



story explorer

The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Q Raúf Intro Week Activity Pack

Introduction for Adults

The Boy at the Back of the Class was the first book written by author and activist Onjali Q Raúf and was published in 2018. It tells the story of a young boy named Ahmet, a refugee from Syria, who starts at a new school after being separated from his family on his journey to London. Four children in his class determine to become his friends and to reunite him with his family. It deals with very serious subjects, including war, death and racist bullying, all from the viewpoint of one of those children. It won the 2019 Blue Peter Book Award and the Waterstones Children's Book Prize.

Raúf's more recent books also explore difficult issues, such as domestic violence in *The Star Outside My Window*, homelessness in *The Night Bus Hero*, food poverty in *The Great Food Bank Heist* and historical racism in *The Lion Above the Door*. Her books explore these topics through a child's perspective, and her books always emphasise friendship and are always told with humour. 2022 will see the release of *Hope on the Horizon: A Children's Handbook on Empathy, Kindness, and Making a Better World*.

The Boy at the Back of the Class is illustrated by Pippa Curnick, who also illustrated two other books by Onjali Q Raúf as well as books by many others. Curnick is also an author in her own right.



How to use the packs

You might be a librarian looking to start your own Story Explorer group; a parent or carer navigating teaching for the first time, or a teacher looking for material to use in your classroom, at home, in school or online.

These packs are designed to be a reading accompaniment. You can use them to help children work through and get the most out of an exciting book for their age group.


There are 11 weeks of activities to complete and you can go at your own pace. **Each week you and the Story Explorers should read the chapter(s) written at the top of each pack before starting the activities.**

For each week, there will be two packs: one for adults with instructions and one for children with activities. You should read these packs before starting your sessions with the Story Explorers.

Each week, the children will be asked to read one, two or three chapters of *The Boy at the Back of the Class*. Children are then encouraged to explore the story further through the activities. These are designed to be fun and engaging, allowing each Story Explorer to develop their creativity (as well as vocabulary and skills) in their own way. Some of the activities include:

- Open-ended questions about characters, locations and plot
- Exploring and recording new vocabulary
- Illustrating characters and locations
- Creative writing

Story Explorers are also encouraged to be inspired by the descriptions and pictures in the book - and their own imaginations - to create their own varied illustrations of characters and events. genres of writing will be explored (including poetry, diary, journalism, screenplay and interview) and there are also several opportunities for performance and recording.



These packs may be completed online, or you may choose to print them out - choose whichever works best for you and your Story Explorers. If you are unable to print the activity sheets, you can copy or draw them directly onto paper. As this is a book firmly set within a school, these activity sheets can be combined to create individual School Yearbooks, examples of which can easily be found online.

Creative Writing

When Story Explorers meet together, writing time is special, a communal experience which supports every individual. Everyone (adults included) writes at the same time, in silence, inspired by the same stimulus. It is just as special when a Story Explorer writes alone.

“We are all going to write, without talking, for five minutes. We will write in silence so that we don’t disturb anyone else, and so that we can focus on our own ideas. This means that we need to be ready to write before we start - so ask any questions now.”


Five minutes may be too long initially, but over time this can be extended. We have found that most children really appreciate silence, but it is important to clear up any questions first and to refer to that silence as a treat, a special time.

“And what if, faced with a blank page, we have no idea what to write? If we start to panic? Adults can feel that way, too. Then we just start writing whatever words come into our heads... I don’t know what I’m doing... I can’t think what to write... I’m hungry and I want something to eat right now...”

The point is to write. Anything. Just the act of getting words onto paper is what’s important. And, more often than not, ideas will pop into your brain and off you speed. Or maybe they don’t come straight away, but you find yourself musing later.

And you have the right to not show it to anyone, or to show it to just one person. It is your creation and you decide what happens to it.

If someone shares their writing with you, tell them what you really like about it - Story Explorers encourage each other.



There are some things that don't matter. Spelling is one - as long as you can read it yourself, that's fine.

Neat handwriting is another, as long as you can read your writing. You may want to continue, edit or redraft this story at some point in the future, so it does help to be able to read it. But that is your choice.

Grammar and fancy or 'wow' words don't matter either, as long as you tell the story inside you which needs to get out onto the page. Use the words that tell the story best.

On the other hand, there are some things that really do matter.

Enjoyment.

Encouraging each other.

Wanting to write.

Having a story that you want to tell, even if it is just to yourself.

Reading because you have to know what happens next, because you feel you are inside the story, because not reading is just not possible.

Story Explorers do just that: we explore stories. We think about the characters. We imagine ourselves in their place and respond in many different ways. We illustrate and dramatise scenes. We write further adventures.

We can explore stories in many ways, by reading a book on paper, an ebook or a graphic novel; listening to an audiobook or to a radio drama; watching a film; listening as a family member reads aloud, or reading aloud to a younger brother or sister. All are valid and all can spark our imaginations.

Get to Know Onjali Q. Raúf

Books by Onjali Q. Raúf

The Boy at the Back of the Class, (illus. Pippa Curnick), Orion, 2018
The Star Outside My Window, (illus. Pippa Curnick), Orion, 2019
The Night Bus Hero, (illus. Pippa Curnick) Orion, 2020
The Day We Met the Queen, World Book Day, 2020
The Great (Food) Bank Heist, (illus. Elisa Paganelli), 2021
The Lion Above the Door, (illus. Pippa Curnick) Orion, 2021
Hope on the Horizon: A Children's Handbook on Empathy, Kindness and Making a Better World, (illus. Pippa Curnick & Isobel Lundle), Wren & Rook, 2022

Website

<https://onjaliquauf.com/>

Videos Featuring Onjali Q. Raúf

Overview for adults:

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2019/april/books-are-absolutely-crucial-in-getting-us-to-think-about-new-worlds-we-speak-to-the-award-winning-author-onjali-q-rauf/>

Anna James interviews Raúf for The Bookwanderers Club, which ran while schools were closed due to COVID-19. They discuss her first book and Raúf reads an extract from her second:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZeBfNWHbKI>

Children from Scotland interview Raúf about what has inspired her writing:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p09tqp21>

Introductory Activities

Using these introductory activities, Story Explorers can discover all sorts of information even before starting to read the book.

The instructions can be printed for an adult to read aloud, or for the children to read themselves, or you may prefer to work with them on a tablet or computer.

Children will also need the activity sheets or plain paper, pencils, scissors (and either gluesticks to glue their work into a sketchbook, or a hole punch if they are putting them into a ring binder).

Activity A – Meet Onjali Q. Raúf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7TRYr5RPhQ>

Story Explorers can meet the author by watching this short (3 minute) video. Here, she discusses books she loved as a child, her favourite writers for children and young people, and her top three tips for storytelling. Children are encouraged to give their own answers to the questions she is asked.

Activity B – Finding Clues

Every book cover provides lots of clues as to the story inside. Each Story Explorer can discuss the open-ended questions before reading the first three chapters.

Activity C – School Yearbook Cover

Activity C introduces an activity which Story Explorers can use throughout the book. They will compile a School Yearbook based on the school the friends attend, and in this activity they can design the front cover. In later sessions, they will complete other pages of the Yearbook by illustrating and writing about the children, teachers, parents and some of their adventures.

There is an activity sheet which can be printed and used, or Story Explorers can design their own cover on a blank piece of paper.

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