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Aliya already struggles with trying to fit in, feeling confident enough to talk to the cute boy or stand up to mean kids — the fact that shes Muslim is just another thing to deal with. When Marwa, a Moroccan girl who shares her faith if not her culture, comes to Aliya's school, Aliya wonders even more about who she is, what she believes, and where she fits in. Should she fast for Ramadan? Should she wear the hijab? Shes old enough for both, but does she really want to call attention to herself?

The Garden of My Imaan Details

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From Reader Review The Garden of My Imaan for online ebook

Arianna says

Aliya is a shy kid. She mostly just wants to go along, not sticking out too much or drawing too much attention to herself. Then a new girl comes to school, Marwa, who is Muslim like Aliya. Only Marwa wears a hijab. Marwa doesn't seem to care one bit about what anyone thinks of her, but it makes Aliya uncomfortable. Why doesn't she try to fly under the radar more? Now people will think Aliya is weird too. At religious school, Aliya's class gets assigned a Steps to Success assignment. They're supposed to figure out how to make themselves better human beings. No one has any idea what to do! So Aliya begins writing letters to Allah, hoping she'll stumble across something. Certainly, there are things she'd change about herself if she could. Not being so scared to speak up, for starters. Maybe Aliya could actually learn a thing or two from Marwa, starting with how to stand up for yourself.

Alexandria says

When I first started reading this book, it was a little difficult to get into. I read the book for a class and ultimately saw the message (about diversity) but found the main character to be grating and difficult to deal with. As I continued to read, however, she more likeable and I found myself enjoying the book. I suppose her transition ultimately aids the story's content and its message. A worthy read in the end!

Omar Zia says

There are many things to like about gardens. Once you get past all of the work (well, you never really do), you find that they provide beauty, nourishment and a reflection of one's self. "The Garden of My Imaan", by Farhana Zia, does all three. My 2 favorite things about this book are 1) the humor and sensitivity with which the author treats the subject and 2) that there is no singular cultural viewpoint or agenda being pushed here. On one level, it's the engaging story of a month-in-the-life of a pre-teen girl. On another level, it may be one of the most important "post 9/11" books ever written.

Laurie says

ARC from Midwinter, publication date 4/2013.

5th grade girl, some nice parallels to Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret.

Marina Minina says

I would like to talk about this book in the context of another one "The Great Wall of Lucy Wu". They both

tell readers about two girls (Lu, the main character of "The Great Wall of Lucy Wu" and the main character of the book 'The Garden of my Imaan', Aliya) who struggle with self-identifying with their heritage. Their families' attitudes to their cultural self-identity are different – Lu's family pushed her to attend Chinese school, Aliya's family seems to be more liberal (for example, they were against her fast). They both have facilitators who encourage them to seek an answer to who they are culturally. Aliya has Marwa, a Moroccan girl, who is devoted to her religion, while Lu has her sister Regina who called her "a banana, a Twinkie", because she is "yellow on the outside, white on the inside" (p.18). And Lu also has her great-aunt Yi Po who helps her to discover a Chinese-half of her personality. The books discuss an interesting and relevant topic for bicultural children who were raised in the U.S. and absorbed the American culture having other different values and traditions in a family. Such children as it is shown in the two books have inner conflict and it is very important for them to identify themselves in the books and read examples of solving this conflict in multicultural literature. That is why I think the books are worth discussing in the classroom.

Moreover, I like the metaphor of the title 'The Great Wall of Lucy Wu' and how it relates to the Great Wall of China. Lucy's wall that she built by herself to divide a room in two parts presents her mental state – she is resistant to her Chinese great-aunt as to her Chinese part of personality. It is a very good comparison that I really liked. As for the authenticity of the books, I have found some stereotypes (for example, such topics as food, hijab, fast) about Muslims and Chinese in them, but they could become the issues for discussion and students can also ask a native Chinese or a real Muslim about the stereotypes in the books because I am not an insider of both books and it is hard for me to evaluate the authenticity. Besides, books discuss common topics of every teenager – both girls have a crush on a boy; that makes the plot more appealing to teenage girls. Overall, they are good books for middle-school students especially girls.

Gloria Miller says

This coming of age narrative proves once more that no matter what faith, ethnicity, or geographic location, adolescents all face the same challenges. They struggle to find their place in the world. Aliya stands astride two worlds.....the traditional Muslim world of her family and the world she faces each day at school. Aliya strives to balance her desire to "fit in" while she makes such important decisions as whether to wear hijab and fast for Ramadan. When Aliya must develop a project in her religion classes, she writes letters to Allah about her life and her dreams. My favorite quote is from one of these letters when she refers to wearing hijab, "It's not what's on your head that matters-it's what's in it." Beautiful thought!

