



Fight Back

written by A.M. Dassu

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Hardcover, 384 pages

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Reading Level: Grade 5–9

Interest Level: Grades 6–7

Guided Reading Level: Y

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
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Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Bullying, Conflict resolution, Discrimination, Diversity, Empathy/Compassion, Families, Fiction, Friendship, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Integrity/Honesty, Kindness/Caring, Middle Grade, Muslim/Muslim American Interest, Optimism/Enthusiasm, Overcoming Obstacles, Persistence/Grit, Protest, Realistic Fiction, Religious Diversity, Siblings, Teen Interest, YA interest

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/fight-back

SYNOPSIS

Thirteen-year-old Aaliyah can't wait for a concert by her favorite K-pop boy band, 3W. She isn't too concerned with stories on the news about the rise of the far right--after all, it doesn't affect her--until a terrorist attack at the concert changes everything.

Local racists are emboldened and anti-Muslim rhetoric starts cropping up at school and on the street. When Aaliyah starts getting bullied, she knows she has to do something to stand up to the hate. She decides that, instead of hiding who she is, she will begin wearing a hijab for the first time, to challenge how people in her community see Muslims.

But when her school bans the hijab and she is attacked and intimidated for making her choice, Aaliyah feels alone. Can she find allies--friends to stand beside her and help her find ways to Fight Back?

Acclaimed author A. M. Dassu's follow-up to *Boy, Everywhere* is an essential read to encourage empathy, challenge stereotypes, and encourage positive action.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Adapted from Author's Note by A.M Dassu

"*Fight Back* was inspired by recent terrorist events and the subsequent rise of the far right, and my desire to put a spotlight on a community that is vilified in the media. Islamophobia and prejudice are a sad reality for people from Muslim backgrounds. Hate crime is on the rise, and anti-Muslim attacks have risen year on year. *Fight Back* challenges the stereotype constantly depicted in the news and in films that Muslims aren't peaceful and a Muslim woman can only be empowered if she doesn't wear a headscarf, or if she is not religious. This story seeks to authentically represent the true lives of Muslims, particularly independent women who are free to make their own decisions.

Through *Fight Back* I wanted to show a different side to a story the world thinks it knows. I wanted to show how Islamist terrorism affects Muslims and also how far-right beliefs not only affect Muslims, Jews, and people of color but equally the families of far-right ideologists. I also wanted to show that it is not only a white working-class problem; in *Fight Back* we see how the negative media narrative affects Sukhi's mum, Mr. Kumar, Mrs. Owen, Darren, and even Yusuf.

We've seen the rise of the far right and division of communities across the world in recent years. Far-right politicians have emboldened those with previously hidden racist, xenophobic, antisemitic, and Islamophobic ideologies to come forward and act on their beliefs. Research shows the far right have engaged with young people online during the pandemic, and it is becoming a bigger problem than we once thought. To stamp these ideologies out, we need to start discussing what's happening at home and at school early. Stories are a vital tool for this – showing that there is nothing to fear, that there is another side to the narrative we might have been told. It is only through such stories that we can learn about – and from – different lives and cultures, and hopefully bring people together. And this is what drove me to write this book – the hope that Aaliyah's and Lisa's story will do just that.

Like Aaliyah and so many children who will read this book, I bridge two cultures, not completely fitting into one or the other. They are intertwined. I am privileged to be able to enjoy and understand both East and West, and so this book was driven by my desire to show that people from minority communities aren't that different; we share the same hopes and fears that others do. And I wanted to write characters who are compelled by their Muslim faith to do good, just like the thousands of other people of faith I know. But they are also flawed – because they're human.

The research for this book was harrowing. The most difficult: articles and footage of young people fleeing a concert bombing, seeing far-right posters – just like the ones depicted in this story – displayed in the UK as recently as 2017 and also 2022, and speaking to girls who were Aaliyah's age who have faced the same anxiety and prejudice. I spoke to people with the diverse lived experiences featured in this book about being judged and their identities stereotyped. Aaliyah's parents are inspired by people I know, and Aaliyah's initial experiences are very similar to those of my own children. Some of the conversations in the story are true to life, including those of Mrs. Owen, which were based on reported conversations between teachers and their Muslim students in France, where wearing a hijab is banned in school. In July 2021, France introduced an "anti-separatism" bill to battle Islamist terrorism, which included aggressive policing of Muslims and a ban on Muslim women under the age of eighteen wearing a hijab in public. And although we haven't seen a ban in schools in the UK or a widespread ban in the US yet, I wanted to explore a mismanaged school

environment (which thankfully most schools reading this will not have!) and the impact racism and far-right ideology has on family and friendships, and the strength that comes from working together to stand up to it.

