear-based responses pointing to a particular ethnic group, religion, or appearance. Then, introduce the book to children, telling them that this coloring book will show them that not all people who talk, look, or seem like the people they mentioned are “bad people” or will “hurt America.”

### DURING READING

- Seat children in a circle and have them read the book aloud. If you are a parent reading this book with your child, take turns reading.
- Invite children to pick a page they especially liked and spend 10-12 minutes coloring images on the page.

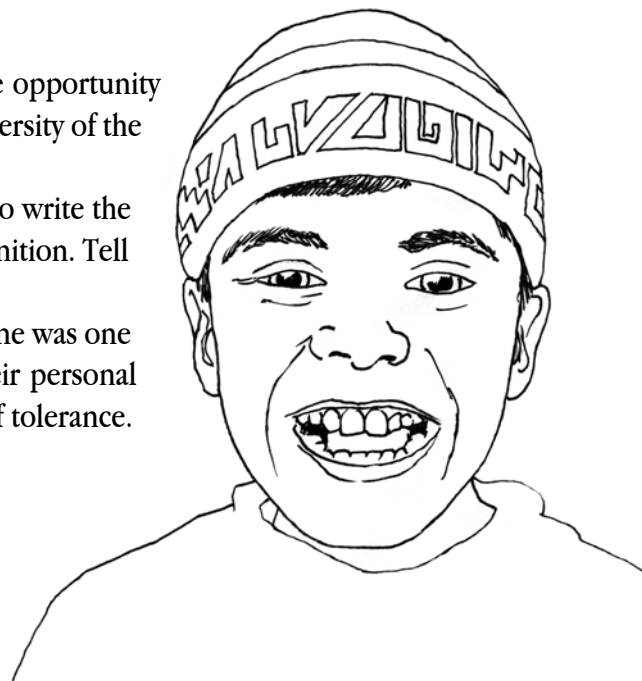
### AFTER READING

- Display the pages of the book that have been colored. Use the opportunity to point out how different the colors of all the people are; the diversity of the individuals portrayed in the book.
- Ask children: What did you learn from this book? You could also write the word “tolerance” on the board. Have children brainstorm the definition. Tell them that this is a theme of the book.
- Invite children to think about a time when they thought someone was one thing or one way and were proven wrong. Have them share their personal experiences, and use the conversation to emphasize the theme of tolerance.

Share the **Declaration of Tolerance**: To fulfill my pledge, I will...

- examine my own biases and work to overcome them
- set a positive example for my family and friends
- work for tolerance in my own community
- speak out against hate and injustice.

**We Share A World:** For all our differences, we share one world.  
To be tolerant is to welcome the differences and delight in the sharing.



## **LESSON PLAN: Middle School (ages 10-13)**

Here are some suggestions for a guided reading of *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!* The emphasis is on moderating a child's interaction with the book so that there is ample opportunity to discuss fears and experiences in a safe space—and to place this book in the context of recent history. A block of 40-50 minutes should be enough time to work with such a lesson plan. The following discussion prompts can help initiate a group dialogue. Encourage students to share their thoughts by seating them in a circle and having each one share his or her thoughts aloud.

### **BEFORE READING**

- Ask: Are you or anyone you know ever afraid that someone is going to attack you or blow up a building, or an airplane that you are in? This question is inspired by the first line of *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!* It can provide an entry point for addressing the difficult topic of post-9/11 fears with children who might otherwise not have the opportunity to talk about their worries.
- Ask: What do you know or remember about 9/11? What words or images come to your mind when I say "9/11"? Use this question to make a list of students' verbal or visual associations.

### **DURING READING**

- Even with a group of older children, reading this book out loud can be a useful exercise.
- You could put a twist on it: Assign characters to students and have them assume those roles, so that in the instances where the page begins with "This is Imaan Bin Ladin" they read, "Hi. I am Iman Bin Ladin." In effect, they are transforming the book into a first-person narrative.

### **AFTER READING**

- Ask: How did becoming the characters in this book allow you to empathize with them?
- Ask: Why do you think the authors selected Omar Ahmad as one of their characters? Does the airplane connect in any way to your impressions or images of terrorism?
- Ask: A number of characters in this book are not Muslim and don't have Muslim names. Why do you think the authors chose to include them in their story?
- Provide class or group time to write a response to the following question: Have you ever had an experience where someone accused you or someone you know of doing something wrong, illegal, or terrorist-like because of the way you spoke, looked, or dressed? How did it feel? Or, have you ever been in a situation where you accused someone (verbally or in your mind) of "terrorist" or "suspect" behavior because of the way he or she spoke, looked, or dressed? How has this book made you reexamine your own way of thinking?