Erik This Kid Reviews Books says

Aliya has always been shy and she doesn't want to call attention to herself. Maybe that's why she doesn't wear a hijab in school or fast much during Ramadan. You see, Aliya is Muslim, but her family isn't strict with following the Muslim rules (her mother believes that Muslim women can still be modest without wearing a hijab). Then Marwa came to Aliya's school. Marwa is the exact opposite of Aliya. Marwa has tons of courage, always wears a hijab, and fasts for the whole of Ramadan. Marwa has a lot of confidence in herself. Aliya has been asked to help Marwa out at school because she is new. Aliya isn't sure how she can help Marwa, who is so confident.

This was a great multi-cultural book. I liked learning new Arabic & Muslim words that were scattered throughout the book. I like how this book talks about two things – it doesn't matter if you fit in and how

bullying effects people. Aliya and Marwa are bullied for being Muslim, and Aliya doesn't want to stick out at school as being Muslim. Ms. Zia covers both topics wonderfully. I like how Marwa has a simple, but great, way of saying things. She could be a scholar. :) I think a lot of kids can learn from this book.

****NOTE** This book was a gift

Savindi says

Cover Gushing Worthiness: The cover of *The Garden of my Imaan* is one of the most adorable covers I've seen this year. The little girl's smile is so cute and the cover works for a cute book :).

Review: I came across this book via netgalley. There have been a lot of works looking at Teenage Muslim girls or Muslim women in their adulthood and of course on the controversial topic of women wearing the Hijab. So when I saw this book on netgalley I was really interested in reading a book about a Muslim girl attending Elementary School. The final verdict: I'm really glad I discovered this gem!

Taking place post-9/11 *TGomI* follows the story of Aliya, an American-Indian Muslim girl as she tries to navigate the treacherous waters of Elementary School while trying to not stand out because of her religion. However Aliya is confronted with her faith as Marwa, a Moroccan Muslim girl who wears the Hijab joins her school. Suddenly Aliya's world is turned upside down with nagging questions about her faith, fasting for Ramadan, election campaigns and a surprise visit from Choti Dhadi.

I think kids are so interesting when they're around 6-10; they start to ask questions with so much innocence and it's wonderful. But there's a darker side to childhood when tragic events like 9/11 happen. Ethnic groups become labeled and kids tend to say things they overhear from adult conversations without knowing the consequences of their actions. At the same time kids from different Ethnic backgrounds may not even understand why there are so many antagonistic feelings towards them. One of the things that really impressed me with this book is, how it did not tip toe around discrimination against the Muslim community in the United States. An example of such is seen very early on in the book when Aliya's mom is driving her and Zayd (Aliya's little brother) to Sunday school and a collision almost happens.

Do you want to kill someone? the driver screamed out her window. Go back to the desert moron! Drive a Camel!

Afterwards Zayd, Aliya's brother asks a question from their mom, who answers.

And what did she mean drive a Camel? No one drives Camels. They ride them, don't they?

Ignorant woman! She thinks we're Arabs.

I truly do admire Ms. Zia for not shying away from including discrimination in this book, despite it being written for a younger audience. I think understanding discrimination has become quite important now more than ever.

I really enjoyed the plot of TGomI a great deal. It's quite refreshing to read about an Elementary School Muslim girl who is curious about wearing the Hijab, Islam, boys, self-confidence; ultimately finding one's self. The way so many factors were incorporated into this story impressed me and I enjoyed the multiculturalism. Another great strength of this book was how it portrayed the diverse practice of Islam. I know personally when I started to study Islamic History in my second year of University what surprised me the most of how the practice of Islam stretched not only across the Middle East, but in Africa, Asia and even up to Uzbekistan. I don't think many people realize how diverse the Middle East is as a region. The struggles Aliya faces between adhering to tradition and embracing Western culture is also an interesting point in the book. Identity is something that I struggle with a lot as well and I think it's intriguing to look at it from the perspective of an eight/nine-year old. I only have one complaint about the book and that is I felt things between Josh and Aliya were unresolved. I wasn't really sure if they became friends or not in the end.