Like *Boy, Everywhere*, this novel aims to reflect the experiences of those who have faced discrimination, and for readers to experience and understand the impact of prejudice. Stereotypes are hurtful and they usually emphasize and belittle a part of a young person's identity they can't control. Recent revelations in sports news have highlighted the importance of words and how comments or "banter" about an individual's identity can be immensely harmful. Aaliyah's story seeks to build empathy, and helps to challenge stereotypes and break down barriers in our society.

This story about family, friendship, identity, freedom of expression, bullying, resistance, and belonging shows readers that awful things do happen, but with hope and courage and by working together, we can empower ourselves and turn things around. It enables us to walk in others' shoes and encourages discussion to combat the negative narrative embedded in our society through media and political positioning.

My hope is that through this book readers will see a happy, hard-working family that faces down challenges because of the actions of someone and something that has nothing to do with them, and understand how that family might feel in the face of those challenges.

Aaliyah's lived experience is individual and her journey uniquely her own, but through it she learns that others are going through similar experiences, and even though they are different to her, they have a lot in common that can lead to solidarity.

Some adults may feel this subject is too challenging, but it's a sad reality that Aaliyah's experiences are reflected in society and that many young people – of all backgrounds – struggle to express their identity and feel alone, scared, and judged. My hope is for anyone who hasn't been able to express themselves the way they want, or has been excluded, or doesn't feel like they belong, to see themselves in this story. Many people experience such struggles, but one thing is true: we are stronger when we support each other.

I hope that anyone reading this will see that though bad things happen, together we can get through them, and no matter how awful things get for you, you're never alone – there will always be someone who can empathize and who is willing to work beside you to make things better.

Growing up and finding your identity is never easy. If you're struggling, I hope you will see your own story through Aaliyah's. Not everyone is accepted for who they are or who they want to be. But please know that you're not alone."

Coming Together and Speaking Up for Others, adapted from the backmatter of *Fight Back*

An ally is someone from one group who stands up to support another group of people who are being treated unjustly. An ally realizes there are people who are disadvantaged and stands up for them against injustice and for what is right. They show empathy and compassion for people who are targeted, by allowing them to be heard and feel supported.

There are many ways to be an ally. Sometimes it is being part of a bigger fight, showing up at protests, marches, writing to politicians, and supporting a larger community, like when white Americans supported the Civil Rights Movement against racial segregation, and when men asked for equal rights for women in the suffrage movement.

But you can also be an ally by putting yourself in someone else's shoes and understanding that when you see injustice, you can make a difference by stepping in and speaking up, like Lisa, Sukhi, Jonah, Leon, and Feifei did, simply by being good friends.

Being a good ally is:

- Using your privilege (be it wealth, education, social standing, or influence) to help empower others
- Asking questions when you see something unfair or unjust
- Recognizing we are never too young to be an ally
- Understanding we all have a voice and using it to uplift the voices of people who are being treated badly
- Giving support to others who need your help
- Being there for that person but allowing them to speak up – standing with them, not in front of them!
- Talking to others about how to be a good ally and what is just
- Learning the history about your community and the advances made by activists that came before
- Remembering it may be lonely to stand up/be an ally/fight injustice, but you are not alone
- Seeking out groups working together to amplify your voice

Muslim Demographics

Twenty-five percent of the global population—people from every ethnic group, race, and culture—identify as Muslim. As of 2015, there were an estimated 1.8 billion Muslims around the world, making Islam the world's second-largest religious tradition after Christianity and currently the fastest-growing world religion. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worldsmuslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>) (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>). The Pew Research Center estimates that there were about 3.45 million Muslims of all ages living in the U.S.

in 2017, and that Muslims make up about 1.1% of the total U.S. population. The Muslim population in the United States has grown at a rate of roughly 100,000 per year (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>), and Muslims will constitute approximately 2.1% of the U.S. population by 2050.

Racism and Prejudice Towards Muslims and Muslim Americans

According to PEW Research, Twenty-five percent of the global population—people from every ethnic group, race, and culture— Consult the Lee & Low Blog Post, “Tackling Islamophobia with Children’s Literature” (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2019/02/28/tackling-islamophobia-with-childrens-literature/>), which was written by Gauri Manglik and Sadaf Siddique, co-founders of the South Asian book blog KitaabWorld (<https://kitaabworld.com/>). The post discusses the importance of Muslim voices in government and in children’s literature, but also how Islamophobia and hate speech against Muslims continue to persist in our government, schools, and other spaces.

Author of *Under my Hijab* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/under-my-hijab>), Hena Khan, wrote a piece in the *Washington Post* titled, “Parents, we need to teach our children about the dangers of hate-laced speech against Muslims” (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/04/09/teaching-my-son-all-parents-stand-up-against-muslim-hatred/?utm_term=.7c079bfb521), where she points out that hate speech towards Muslims is becoming normalized and not addressed nearly enough in educational settings. Khan suggests strategies where parents can encourage children to not use harmful language, educate them about Muslim practices, and expose them to quality literature in order to break the dangerous trend.

