



Amal Unbound

AISHA SAEED

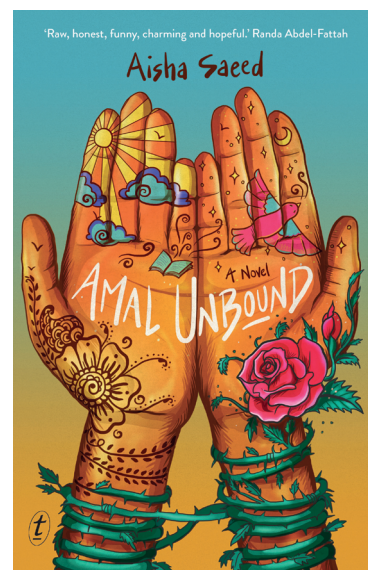
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 11+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

"I'm not brave. I'm terrified. I just don't have a choice."

"You always have a choice. Making choices even when they scare you because you know it's the right thing to do—that's bravery." (p. 210)

Amal loves learning and aspires to be a teacher. She has her whole life planned out, including going to university and living with her best friend, Hafsa. However, as the eldest daughter in her family she has responsibilities, and when her mother falls sick after the birth of her fifth daughter, Amal must take care of her young sisters and the house.

Unable to go to school and feeling burdened by the injustice of her situation, Amal rebels in an unlikely way and finds herself indebted to the son of her village's corrupt landlord.

Forced into a life of servitude away from her family, Amal must use all her wits to survive. Still, her love of literature and learning cannot be quelled, and they lead her to discover a very dark secret and the potential path to her freedom.

Aisha Saeed draws on the story of Malala Yousafzai as inspiration for this uplifting story about bravery, family, friendship and the power of education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aisha Saeed is a Pakistani-American writer, teacher and attorney. She has been featured on MTV, the Huffington Post, NBC and the BBC, and, as one of the founding members of the much talked about 'We Need Diverse Books' campaign, she is helping change the conversation about diverse books. Aisha lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and sons.

BEFORE READING

1. Ask students if they can find Pakistan on a map. Show students where Pakistan is and identify the surrounding countries. Have students complete the following table:

What I definitely know about Pakistan	What I think I know about Pakistan	What I want to know about Pakistan

Give students time to research Pakistan, allowing them to confirm what they have written and find answers to their questions.

2. Do you think the order of your birth has a role in shaping who you are? What qualities do certain siblings have? For example, if you are the eldest sibling, does that make you a natural leader? Are there certain responsibilities that come with birth order? If so, what do you think they are?
3. Do girls and boys have equal rights everywhere? Are there any countries that you know of in which women are not given the same opportunities



as men? Why do you think there are differences between the rights of males and the rights of females? How does this compare to your experience here in Australia?

WHILE READING

1. In the first chapter, Amal feels frustrated that 'helping family is what a good eldest daughter [does].' (p. 2) She feels her time is better spent helping her teacher. Should family always come first or is education more important?
2. Chapter One finishes with Amal saying, 'This is what I now remember most about my last afternoon at school...how easily I took my ordinary life for granted.' (p. 4) What does this suggest about Amal's life and her future?
3. Why is it so important to Amal's parents and their community that the new baby is a boy?
4. Amal's friend, Omar, borrows books from his school library and lends them to Amal because 'it was no secret that the boys' school had a much bigger library to choose from.' (p. 11) Why do you think the boys have a bigger library? What does this tell you about Amal's determination to learn?
5. What do you think happens to Amal's mother after the birth of her fifth daughter? Why won't she get out of bed?
6. Describe all the ways that Amal acts as a teacher.
7. Amal feels guilty when she sees Nasreen Baji's distress after Jawad and Khan Sahib are arrested. Why does she feel guilty? And should she?
8. Plot a timeline of significant events in the novel. Underneath each event, write a short description of the consequences of that event, and draw an arrow to any other event that happened as a direct consequence of it.

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. In Chapter Seven, Amal wonders, 'Why did this random chance have to dictate so much of my destiny?' (p. 34) Now that you've finished the novel, can you think of all the moments of chance that Amal experiences which shape her destiny? List them and explain how these moments shape Amal's future.
2. Construct two 'maps' showing the characters in the novel. Place Amal in the middle of each map. Have one map represent the characters and relationships in Amal's village and the other map represent the characters living at the Khan estate.
3. Describe the Khan family. What do they do? How do they have so much money?
4. Is Nasreen Baji just as guilty as her husband and son? Why or why not?