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- There are 5 to 7 million Muslims in the United States. They are African-Americans, South Asians, Middle Easterners, Africans, Europeans, and many more.
- The oldest existing mosque in America, built in 1934, sits on a quiet residential street in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 64 percent of Arab-Americans are Christian.



## LESSON PLAN: High School and Up

Here are some suggestions for a moderated reading of *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!* This lesson plan is flexible enough to be used with high school students, independent learners, as well as adults. The emphasis is on using the book as a conversation starter to explore readers' experiences with racial profiling, stereotyping, and post-9/11 fears, expectations, and experiences.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Ask: What words come to your mind when I say the word “terrorist”? What does a terrorist look like? Invite participants to write their answers on a piece of paper. Then ask them to share their responses with the group. Record them on a board for the whole group to see and compare their answers. Use this activity to set the stage for the purpose of the book.
- Initiate a group discussion: We all have to explain ourselves in small and large ways in our lives. Have you ever been in a situation where you have had to explain yourself or justify your goodness? Think about an occasion where you had to defend, justify, or explain your views, appearance, or behavior. How did it feel?

### ENGAGING WITH THE TEXT

- Even with older students or adults, reading this book out loud can be a useful exercise.
- You could put a twist on it: Assign characters to each person and have them assume those roles, so that in the instances where the page begins with “This is Imaan Bin Ladin” they read, “Hi. I am Iman Bin Ladin.” In effect, the book is being transformed into a first-person narrative.

### POST READING DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

- Discuss: Why do you think this book is called *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!*?
- What's in a word? The words *blow up* were used to refer to tires and buildings in the book. Think about idioms and usages of this word in your daily life. What other words and idioms are associated with terrorism, security, and patriotism nowadays?
- Distribute a copy of Cynthia Duxbury's poster where an image of Santa's cap is juxtaposed with an image of a turban. Download the image at: [www.blowyouup.com/edu/duxbury.pdf](http://www.blowyouup.com/edu/duxbury.pdf)
- Evaluate: How did this book make you feel? Did you identify with the people you were reading about? Or, did you begin to view them in a new light?
- Brainstorm: In what ways can the types of stereotyping and ethnic, racial, or religious profiling and harassment discussed here be remedied? What can we do as individuals and as communities? Make an action plan.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Days since the U.S. government first placed the nation under an “elevated terror alert” in 2001 that the level has been relaxed: **0**
- Ratio of the number of Americans killed by terrorists in 2001 to the estimated number who died from food poisoning: **3:5**
- Estimated number of pro-terrorism websites worldwide in 1998 and in 2005 respectively: **12; 4,700**

## CREATE NOW!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Illustrate and tell us about a person who “doesn’t want to blow you up.” To help you get started, think about individuals in your community, news and media personalities, or even characters in books or movies who might be stereotyped or misunderstood based on their name, race, appearance, or religion. Draw your “character” or paste a photograph of him or her below. Then write a short description, similar to this example:

Muhammad Ali is the three-time heavyweight champion of the world.

He changed his name from Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. when he joined the Nation of Islam in 1964.

Ali has beat up many prize fighters in the boxing ring, but he has never blown anyone up! In 2002, the United Nations made him their “Messenger of Peace” to Kabul, Afghanistan.



## YOUR TURN!

Design your own book cover, for the book YOU would like to write.



## Go Deeper: Additional Resources

If you are interested in developing a classroom unit or workshop on stereotypes, tolerance, or 9/11, the following multi-media recommendations can serve as valuable resources. Many are award-winning works that can provide cross-curricular connections to the themes and message of *I Don't Want to Blow You Up!*

### Additional Teaching Resources

**When Hate Hits Home** [http://www.tolerance.org/news/article\\_tol.jsp?id=272](http://www.tolerance.org/news/article_tol.jsp?id=272)

A guide to talking to kids about terrorism, from the award-winning publication *Teaching Tolerance*.

**Where We Are Now** [http://www.tolerance.org/news/article\\_tol.jsp?id=610](http://www.tolerance.org/news/article_tol.jsp?id=610)

*Teaching Tolerance* explores the impact of 9/11 on members of America's Arab and Muslim communities and looks at where we are now. Also includes "10 Ways to Fight Hate."

**50 Facts about Terrorism** <http://www.harpers.org/subjects/Terrorism/SubjectOf/Fact>

From *Harper's* magazine.

### Picture Books

*My Name Was Hussein*, by Hristo Kyuchukov

Traces the experiences of a young Roma boy who lives in Bulgaria. Hussein introduces readers to the blend of many cultures and traditions that his family has incorporated over the centuries.

*My Name Is Bilal*, by Asma Mobin Uddin

When Bilal and his sister transfer to a school where they are the only Muslims, they must learn how to fit in while staying true to their beliefs and heritage.