Consult additional resources on how to tackle Islamophobia in schools and in the community. See the following resources below for additional information on how to tackle Islamophobia and support your students.

- Teaching for Change, *Challenge Islamophobia* (<https://www.challengeislamophobia.org/about>)
- Learning for Justice, *Countering Islamophobia* (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/countering-islamophobia>)
- Islamophobia Education Collective, *Resources* (<https://www.islamophobiaeducationcollective.com/curriculum-and-materials-on-islamophobia>)
- Harvard Graduate School of Education, *Dismantling Islamophobia* (<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/11/dismantling-islamophobia>)

Resources for Talking to Students About Trauma and Intentional Acts of Violence

Aaliyah, Sukhi and Lisa along with other classmates experience a traumatic event, a bombing at a concert. This event can be triggering for students and create long-lasting impact after the traumatizing event. It is important to talk and listen to students’ feelings about traumatic events that occur around the world and in their community. See the following resources below for additional information on how to support students:

- The National Association of School Psychologist detailed tips on how to help support students after intentional acts of violence (<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/media-room/press-releases/nasp-statement-regarding-terrorist-attack-in-manchester-england>)
- Edutopia, *8 ways to Support Students Who Experience Trauma* (<https://www.edutopia.org/discussion/8-ways-support-students-who-experience-trauma>)
- Healthy Children, *Childhood Exposure to Violence* (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Crime-Violence-and-Your-Child.aspx>)
- National Association of School Psychologists, *Helping Children Cope with Terrorism – Tips for Families and Educators* (<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/war-and-terrorism/helping-children-cope-with-terrorism>)

Resources for Supporting Students Experiencing Bullying, Racism and Acts of Hate

Aaliyah, her family, friends and classmates experience hate and bullying both in school and out in the community. These situations can be triggering for students. It is important that educators are able to educate students on the harm that racist, xenophobic, antisemitic and Islamophobic ideologies can affect individuals and communities. See the following resources below for additional information on how to support students:

- Teaching for Tolerance, *Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics with Students* (<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf>)
- Center for Racial Justice in Education, *Resources for Talking About Race, Racism, and Racialized Violence with Kids* (<https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/>)
- ¡Colorin Colorado!, *Talking About Racism and Violence: Resources for Educators and Families* (<https://www.colorincolorado.org/talking-about-racism-and-violence-students-resources-educators>)
- Edutopia, *A Guide to Equity and Antiracism for Educators* (<https://www.edutopia.org/article/guide-equity-and-antiracism-educators>)
- Unicef, *5 Ways to Fight Racism and Xenophobia* (<https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/5-ways-fight-racism-and-xenophobia/34567>)
- Facing History, *The Roots and Impact of Antisemitism* (<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/roots-impact-antisemitism>)
- Learning for Justice, *Addressing Antisemitic Hate with Students* (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/addressing-antisemitic-hate-with-students>)

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Have you ever stood up for something or someone? Was there ever a time when you stood up for something that you believed in, even if others disagreed with you? How did it feel? What did you do?
- What strategies do you use when you're sad or scared? What kinds of techniques do you use to make you feel better? How did you come up with ways that help you in times of need?
- Have you ever been in a difficult situation where you didn't know what to do? Who did you go to for help? What plan did you come up with to tackle the situation? How did this situation make you feel?
- What does it mean to be a friend? What are the qualities of friendship? How do you support your friends? Why is it important to be loyal to your friends and defend them?
- What does it mean to be resilient? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so?
- Ask students to think about their family and what family means to them. How is family important to you? How do you interact with your family members? How do you help them?
- Have you ever solved a problem? What did you do? Why did you have to solve that particular problem? How did you think quickly? How were you acknowledged afterward?
- What does the word "freedom" mean? What does freedom mean to you? What about independence? Are freedom and independence different from each other? How?
- What do students know about nonviolent resistance? What does nonviolent resistance mean? What have you learned about nonviolent resistance at school or at home?

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Book Title Exploration: Talk about the title of the book, *Fight Back*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Book Walk: Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, table of contents, author's dedication, and Author's Note at the end. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration?

Read A. M. Dassu's biography: Read about A. M. Dassu on her website <https://amdassu.com>. Encourage students to think about what could have been her inspiration for writing *Fight Back*.

Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.