This story had a band of great characters; from Aliya's family to Winnie her best friend, school mates and friends from Sunday school. Sometimes Aliya could be an incredibly frustrating character because she could be judgmental and self-absorbed. At the same time her flaws are what made her a great character. We follow Aliya's journey on fasting for Ramadan, preparing for school council elections and standing up for herself. By the end of the book Aliya definitely developed as a character. Winnie, Aliya's best friend was a really great character. I liked how comfortable she was with her mixed heritage and I thought she was a great best friend when she stood up for Aliya a few times. Marwa, who is kind of like the second protagonist since most of the story revolves around her and Aliya's interactions was an awesome character. I truly admired how strong she was for a kid, how she stood up for herself when Austin made a comment about her wearing the Hijab. I really enjoyed this conversation between Marwa and Aliya about the Hijab.

Well are you ever embarrassed to wear this thing at school?

Why should I be? I wear hijab on my head and sneakers on my feet for PE. It's pretty simple.

It's not the same thing. Nobody notices sneakers. But a hijab...it's way out there.

It's in everyone's face right? But without it I'd probably feel the way you'd feel without sneakers for PE.

But...

This is who I am Aliya and I'm okay with it. Really

It's quite something to see kids who are so sure about themselves and comfortable in their own skin. There needs to be more people like this in the world. Apart from Marwa, I also admired Aliya's friends from Sunday School who were so comfortable and proud to wear the Hijab. Kids aside, I adored Aliya's grandma, great-grandma and her Choti Dhadi. It reminded me of growing up with my grandma and my great aunts. Growing up with your grandparents truly is a wonderful and inspiring experience and Aliya's relationship with grandmothers was beautiful. Her grandma was definitely a good influence on her. Choti Dhadi too reminded me of my great aunts who I miss from Sri Lanka. Life is never dull when they're around! Aliya's parents too were great characters. Her parents seemed like polar opposites, but in a good way because they both made Aliya see things from a different perspective.

The ending was a bit of a sad one for me, I would have liked it to have been a bit different. However those are my personal thoughts.

Oh and another which is awesome about this book: **It has a GLOSSARY with Arabic Terms!** Seriously you guys have no idea how excited I was when I saw this!! So many books written about the Middle East sometimes fail to include glossaries for Arabic terms and I was so grateful that this book had one! For those who are unfamiliar with certain terms the glossary is like a godsend!

Overall, *The Garden of my Imaan* is a cute story. The perspective of Aliya is an interesting one and the characters are great as well! Other than that one unresolved issue this was a great read!

My Rating: 4.5/5

Would I recommend it? Yes

I had the opportunity to ask Ms.Zia a few questions about the book and you can read her answers here.

The Garden of my Imaan is published by Peachtree Publishers and will be released on April 1, 2013. This ARC was provided by Netgalley. Thank You Netgalley for this ARC in exchange for an honest review. .

Tami says

I have been searching for a book like *The Garden of My Imaan* for a while now. Aliya attends a public school where she is the only Muslim. Soon after we meet her Aliya's mother accidentally cuts off another woman in traffic. She yells at them to "go back to the desert and ride a camel!" The angry woman takes no note of the fact that family is from India--where there are NO deserts; and she doesn't care. The entire episode frightens Aliya, who sees a stranger screaming in anger because Aliya and her family are different...because they are Muslim.

Aliya is confused about aspects of her own Muslim faith and how much of her life and her family's traditions she wants others to know. She attends classes in Islam on the weekends and her teacher gives Aliya's class a project: use Ramadan to find a way to improve on themselves. Aliya must determine an area within herself which she feels needs improvement, decide on a course of action to accomplish it, engage in that action and then write an essay about it. The entire idea sounds vague and ridiculous to Aliya. After talking with her great-grandmother she decides she will try writing letters to Allah in addition to praying in order to talk with him in more detail about her life and her feelings.

A new student arrives. Marwa is also Muslim. Her family was originally from Morocco and, unlike Aliya, Marwa wears the *hijab* at school. A *hijab* is the covering Muslim women wear over their heads. At first Aliya doesn't want to be associated with Marwa. She is afraid of looking or acting differently from what she perceives as the norm. The more Aliya watches and gets to know Marwa, however, the more she comes to understand who she truly is and how to have the courage to be herself--whatever that involves.

This story is primarily about Aliya and the ways in which she begins to identify who she is, realize she likes

many things about herself and that it is okay to share those things with others. The narrative voice in *The Garden of My Imaan* is genuinely that of a young pre-teen girl. She IS preoccupied with the way she looks to others and what others say ABOUT her. She is terrified of being different, standing out, of NOT belonging.

