

Lack of Diversity in Children’s Literature Inspires St. Cloud Author’s Latest Book

What Color is My Hijab? Intended to Inspire Young People to Achieve Great Things

By Rachel M. Anderson, Contributing Writer

(St. Cloud) – There is no denying the fact that there is a lack of diversity in modern day children’s literature. This really hit home for Hudda Ibrahim when her seven-year-old niece, Fatima, posed an important and telling question.

“She said ‘Aunty, how come I don’t see characters that look like me in the books I read?’ Her mother and I looked at each other and we were like, ‘Gosh, what can we do about this?’” recalls Ibrahim.

A smile formed on Fatima’s mother’s face when she said to Hudda, “Well, you’re the writer in the family, so you figure it out.” They had that conversation in early 2019. About a year later, the book inspired by a very astute now 8-year-old girl has become a reality.

Minnesota publisher Beaver’s Pond Press released *What Color is My Hijab?* in April 2020. The book was written by Hudda Ibrahim and illustrated by Meenal Patel, an artist who resides in California. Ibrahim says fulfilling her niece’s wish for a children’s book with characters that look like her wasn’t her only motivation for writing and publishing the book.

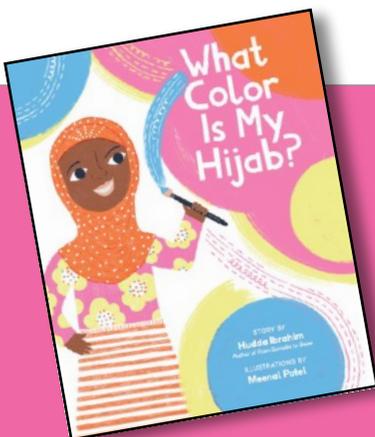
“I wanted to write something for the Muslim community to embrace, and to satisfy the curiosity of the wider American society that wonders how much Muslim women can actually do, even pushing the limits of what they thought Muslim women could do,” says Ibrahim, who teaches diversity and social justice at St. Cloud Technical and Community College in St. Cloud, Minn.

In the book, women of all different professions, including doctors and teachers, artists and politicians are featured wearing their very colorful hijabs, and a variety of clothing. Ibrahim says the variety is intentional as it illustrates that like all Americans, Muslim women come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.

For example, Minnesotans are familiar with Somali women in long dresses and hijabs (covered very modestly). This book shows them, as well as other Muslim women wearing jeans and a turban-style hijab.

“What constitutes a hijab can be just as diverse as the women who wear it,” says Ibrahim, who also wanted to increase understanding about the hijab itself through the book. Hijab is an Arabic word meaning barrier or partition. In Islam, however, it has a broader meaning. It is the principle of modesty and includes behavior as well as dress. Muslim women cover their hair, neck, and all or part of their chest, but not their faces with a hijab.

This isn’t just a book about hijabs though. Ibrahim says she wanted to show Muslim women living their lives as professionals, not always in the context of addressing current or past socio-historical events. “I see the book as an educational tool. I want little kids of all faiths, of all cultures, and all backgrounds to know something about why their friends are wearing the headscarf,” says Ibrahim. “If we teach kids about diversity when they are very young, when they get to college they will see others as the same rather than different.”



What Color Is My Hijab?

STORY BY
Hudda Ibrahim
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Meenal Patel

Feature Article
RMA Publicity

Ibrahim adds that the book is not just for Muslim girls. It is also intended as a tool preschool and elementary school teachers can use to help kids understand that even though a little girl in their class is wearing a hijab, she is no different than any of the other students.

“I am very excited about this book. It is all about little girls and how they want to show up when they wear their headscarf. It is also about how they can wear the headscarf and be somebody—be creative, smart, professional women when they grow up.”

Ibrahim is intending for *What Color is My Hijab* to be the first in a series of children’s books that educate readers about the Muslim culture. She is also working on a book for teens that tells the story of a young woman who came to this country with her family, and is trying to navigate the educational system here, while also caring for a sick family member.

Learn more about Hudda Ibrahim’s work at Huddaibrahim.com.

About the Author



Hudda Ibrahim is a Somali refugee whose family fled her war torn homeland in 1991. She spent her formative years in Ethiopia and Kenya before moving to the United States in 2006 and settling in Minnesota.

Ibrahim earned her bachelor’s degree in Conflict Resolution and English literature from the College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University in Minnesota; and a master’s degree in Peace, Justice, and Reconciliation from the University of Notre Dame. She has an additional certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University, and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Education in Leadership (Ed.D) at Saint Mary’s University.

She currently teaches diversity and social justice courses at St. Cloud Technical and Community College, and she sits on several nonprofit boards, including the Greater Minnesota Mentoring Academy, United Way of Central Minnesota, and the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce, in which she was diversity council chair.

Ibrahim is also the founder and president of Filsan Talent Partners LLC. Filsan helps employers build leadership ability to harness diverse and inclusive workplaces. The company works with local businesses and related entities to provide consulting, speaking engagements, and training for the employer. Ibrahim also mentors kids through the nonprofit she founded, the Greater Minnesota Mentoring Academy.

In recognition of her leadership, Hudda Ibrahim has received numerous awards. She is a Bush Fellow, and has been recognized with the Five under Forty Award, 2017 Difference Maker, 2016 Difference Maker, 2016 Partners in Education District 742 Award for the Take Ten project, and the Women’s Group project. In addition, she has received an appreciation award for her work in the community from the Somali American National Institute, and St. Cloud Mayor David Kleis presented Hudda with the St. Cloud “Rock On” Award.

What Color is My Hijab is Ibrahim’s second published book. Minnesota-based Beaver’s Pond released her first book in 2017. *From Somalia to Snow: How Central Minnesota Became Home to Somalis* gives readers an invaluable insider’s look into the lives and culture of their Somali neighbors and the important challenges they face.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This feature article is available for your use copyright free and cost free. High resolution photography is available for your use for free as well upon request. To arrange an interview of your own with Hudda Ibrahim, contact Rachel M. Anderson, Publicist, at 952-240-2513 or rachel@rmapublicity.com.

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