Have students write feeling(s) in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- what happens to Aaliyah, her friends and family
- how to confront harmful representations and racism
- how Aaliyah, her family, and friends change over the course of the book, and what events cause those changes
- how young people show resilience through difficult times
- how the support from family and friends during difficult times is important
- why it's important to advocate for yourself and stand up for your beliefs, identity, culture, and traditions.
- how and why trauma can affect people differently
- how Aaliyah manages and copes with complex emotions while her life is changed forever

Encourage students to consider why the author, A.M Dassu would want to share this story with young people around the world.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

ignoramus, terrorist, langar meal, Hinduism, gurdwara, Diwali, chaperone, tarmac, embroidered lehenga, fluorescent, papadum, queue, mantlepiece, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, hosepipe, mosque, cardamom, vigil, islamophobia, impulsive, psychologist, Quran, duvet, ammunition, barbaric, neanderthal, unbearable, fete, leaflets

Academic

squealing, prodded, gory, fuming, ranting, weaving, bellowed, sneering, frantically, furrowed, moped, heaving, horde, stampeding, trod, throng, trampled, burrowing, hassled, tutted, traipsed, queasy, mulched, chattering, gurgled, rummaged, cheeky, stiffened, fretted, scuffed, pooling, scoffed, plunked, rummaging, hyperventilating, thumped, pecked, deflated, swaggered, swayed, gawping, canopied, mooched, denser, engrossed

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Chapters 1 - 10

1. Who does Aaliyah get a note from? What does the note say?
2. Why does Aaliyah find the library comforting?
3. What does Sukhi explain to Lisa about the picture she posted on Snappo?
4. Why did Lisa's brother Darren, keep her up late at night? What was he yelling about?
5. Who is bullying Aaliyah? Does Sukhi get bullied in school? Why or why not?
6. What does Aaliyah ask her Mum permission for? What does Mum say?

7. What happens when Mum and Aaliyah go to the grocery? How does Mum respond to the incident?
8. When was the first time Mum put on her hijab? Why did Mum decide to put on her hijab then?
9. What does Aaliyah wish she would have said to the man who verbally harassed her and her Mum?
10. What did Mum go viral for on twitter?
11. Why is Aaliyah not happy about Yusuf being home?
12. What do the girls realize is going on at the 3W concert?
13. What happens with Lisa and the group chat? What are Lisa and Sukhi trying to figure out?
14. What is the news reporting about the 3W concert bombing? How does Aaliyah and her family react to this?
15. How is Aaliyah coping after the concert? Does she want to go back to school?
16. What are Sukhi and Aaliyah thinking after they have not heard from Lisa?
17. What information does the school share about the students who attended the concert?
18. What does Uncle Aziz tell Aaliyah about the struggles his family faced in coming to England? How does Aaliyah feel after he shares their story?
19. Why does Aaliyah not want to go to the vigil? How does she feel when she is there? What happens at the vigil?
20. What happens to Yusuf at the park? What do his parents say about this incident?
21. What does Aaliyah hear when she goes outside for a breather? What emotion does Aaliyah feel in taking care of the cat?

Chapters 11-20

22. Why did the police officer go to Aaliyah's house? How does their neighbor feel about her family?
23. What does Aaliyah take to school one day? Why does she take it? How is her day at school?
24. What did Aaliyah find out about Lisa?
25. What does Aaliyah find at her locker? How does this make Aaliyah feel?
26. What does Aaliyah tell Mr. Atkinson? How does he respond? How does that make Aaliyah feel?
27. What headline is on dad's newspaper?
28. What do Mum and dad ask Yusuf to do? Who do they want Aaliyah to see?
29. What consequence does Aaliyah receive at school for what she did to Jayden?
30. Aaliyah finally see's Lisa at school. What is their interaction like? What happens? What does

Aaliyah think of this?

31. Why does Aaliyah decide that it is time to stop "feeling bad" for herself?
32. What does Aaliyah mean when she says, "It was time to *Fight Back*"?
33. How does Mum feel about Aaliyah wearing the hijab to school?
34. Why does Aaliyah want to wear Mum's silk scarf to school?
35. What does mom think the strange noises in Aaliyah's room are?
36. How does Sukhi respond to seeing Aaliyah in her hijab for the first time? How does Aaliyah explain to Sukhi why she is wearing a hijab?
37. What are the students a school saying about Aaliyah? What does Aaliyah notice about her teachers? How does this make her feel?
38. How does Aaliyah feel about big crowds? Why does she think that the end-of-year summer fete will be different?
39. Who attacks Aaliyah at school? What does her attacker say to her? Who does Aaliyah tell about the attack? What are their responses?
40. Where does Aaliyah decide to stop before going home? What does Aaliyah witness on the way there?
41. What does Aaliyah overhear Mr. Kumar saying? What does she decide to do? What does she hope to remind Mr. Kumar of?
42. What bonuses does Aaliyah realizes she has because she is wearing her hijab?