All of us feel like that at Aliya's age. What makes this story unique is the fact that its main character is Muslim at a time in the United States when many people often make no distinction between Muslims in general and the specific individuals responsible for 9/11. This atmosphere and attitude definitely provide another dimension to Aliya's life that we don't often talk about outside the context of politics.

I, personally, do not have a lot of knowledge about the Muslim faith and I was excited to learn about some traditions--particularly in connection with Ramadan and daily prayers through Aliya's story. I firmly believe the more we learn about each other as people the more we realize both how alike we are and how to appreciate our differences--as opposed to fearing what we don't know or understand.

I had hoped to find a book with a main character who was also Muslim to read aloud in the classroom but due to some specific details about girls maturing, *The Garden of My Imaan* is not a good option for that particular environment. (There is NOTHING inappropriate in the book; it refers to biological developments that would be cause for embarrassment in a classroom for girls and boys.) *The Garden of My Imaan* is a great independent reading choice, or perhaps a good bedtime story where other conversations about differences and commonalities can happen naturally. Aliya is an engaging young girl on an inspiring journey of self-discovery. This is an absolutely worthwhile and enjoyable read!

Mohammed Rasheen says

This is a short and cute book that contains many themes relevant to the life of any late elementary or middle schooler. Characters are little flat but live enough for the age group this book is intended to. may be 8-16 . Realistic, sweet, and satisfying with a happy ending as Aliya discovers and embraces who she is as the story progresses. Rich with positive advises, this book also tried to face indeed a very dangerous situation of islamophobia in US and other western countries in a casual way.
Score. 4 / 5

Paige (Illegal in 3 Countries) says

See more of my reviews on The YA Kitten! My copy came from YA Books Central for review.

Diversity: 3 – Closer to Reality

Racial-Ethnic: 4 (Aliya and her family are Indian Muslims; her best friend Winnie is Korean; Marwa's family is Moroccan)

QUILT BAG: 0

Disability: 0

Intersectionality: 4 (the book's focus on Muslim girlhood creates plenty of intersections between gender and racial-ethnic identity)

One review of *The Garden of My Imaan* calls the book a modern homage to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, that classic book parents gave to their kids when puberty threatened to rear its ugly head and begin the monthly misery of menstruation. I never got to read that one because I was an ace at odd things like not getting to read things that were “normal” for kids my age to read. That continued all the way into high school. ANYWAY. *The Garden of My Imaan* is far from perfect, but it has a lot of value for its audience even if it's a bit didactic.

I'm used to seeing most MG and YA Muslim rep in the form of Arab Muslims, but Aliya provides a different perspective as a tween girl from an Indian Muslim family. Her family observes Ramadan as many other practicing Muslims around the world do, but their cultural practices as an Indian family are mixed in as well. Aliya's dynamic with her family is lovely, especially when it involves her grandmother and great-grandmother.

At times, it seems to offer commentary on how people of color can perpetuate racism against other people of color as well. Though it's a one-scene wonder and never comes up again, Aliya's grandmother expects Aliya's half-Korean best friend Winnie to be good at math because Asian people are “all the same.” Sadly, it's played off as a joke.

It demonstrates the same point a bit unintentionally as well through Winnie's mangling of the Spanish language on a basic level. Winnie once calls someone a “loco mujer” and “crazy woman” is offered as a translation. Later, she says Aliya looks “precioso” in something. As soon as you learn adjectives in Spanish, you're taught that they're gendered and typically placed after a noun, not before it. “Mujer loca” is how to correctly call a woman crazy; if a girl looks beautiful or beautiful in something, she looks preciosa. Some adjectives like *inteligente* (intelligent) don't change form based on the noun's gender, but the two used in the book do.

If there's a term for when a Manic Pixie Dream Girl is entirely platonic, *The Garden of My Imaan* is guilty of using the trope through Marwa, the hijabi girl and new kid at Aliya's school. Marwa exists to say whichever sage thing Aliya needs to hear at a given time and teach Aliya to be more comfortable with her Muslim-ness. The book's heavy focus on Aliya leaves Marwa bereft of her own character arc and reduce her to a heavily didactic character in a novel that already feels more like a teaching tool than a reading experience.

Typically, a book like *The Garden of My Imaan* would be a little too didactic for my tastes, but this is 2016. Due to an outdated, broken electoral system, a minority of the United States pushed an openly racist and Islamophobic man into the presidency and the world will suffer for it. With rhetoric like his shaping the world, *The Garden of My Imaan* is highly necessary and offers a new view into life for Muslim families post-9/11.