### Graphic Novels

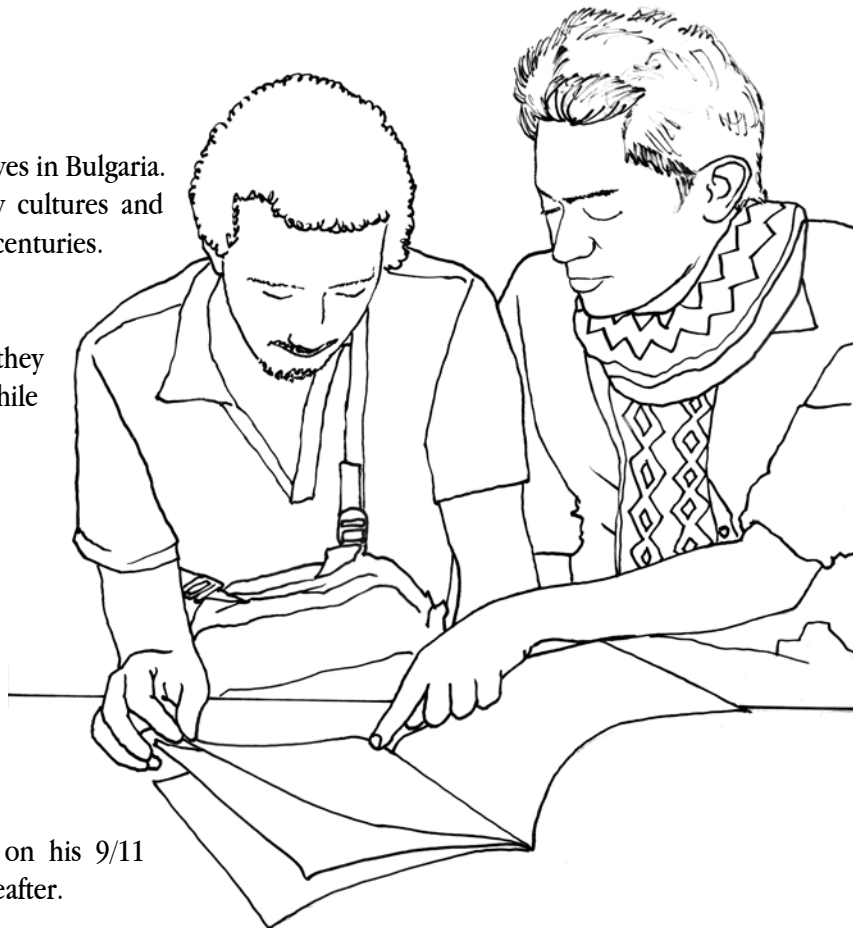
*Suitable for middle school and up.*

*Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi

A graphic memoir of growing up as a girl in revolutionary Iran.

*In the Shadow of No Towers*, by Art Spiegelman

The Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic artist reflects on his 9/11 experience and the ways in which life changed thereafter.



## Go Deeper: Additional Resources (page 2)

### Graphic Novels (*continued*)

*American Born Chinese*, by Gene Yang  
The son of Chinese immigrants struggles with his wish to become someone he's not.  
Winner of the National Book Award.

### Novels

*Suitable for middle school and up.*

*Ask Me No Questions*, by Marina Budhos  
A Bangladeshi family is split up after 9/11 when the father is detained for not having a valid passport.

*Does My Head Look Big in This*, by Randa Abdel-Fattah  
Sixteen-year-old Amal makes the decision to start wearing the hijab full-time and everyone has a reaction. Her parents, her teachers, her friends, people on the street.

*Home of the Brave*, by Katherine Applegate  
This novel in free verse captures a teen Sudanese refugee's impressions of America and his slow adjustment.

### Documentary, Radio, and Newspaper

**One Nation, Many Voices Contest** <http://www.linktv.org/onenation>  
Winners of a documentary contest inviting submissions on the theme "Muslims in America: Stories, Not Stereotypes."  
This contest was sponsored by Link TV.

**Through the Eyes of Immigrants** [http://www.evc.org/screening/cat\\_hum.html](http://www.evc.org/screening/cat_hum.html)  
This 23 minute Educational Video Center documentary has a particular emphasis on Arab and Muslim teenagers and how they have been stereotyped and discriminated against after 9/11.

**Muslim Comedian Aims at Breaking Stereotypes** <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11746247>  
Dean Obeidallah, an Arab-American comedian, talks to National Public Radio about how he's using his comedy to break stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs in America.

*Between Black and Immigrant Muslims, an Uneasy Alliance*, by Andrea Elliott  
This *New York Times* article from March 11, 2007 focuses on the relationship between African American and South Asian Muslims, and includes a narrated slideshow.