Chapters 21-30

43. What is Aaliyah doing to try and avoid drama?
44. What does Aaliyah say to herself in the mirror? How does this help her? What does it make her think of?
45. What does the note Aaliyah found on her locker say this time? What is different about this note?
46. Why doesn't Aaliyah storm into Mrs. Owen's office? How does she feel let down by her school administration?
47. What is Aaliyah's intention with wearing the hijab? What is happening instead?
48. What does Aaliyah notice about her parent's interactions and reasons for why they can't go to Sukhi's parents' party? How does this make Aaliyah feel?
49. Why does Mrs. Alcock ask Aaliyah to stay back after class? How does this make Aaliyah feel? How does Aaliyah respond? What is the reason the school tells Aaliyah to consider not wearing the hijab?
50. What does Aaliyah look up on her computer? What discourages her from doing something?

51. Aaliyah decides to say something to Yusuf. When Aaliyah goes back to her room, she reads the article over again and gets an idea, what is it?
52. Why does Aaliyah go to school so happy the next day? What happens on her way to school? How does she feel after this incident?
53. What does Aaliyah respond to Sukhi when she says, "Why does everyone say that Muslim women are forced to cover up?"
54. Why does Aaliyah enlist Sukhi's mom for help with the fundraiser?
55. Who does Sukhi walk into citizenship class with on Friday? What is this person wearing? What is Aaliyah thinking when she sees this? What does Sukhi do?
56. What do the students in citizenship class want their free lesson to be? What happens when Aaliyah brings up the topic of identity and freedom of expression?
57. What news does Mum deliver to Aaliyah? What is her school planning to do?
58. Aaliyah feels a purpose for the first time, what is that purpose?
59. Why does Aaliyah decide to wear the hijab even after the school sent out a notice banning religious symbols?
60. What lie does Aaliyah tell Mrs. Alcock?
61. What does Aaliyah see on her way to swim? Why is this suspicious?
62. What does Aaliyah find out about Mrs. Owen's and her religious symbols ban?
63. What message are Aaliyah and her friends ready to send Ratcliffe Academy?
64. How do the Aaliyah and friends protest? What is the outcome?

Chapters 31-Epilogue

65. What story does Sukhi share with Aaliyah about dealing with personal attacks based on their religion?
66. What note does Aaliyah find at home? How does this note make Aaliyah feel?
67. What does Mum say about the first people who were born in England? Who are they descendants of?
68. Why are Mum and Dad upset about Aaliyah protesting at school? What do they say?
69. What does Aaliyah admit that she is scared of?
70. What did Sukhi send Aaliyah? Why are they worried about Lisa?
71. Who does Aaliyah begin to talk to for help with the fundraiser? What idea do they come up with?
72. Why are Aaliyah and Sukhi worried about Lisa? What is their plan to go see her? What are they scared of? What excuse does Aaliyah give her mom about why she is going on a "run"?
73. What do Aaliyah and Sukhi say to Lisa when they get to her house? What does Lisa say to

them? What has Darren done to Lisa?

74. How does Darren respond when Lisa tells him to "STOP"? What does Aaliyah tell Darren? How does Aaliyah stand up to Darren?
75. How does Sasha's attack help Aaliyah and Sukhi?
76. What was the result from the Gamechangers planning the speeches for the governor?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does the title *Fight Back* mean to you after reading? Why do you think the author chose this particular title?
2. How does Aaliyah find her identity throughout the story? Is Aaliyah sure of her identity at the beginning of the story? What about at end of the story?
3. How does Aaliyah's character change and evolve from the beginning of the book versus the end of the book?
4. What do Aaliyah's friends throughout the book teach her? How do Sukhi, Lisa, and her friends in the Gamechangers help Aaliyah cope with the situation and make her think differently about her life? How do each of them give Aaliyah perspective?
5. Why does Mum not want Aaliyah to wear her hijab to school? Why do you think she is hesitant to accept that Aaliyah wants to begin wearing a hijab?
6. What lessons does Aaliyah learn about honesty and responsibility? What mistakes help her learn about what is important in life?
7. How does Aaliyah use her passion for freedom of expression and identity to fight for what she believes in? Who helps her in the fight against the religious symbols ban at school? What does this show you about the true meaning of friendship?
8. How does Aaliyah change her thinking on confronting those individuals who have caused her harm (Darren, Jayden, Sasha)? How does she first approach the situation and individuals? How does she approach those individuals and the difficult situations they put her in?
9. What does Aaliyah reflect on at the end of the book? What do you think she realizes? What lesson(s) does Aaliyah realize at the end of the story?
10. What does family mean to you after reading this story? Have any of your perceptions or feelings toward family members changed after reading this book? How does Aaliyah's relationships with her family members inspire you to act toward your own family and friends?
11. After reading *Fight Back*, why do you think that it is important to stand up for something that isn't fair or just?
12. *Fight Back* takes place in the United Kingdom, how are the issues that Aaliyah, her family and friends encounter, relevant to the issues in the United States?