Barbara says

Fifth grader Aliyah loves her family and her religion, but she feels uncomfortable enough about her own place in the school's pecking order to be able to openly embrace her Muslim faith and cultural identity. In fact, when the school principal suggests that she befriend Marwa, a new girl from Morocco who is also Muslim, she avoids the girl as much as possible. Over time, though, as she works on a project for her religion class and watches how comfortable Marwa is with her own self-identity, she begins to speak up for herself and what she believes too, taking risks and embracing the possibilities that come her way. Bullying comes in

all sorts of forms, from an adult shouting ethnic slurs at her mother for almost causing an accident to classmates who seem only to see the hijab worn by Marwa and not the girl beneath the scarf or those who lump all Muslims together. Certain to prompt healthy discussion about the dilemmas faced by Aliyah and Marwa, this is an honest, appealing approach to issues that many boys and girls Aliyah's age must face, and while the issues are serious, the book also contains many humorous passages.

Sarra says

This was recommended to me by my librarian probably because it's a Muslim book, and it's written by a Muslim author. I'm a Muslim, so i was kind of like, "Cool! A relatively Muslim book!" But as the days drew on and I read other books, came across and said, "I don't really want to read this," I finally came at a stop sign, and because I had stopped, I looked at this book once more and thought, "Oh well! It can't be that bad." All this because I thought it was going to be like those high school books where they always complain about not getting the boy, oh my god he's so cute, and all that other jibber jabber, but this book exceeded my expectations. It was a really good book.

Main character Aliya is lukewarm in her faith and belief as a Muslim, choosing when to fast, wanting a boyfriend, etcetera, but when her principle introduces her to a new student, Marwa, it sort of flips her ideals. When she gets stuck with an assignment on how to better herself for Sunday school and a project on how to include different things that make a nice colorful fruit bowl, she doesn't know how to deal. this book shows amazing character growth, in belief/faith/iman and personality as well. This book is also multicultural, including not only Muslim/Arab customs but also Indian customs as well. This exceeded my expectations, and I am really glad I read this book and hadn't set it aside.

Kate says

Although this book is not particularly well-written and the characters lack dimension, it is one of the few I've encountered that stars an American Muslim child. Aliya is likable enough; although much of the book reads like a child's guide to Muslim traditions and the diversity within the Muslim population, she struggles with her first Ramadan fast in a realistic way.

I am puzzled by the cover photo, though; Aliya is supposed to be Indian, but the girl on the cover does not seem to reflect this heritage. Maybe the photo is supposed to be of Marwa, who is described as having light hair and eyes, but it edges too close to whitewashing for my comfort.

Ms. Yingling says

Aliya doesn't like to wear her hijab in public, because people think that all Muslims are responsible for the problems after 9/11, and it's easier to practice her faith if others don't know about it. Since her family is from India, she doesn't think that she shares much in common with other Muslims, especially the new girl, Marwa, whose family is from Morocco and who wears hijab. Aliya is having enough troubles with the bratty Juliana, who ends up running against her for student council rep; with Carly, who doesn't invite her to a birthday party at a spa; and with various boys in her class who say rude things about Mawra. Aliya has an assignment from her "Sunday school" to better herself during Ramadan, and both her grandmother and great-

grandmother think this is a great idea and try to help her. When Mawra wants to know if Aliya is going to fast, she decides to give it a try, even though it is very difficult for her. This year, Thanksgiving coincides with Ramadan, making the time even more difficult for Aliyah, since her demanding great aunt is visiting. Seeing how brave Mawra is, and how she stands up for herself and her religion gives Aliya motivation to improve her own religious practices, and she considers wearing hijab herself.

Stengths: The Columbus metropolitan area has a fairly sizable Somali population, and several of the girls in my school who wear hijab happen to be voracious readers. I had a lengthy conversation not long ago with one girl who wanted ANY book that had Muslim characters in it, and I had to tell her that there are just not that many. I will be so happy to be able to hand her this book. Since she would be familiar with the terms and practices, she will connect more with Aliya's emotions and her conflict about her faith; for me, I found the overview of a culture with which I was not familiar very interesting. Perhaps my favorite moment was when Aliya's great grandmother, in a conversation with Aliya's friend, Winnie (who is half Korean), tells Winnie "Chinese, Korean, same thing." Even as Aliya is struggling with trying to prove that she is different from people from other Muslim cultures, her own family has difficulty distinguishing between others' cultures! I will definitely be looking for other books by this author, and am so glad that Peachtree published this!

Weaknesses: I understand why the main character is in 5th grade, I just wish for my purposes that she was older.