5. Why do you think the author, Aisha Saeed, creates a link between Nasreen Baji and Amal's village? How does this affect how you feel about Nasreen?
6. Nabila is initially very jealous of Amal. What are some of the tricks she plays on Amal, and why does she play them?
7. Like Amal, Nabila lives at the Khan estate as an indentured servant. How is her situation different from that of many of the other workers at the estate?
8. Describe the relationship between Amal and Nasreen Baji. In what ways are Amal's role as eldest daughter and her role as Nasreen Baji's personal maid similar or different?
9. The mythology surrounding the Khan family introduces us to them as characters before they make an appearance in the text. What power do they have over the people in Amal's village, and even over the children who have never met them?
10. Write a list of all of the servants at the Khan estate and identify each of their jobs.

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. This narrative is written in first person, from Amal's perspective. Why do you think the author chose to write in first person rather than third person?
2. Imagine the novel was written from Amal's mother's point of view (POV). What information could she give us that Amal couldn't?
3. If this story had been written from Nasreen Baji's POV, what would we know about Amal? Would we believe that Amal was living a good life? How do you think Nasreen Baji would justify Amal's indentured servitude?
4. Foreshadowing is a literary device that Aisha Saeed uses in this story. What is foreshadowing? Can you identify when it is used in the text?

THEMES

Bravery, hope and fear

1. Once the Khan family is arrested, Amal thinks, 'No one here...would ever know it was a group of servants who brought this family down. No one would ever know it was a girl who helped save the village.' (p. 220) Is it harder for servants to be brave than other workers? Why might someone be surprised to know a girl saved the village?
2. On page 38, the author 'personifies' hope when she writes, 'But hope was a tricky thing. It found its way back to me.' In these sentences hope is described as if it has a mind of its own. Did hope find its way back to Amal or is Amal a hopeful person? Answer with reference to examples in the text.
3. "'I'm not brave. I'm terrified. I just don't have a choice.'" "You always have a choice. Making choices even when they scare you because you know it's the right thing to do—that's bravery.'" (p. 210) Do you agree with Asif's statement about bravery? Are



bravery and courage the same thing? Write your own definitions of bravery and courage.

Friendship and family

1. Towards the end of the novel, Nasreen Baji says to Amal, 'I thought about keeping you...I've enjoyed your company and have grown fond of you.' (p. 222) Do you think Amal and Nasreen Baji have developed a friendship? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that Amal's parents had a choice in allowing Jawad Sahib to take Amal? Do you think they took responsibility as parents?
3. Omar is one of Amal's best friends, but she complains that it is unfair for God to give her a friend who understands her completely and create him as a boy (p. 11). Why does it matter that Omar is a boy?
4. Compare and contrast the friendships Amal has with Hafsa and Nabila.
5. Consider Amal's friendships. What characteristics does the novel suggest are necessary for a good friendship?

The power of education

1. Omar gets a scholarship at Ghalib, one of the best schools in the country. Amal notes that this could change everything for him. Given his background as a servant's son, how could this change his life? What sort of life might he have had without this opportunity?
2. Amal wants to be a teacher, but she feels she has lost her chance when she begins her life of indentured servitude. At the Khan estate she begins to teach Fatima to read and write. What effect does this new knowledge have on Fatima's life? And how does it help Amal?
3. People often say that 'knowledge is power'. What do you think this means? What does this say about the value of education?
4. Why do you think Khan Sahib chooses to build a literacy centre in Amal's village? Why does he think this will encourage people to vote for him in the election?

RESPONDING

1. Debate the following topic in class: 'If everyone decided nothing could change, nothing ever would.' (p. 207) Divide the class in two, and allow time for each side to develop arguments that support their position. Allow each side to present their arguments, encouraging students to refute the opposition's arguments using valid reasons.
2. Have the students present a monologue from the point of view of Omar, Hafsa or Seema about the day Amal is collected and taken away. Students should consider the events of the day and also the characters' feelings. Ask students to avoid a simple retelling of the events; rather they need to reflect

on the events and discuss their emotions, while also questioning what the future will bring.

3. On page 218, Amal asks the other servants, 'Isn't it a good thing that he's been caught?' She has never considered the further implications for other people at the estate if the Khan family can no longer employ them. Write an extended response discussing whether you believe that Amal has done the right thing. Was her freedom worth more than the security of many other families?
4. *Amal Unbound* was inspired by the story of Malala Yousafzai. Research Malala Yousafzai and other inspirational women who have fought for women's rights and freedom. Select one of the women and create a multi-modal informative presentation. Consider using programs such as Prezi, Adobe Spark, Haiku Deck, Google Slides or Visme for the presentation.
5. In character as a United Nations Youth Delegate, write and present a persuasive speech, to be delivered at the United Nations, urging governments to take stronger action against indentured servitude.
6. We don't see Amal reuniting with her family. Instead we see Amal walking to her village and wondering what will happen next in her life. What do you think happened next? Do you think Amal easily fits back into her family? Would her relationship with her parents be the same after they have allowed her to be taken away?
7. Write an essay that describes and analyses the many ways that the literacy centre in Amal's village serves as a symbol for freedom within the novel.