

Sitti's Secrets

 by Naomi Shihab Nye, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter

Identities & Themes

- South Asian/Middle Eastern American
- Religion/Faith (Islam)
- English Language Learner/Language barrier
- Multigenerational
- Families separated
- Identity affirmation

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. Think back to when you were growing up. What were your social identities (geographic location, socioeconomic status, family structure, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.)? Which identities limited your access or were targets of bias? Which gave you access or benefits?
2. What overt and covert messages are your students getting about other parts of the world from TV, movies, video games, social media, and the news? Which groups are receiving positive messages? Negative messages?
3. How are you exploring your ideas, feelings, and experience of social justice and growth as an Anti-Bias Educator?

Background Information for Teacher

Having a connection with one's cultural or ethnic heritage encourages the development of a strong sense of self. This book provides an entrance into examining culture and traditions while highlighting the connections that are possible with people across the world and families separated by geography. Historically, the melting pot of the U.S. has created an assimilation process through which people from many different backgrounds have lost their cultural identity and traditions. Helping students understand the complexities of their own identity prepares them to understand the complexities of others with empathy and understanding.

There are two good extension activities in the back of the book. Students can explore a map of the world and calculate the distance between where Sitti lives and their own cities. You can also bring in some of the foods suggested by the author for students to try.

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

Read this to the students before reading the book:

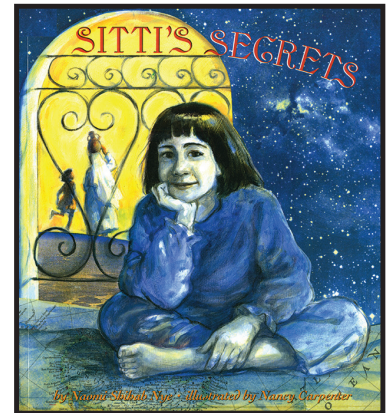
Mona and her grandmother, Sitti, live on opposite sides of the world. They are separated by distance and language. When Mona and her father travel to spend time with Sitti, Mona learns to build a closeness that runs much deeper than the things that separate them. From this experience, Mona realizes the importance of valuing the humanity in everyone.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. **Mona and her Sitti live across the world from each other. What did Mona learn about her grandmother's day to day life when she visited?**
2. **What are some similarities and differences between the daily lives of Sitti and Mona? Between Sitti's life and yours?**
3. When Mona visited her grandmother, she didn't speak the same language as Sitti. How did they build a connection with each other despite the language barrier?
4. What special things are in Sitti's trunk? What would you put in such a trunk if you had one?
5. **Why did Mona write to the president when she returned home? Why did she describe her grandmother in detail? How might the president have responded to her letter?**
6. Knowing what you do about what is happening in the world today, what is an issue you would write to the president about and why?

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. The author describes the way Sitti and others in her village grow, acquire, and prepare foods in a way her father says she's been doing for "a hundred years." What are some traditions around food you've seen or participated in?
2. Even though they lived across an ocean from each other and didn't speak each other's languages, Sitti and Mona had a lasting connection between them. Tell about someone who has made a lasting impact in your life. How did you meet them, what did you do together, and how did they affect you?
3. Choose a social justice topic that means a lot to you, and do some research about different approaches and ways to address the issue. Write a letter to a local, state, or national leader about the topic and what you propose to do about it based on your research.
4. Explore the resources in the back of the book.



Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Personal narrative
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast settings
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe setting
- 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)
- Vocabulary in context
- Figurative language