13. Explore the structure of this text. Does the story describe events chronologically, as comparison, cause and effect, or problems and solutions? Why do you think the author structured the text the way she did? How does this story compare to other texts you have read?
14. As a reader, how did you feel throughout the book? What thoughts and emotions did you experience as you read *Fight Back*? What did you learn about what it means to be an ally? How did this story connect to your life? What moments did you identify with? Why?
15. Read about author A. M. Dassu's life (amdassu.com). What inspired her to write this story? How can our own lives and experiences be mined for inspiration? How can real life be used in fiction writing?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought (takeaway or reaction) you have after reading this book? Think about how Aaliyah navigates and experiences trauma throughout *Fight Back*. How does she process trauma and change during the story?
2. What do you think is A. M. Dassu's message to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind A. M. Dassu's intentions for writing the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Aaliyah's experiences, thoughts and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Fight Back*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *Fight Back* make you think of that?
6. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *Fight Back*?
7. What different type of conflicts are presented in *Fight Back*? Discuss Aaliyah's conflicts within herself, with her family, with her friends, and conflicts in the world. Compare and contrast the different conflicts within the text.
8. Have students write a book review after reading *Fight Back*. Consult ReadWriteThink's lesson plan on how to teach students how to write book reviews (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/what-think-writing-review-876.html>). Students can also refer to other book reviews for references. What did they enjoy about *Fight Back*? What would they tell a friend or another person who wants to read the book? Students can share their book reviews with small groups or the whole class.

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Review each chapter and chapter title. Have students summarize what is happening in the chapter, first orally, then in writing. Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about one of the characters in the book. Have them discuss what characteristics they admire about the person they chose.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. The book contains different Arabic words. Have students highlight them in the text, and then record them separately. Have students look up their definitions and share their knowledge about these words, if applicable.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. How does Aaliyah demonstrate persistence and resilience throughout *Fight Back*? Identify a scene from the story that exemplifies how Aaliyah is resilient. What made you choose this particular passage? How did it affect you and what did you learn from Aaliyah after reading *Fight Back*?

2. How is Aaliyah treated at school by some of her classmates before the 3W bombing? How is she treated after the bombing? How does that impact her as a character? How does it affect her emotions and how she feels throughout the book?
3. What kinds of emotions does Aaliyah struggle with after the bombing at the 3W concert? How do these emotions affect her thoughts and actions throughout the story?
4. What are the coping strategies and techniques that Aaliyah uses after the bombing? How does she evolve in her coping strategies throughout the story?
5. Aaliyah, her friends and family face discrimination throughout *Fight Back*. How do you respond to prejudice or discrimination? When you experience it yourself and/or when you see it happening to others?
6. How does trauma affect Aaliyah and her family members differently? How do they each cope with the racist, xenophobic, antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks that they face?
7. How does Aaliyah use her frustration with the religious expression ban at school to help others? How did people in Aaliyah's life support her when she needed help? What did you learn about Aaliyah dealing with injustices?
8. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *Fight Back*.
9. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions.
10. Encourage students to identify passages where characters manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. In a chart with four columns, write: What was the cause of the conflict? What was the consequence of the conflict? How does the character(s) resolve the problem? What are additional ways the character(s) could have solved the problem? What advice would you give

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Prepare a persuasive essay that explains your views on which character changed the most throughout the course of the novel.** Defend your views by citing specific examples. Track their change through evidence from the book over the course of the story. What did you notice about how they changed? Readwritethink.org “Inferring How and Why Characters Change” lesson plan provides additional details and ideas on how to teach about character change (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/inferring-characters-change>).
- **Have students identify a place where Aaliyah’s character changes in the book.** Why do students think that was a point where Aaliyah’s character changed? How does Aaliyah feel before the change, what causes the change, and then how does she feel after? Create a graphic organizer with a column on the left that says “Before,” a column in the middle that says “Event—what happened that caused the change,” and then a column that says “After.” Afterwards, students can write an essay detailing their findings from the graphic organizer, and what they learned from analyzing Aaliyah’s character change.
- **Analyze Aaliyah’s relationships with other characters in the book and divide students into their respective groups: Aaliyah and her family; Aaliyah and Sukhi; Aaliyah and Lisa; Aaliyah and the Gamechangers.** Have students examine these relationships closely and think about how they help Aaliyah develop as a character throughout the story. Then, have students share out their findings and write an essay comparing their character’s relationship with Aaliyah and another group’s character.
- **Select a scene in which you disagreed how a character handled a situation, person, or event.** In the voice of that character, rewrite the scene as you think it should have happened. Here are a few resources on how to teach voice in writing (<https://www.teachwriting.org/612th/2020/1/29/teaching-voice-in-writing-a-guide-for-creative-teachers>) and (<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/teaching-voice-anthony>). Have students share their writing pieces afterwards, and reflect on what it was like to think about the characters differently.

