

# The Proudest Blue

 by Ibtihaj Muhammad, S.K. Ali, illustrated by Hatem Aly

## Identities & Themes

- Black/African American
- Religion/Faith (Islam)
- Standing up for self/others
- Identity affirmation

## Teacher Reflection Questions

1. Think back to a time when you worried about how others would judge you based on something you wore or how you expressed yourself. How did that feel? Who was supportive when you expressed your identity through your appearance?
2. How can you support your students who might experience similar feelings for looking different or expressing their identities in ways that are out of the culturally dominant norm in your class/school? How could you structure your class so all students can support each other in their expression of their identities?

## Background Information for Teacher

Including books that share different religious practices and beliefs exposes children to another area of diversity in our world. Intolerance to religious differences is often based on a lack of understanding. Books that share stories about people from varying religions helps children connect to the similarities and the humanity we all share.

Religion is a part of cultural identity and daily life for many children. Learning about beliefs and practices, especially those in non-dominant religions, allows children to develop understanding and acceptance of differences. Unpacking the tenets of a religion and looking at similarities and differences between religions can help go beyond the tourism (heroes and holidays) approach to differences. See also the **Religion/Faith Primer** in this guide.

This book touches on all five Anti-Bias Education tenets and Social-Emotional Learning competencies. Both the main character, Faizah, and her older sister, Asiya, are proud of their Muslim identity and excited for Asiya to wear her hijab to school for the first time. As Faizah watches other students tease her sister about the hijab, she learns from Asiya different ways to manage her emotions and show resilience in the face of bias-based mistreatment. This book allows for important discussions that affirm Muslim identity and help students process how to respond to identity-based teasing.

### Vocabulary

- **Wearing hijab** - Wearing hijab refers to the act of covering up. It means “curtain” or “partition” and refers to using scarves/clothing like a khimar or burka to cover-up according to Muslim sharia rules about modesty and conduct
- **Resiliency** - The ability to recover quickly or bounce back from challenging experiences; toughness

### Pronunciation of names

- Faizah [Fa-e-za] or [Faa-i-za]
- Asiya [ah’ssee’yah]
- Ibtihaj [Ib-tee-haj]

It is important to review the character names and practice the pronunciations before reading the book. Learning to pronounce names from another culture is a form of respect and can teach children to honor the languages and cultures of those who are different from them.

**Authors’ Notes:** After sharing the book with students, read the Authors’ Notes in the back of the book, which provides autobiographical information on Ibtihaj Muhammad’s experiences growing up wearing a hijab. You can also share that Ibtihaj Muhammad was the first Muslim American woman to compete in the Olympics for the US in fencing in 2016 where she won a bronze medal. For more information on Muhammad, go to her website at [www.ibtihajmuhammad.com](http://www.ibtihajmuhammad.com).

## Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- ▣ Empathy & Understanding
- ▣ Healthy Complex Identities
- ▣ Respect Across Differences
- ▣ Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- ▣ Responsiveness & Action

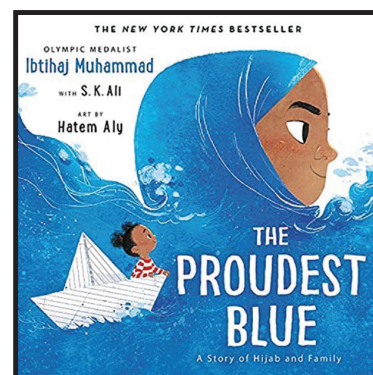
## Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- ▣ Self-Awareness
- ▣ Self-Management
- ▣ Social Awareness
- ▣ Responsible Decision Making
- ▣ Relationship Skills

## Background Information (continued)

### A Note to Dispel Myths about Wearing Hijab

- Wearing hijab is not a form of oppression. Women around the world have agency and actively choose to wear hijab for religious and cultural reasons.
- Some women choose to wear hijab, and some don't. Wearing hijab is not an indicator of religiosity or religious zeal or fervor. Different cultural and religious beliefs around wearing hijab vary across the world and within the United States.
- The First Amendment of the Constitution protects the right to religious expression and practice, including wearing hijab as a practice of Islam.
- Because hijab refers to practicing modesty and comportment (and not a headscarf/covering in and of itself), hijab can also apply to men in certain situations in terms of what they wear or how they act.



### Read this to the students before reading the book:

*This book follows two Muslim sisters on their first day of school. The older sister, Asiya, wears a hijab to school for the first time, and the younger sister, Faizah, watches and worries about how other students react and respond to seeing the hijab. Listen to find out why the first-day hijab is so special and how the sisters get through their day.*

### Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. **Why is Faizah so excited to see her sister wearing her blue hijab on the first day of school?**
2. **What metaphors does Faizah use to describe her sister's hijab?**
3. **Why did some kids tease Asiya for wearing a hijab? Why did some kids support Asiya for wearing a hijab?**
4. "If you understand who you are, one day they will too." What does the author mean by that?
5. **How does Faizah respond to the mean and teasing behavior from peers towards Asiya's hijab? How does Asiya respond?**
6. **How would you have responded to the boy who pointed and laughed at Asiya's hijab if you were Asiya or Faizah? If you were a bystander?**
7. How would you describe the relationship between Faizah and Asiya? What evidence from the book supports this?
8. What do you think of Mama's advice about hurtful words? "*Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong only to those who said them.*" How easy or hard is it to drop the hurtful words that others say? Why?

### Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Have you ever been worried that someone was going to judge you because of something you wore or the way you presented yourself? Write about that time. What feelings did you have? What did you do in that situation? Who supported you in this situation?
2. Asiya showed great resilience in the face of mean and teasing behavior from other students. Write about a time when you showed resilience in the face of something difficult.
3. How would you like your classmates and friends to support you in situations in which verbal and nonverbal teasing, exclusion, or mistreatment is happening?
4. **Metaphors:** Look at how Faizah compares Asiya's hijab to the ocean and the sky. How does she use figurative language to describe the importance of Asiya's hijab? Write a poem using metaphors to describe yourself or something that is part of your identity and who you are.

### Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Personal narrative
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/  
Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/pictures/  
photos to gain information
- Make predictions
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to  
self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events
- Vocabulary in context
- Figurative language