- **Assign students different characters from the book and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us?** Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have also done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share out their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author A. M. Dassu.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a children's book? How did the author come up with the idea to write *Fight Back*? Consider contacting A. M. Dassu and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting for a virtual author visit (<https://amdassu.com/>).
- **Have students read *Boy, Everywhere* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/boy-everywhere>), which is another title by author A. M. Dassu.** Ask students to compare each book with the following guiding questions: what is the central idea of each title? How are the titles connected? What themes or ideas do they share? How are the main characters, Sami and Aaliyah similar? How are they different? What kinds of problems do they experience in the books? How are their families important in their lives? What are the ways that they solve critical problems and think about their actions? Have students plan their thoughts in a graphic organizer and write an essay afterwards.
- **Have students read the Author's Note from A. M. Dassu.** What did they learn from the Author's Note after reading the story? How did it make them think differently about *Fight Back*? What is A. M. Dassu's perspective and why did she decide to write this story? Have students write a reaction essay to the Author's Note, and present 3 follow up questions for A. M. Dassu.
- **Have students read the author's backmatter, "Coming Together and Speaking Up for Others."** Aaliyah and her friends face hatred, Islamophobic, racist, xenophobic and antisemitic attacks. How can students be a good ally? What did they learn from this? How did it make them think differently about *Fight Back*? Have students write a reaction essay to the "Coming Together and Speaking Up for Others" and brainstorm different ways that they can be allies in their own classroom and school community. Consider creating a poster displaying the ways that students can be an ally for them to refer to throughout the school year.
- **In an essay, poem, or other written format, have students share something that's important to their identity, using inspiration from Aaliyah in *Fight Back*.** How is this critical to who they are? Why is this important to students, and how does it make them feel to show people their true selves? Why is it essential to be who you are, and not try to be someone else or to be ashamed of your identity? Students can share with a partner, small group, or the whole class.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students read "Zahara's Hijab", an article from Learning for Justice on the significance of wearing a hijab in Islam religion.** Students can read this non-fiction story (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/texts/zahrahs-hijab>). As students read, have them compare Zahara's story with Aaliyah's in *Fight Back*. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Why is it important to show respect to all persons regardless of religion? What is something new that you learned after reading this story? What did you already know? Students can share their reflections in an essay.
- **Aaliyah's freedom of expression is challenged with the religious symbols ban at school.** Encourage students to learn more about the First Amendment and its protection of religious freedom in the United States. PBS Learning Media has teaching materials on religion and the first amendment and how this amendment allows people of diverse religion to co-exist peacefully within society (<https://pba.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/islam08.socst.world.glob.lpfirstame/religion-and-the-first-amendment/>). What did students learn about the First Amendment? What did students learn about the diversity of religions in the United States? How does this connect to Aaliyah's experiences in *Fight Back*?
- **Encourage students to learn about the religion Islam.** For older students, consider teaching a unit about Islam and its history. PBS has a unit, "Access Islam," that contains lesson plans about the different historical elements of Islam (<https://www.thirteen.org/edonline/accessislam/lesson.html>). Learning for Justice also has a lesson, "Debunking Stereotypes about Muslims and Islam," that can be used and adapted for students (chrome-extension://efaid-nbmnnibpcajpcglcfindmkaj/https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/general/tt_debunking_misconceptions_0.pdf).
- **Have students learn more about Muslim communities and the situation that many Muslim groups face across the globe.** To provide students with context and information about how different Muslim communities, have students read Muslim Demographics (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worldsmuslim-population-more-wide-spread-than-you-might-think/>) (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>) and write down their findings. Then have students read about Anti-Muslim hatred: "Anti-Muslim hatred has reached, 'epidemic proportions' says UN rights expert, urging action by the states" (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086452>). What measures have U.S. states adopted that are restricting and targeting Muslim communities? How does reflect what students read and learned about in *Fight Back*?

- **Aaliyah's family and friends face hatred, Islamophobic, racist, xenophobic and antisemitic attacks.** It is also critical to be cognizant and aware of the students in your classroom when teaching about these topics. Assign words to groups of students (Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia and antisemitism) and have each group define their word and have them conduct a research study on their word and how to combat each term within their school, community and the world. Have students present their findings to the class. Consult the Background section in the guide for additional resources.
- **Encourage students to brainstorm ways they can support Muslims and Muslim Americans in their community.** Students can read author Hena Khan's article for *The Washington Post* (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/04/09/teaching-my-son-all-parents-stand-up-against-muslim-hatred/>) about how hateful speech about Muslims has become the norm and needs to stop. Think about ways that students can be activists for Muslims and what that looks like. How can they bring more books featuring Muslim characters in their classroom? How can they distribute accurate and positive information about Muslims and the Islam religion? Consult organizations like the Pillars Fund (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/24/your-money/pillars-fund-muslim-americans-support.html>) (<https://pillarsfund.org/>) (<https://www.bustle.com/p/7-muslim-advocacy-groups-to-support-through-donations-volunteering-32913>). Encourage students to also research and learn more about World Hijab Day (<https://worldhijabday.com/>) and share with their school or larger community.
- **Aaliyah is pleasantly surprised when she sees an influencer who is wearing a hijab on social media.** Have students conduct a research project on famous women, including athletes, politicians, artists and more, who wear hijabs. Students can learn about Olympians and professional athletes who wear hijabs, women in our own government today, artists, and more (<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-sports/hijab-in-sports-how-muslim-women-athletes-are-fighting-for-acceptance-115443/>) (<https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/9-inspiring-muslim-women-shattering-stereotypes/>) (<https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/07/rashida-tlaib-ilhan-omar-are-the-1st-muslim-women-elected-to-congress.html>). Nike also came out with a hijab for women athletes in response to the high demand for hijabs in professional and Olympic sports (<https://news.nike.com/news/nike-pro-hijab>). Have students reflect on why they believe representation matters.

Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Aaliyah, Sukhi and Lisa peacefully protest in front of Mrs. Owen's office the day after the religious expression ban at school.** The girls have signs for their silent protest. Encourage students to think about what they would write if they were students at Ratcliffe Academy. Have students recreate those signs and reflect on what their sign would say and why. The National Museum of American History has a lesson plan about protest signs (https://amhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/freedom/lunchcounter_signs.pdf) for additional information and student support).

- **Citing textual evidence, select a theme portrayed in the novel, *Fight Back*.** Create a visual presentation with illustrations, drawings, and any other creative materials to reflect how this theme is developed over the course of the text.
- **Have students illustrate a feeling one of the characters experienced in the story.** What do they want to convey? Students can think about a particular scene that stood out to them from *Fight Back* featuring the character of their choosing. What kinds of materials do they want to use? Have students share their pieces with a partner, small group, or whole class.
- **Have students reimagine the cover to *Fight Back*.** What would they change? What would they keep? If time allows, have students illustrate a new book cover.

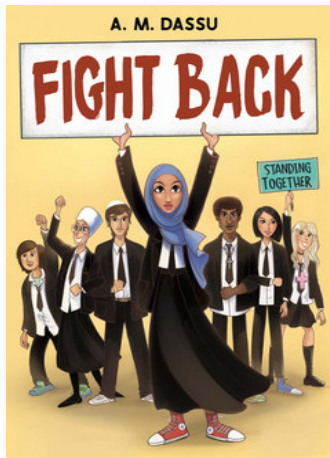
School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Interview a family member about the history of their family.** Have students talk about their country of origin. Why is it important to understand your family history? Why is it important to know the different parts of the world where your family is from? If students do not know their family history, have them interview someone about the history of your town or city.
- **Have students interview a parent, guardian, or adult mentor about their experiences with fighting for something they believe in or going through a hardship.** How did this person react to and handle the situation when they were faced with obstacles? What advice do they have for someone trying to take up a cause and stand up for justice? What advice do they have for someone who has been abused or silenced?



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. M. Dassu is the internationally acclaimed author of *Boy, Everywhere*, which has been listed for 25 awards, including the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, the Carnegie Medal, is the 2021 winner of The Little Rebels Award for Radical Fiction and is also an American Library Association Notable Book. Her novel, *Fight Back* was Indie Book of the Month and also a Guardian Book of the Month upon publication this year. She is a director at Inclusive Minds, which is an organization for people who are passionate about inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature, and one of The National Literacy Trust's Connecting Stories campaign authors, aiming to help inspire a love of reading and writing in children and young people. A.M. Dassu grew up in the Midlands dreaming of becoming a writer but studied economics instead and worked in marketing and project management before realising her dream. She writes books across a wide genre, including non-fiction, that challenge stereotypes, humanise the "other" and are full of empathy, hope and heart. Her work has been published by *The Huffington Post*, *Times Educational Supplement*, *Scoop magazine*, DK Books, Scholastic, Lee and Low, Old Barn Books, Hachette, Oxford University Press and Harper Collins. Her next book is a World Book Day novel and will be published in March 2023. You can also find her on Twitter @a_reflective or Instagram @a.m.dassu.

REVIEWS

"This group of committed friends will win readers' hearts." – *Kirkus Reviews*

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