



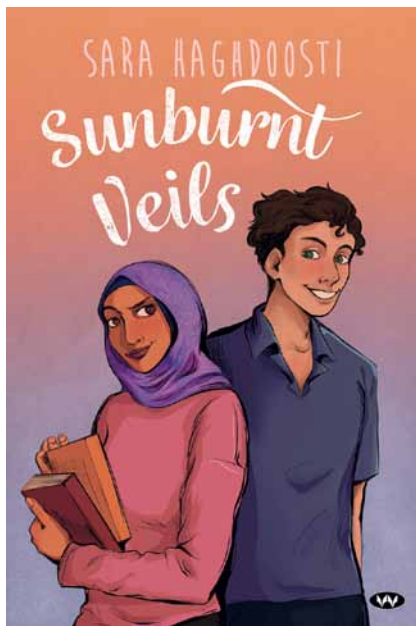
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TEACHERS' NOTES

Sunburnt Veils

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1. Introduction to *Sunburnt Veils*

An own-voices #LoveOzYA rom-com with a political activist edge and a deliciously savvy pop-culture voice.

Tara wears hijab even though her parents hate it, and in a swipe-right world, she's looking for the 'will go to the ends of the earth for you' type of love. Or, she would be, if she hadn't sworn off boys to focus on getting into med. Besides, what's wrong with just crushing on the assassins, mages and thieves in the fantasy books she reads?

When a bomb threat on her first day of university throws her together with totally annoying party king and oh-so-entitled politician's son Alex, things get complicated. Tara needs to decide if she's happy reading about heroes, or if she's ready to step up and be one herself.

Advance Praise for *Sunburnt Veils*

'A must-read about what it takes to be a real hero, from a vital new voice.' – **Jenna Guillaume**

'Clever, warm and heartfelt. *Sunburnt Veils* perfectly captures the ramifications of challenging stereotypes whilst demonstrating that you're never alone when being true to your heart.' – **Sarah Ayoub**

'A well-rounded and strong own-voices debut that captured my heart, captioned my pain but made me smile.' – **Annie McCann, Read3r's Re-Vu**

2. About the author

Sara Haghdosti loves all things YA and fantasy, and often skips out on nights of sleep to finish great stories (a big deal given she has two little kids who often don't sleep through the night). She works in social change – which means that she's professionally one of those kinda annoying do-gooder types. She's a proud Iranian Australian feminist, and her writing has appeared in *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Drum* and *The Punch*.

Sunburnt Veils is her debut novel.

Find out more at www.sarahaghdosti.com



3. Inspiration behind the novel

When I say I'm an Iranian Australian Muslim feminist, I'm often met with raised eyebrows. I wanted to write a book that showed fierce Muslim women who were like the ones I grew up with: complicated, contradictory and compelling. I wanted to create a bridge so that people could see that my feminism didn't come from repression, but rather histories of resistance and some incredible role models.

I wanted to write a book with badass role models that my 15-year-old self would have loved, one that would have made her feel like she wasn't the only one that didn't quite fit in.

I loved running for student government in university – it's where I met some of my closest friends – but it's also the place where I encountered a lot of racism, from casually being nicknamed the 'terrorist' to being in a class where everyone agreed that Muslims wouldn't ever be able to integrate into society. There are such classist notions around racism being a symptom of a lack of education, and I wanted to shine some light on how these

situations are less about education than they are about power, and how that imbalance can allow racism to flourish at elite institutions.

The other aspect I wanted to explore is how much being 'Muslim' isn't about personal faith, but about how others interact with Muslim people. I was impacted by the US 'Muslim Ban', while at the same time, laws in Iran would impact me for not being Muslim enough. For all the controversy around Islam, we don't talk nearly enough about how governments are creating laws that target people for what they think they might believe.

4. Links to curriculum

These Teachers' Notes have been designed with the aim of encouraging students to engage more closely with *Sunburnt Veils* to promote emotional intelligence, critical interpretation, awareness of social issues and a deeper understanding of using the English language for creative writing purposes.

The suggested questions and activities will encourage students to think critically and creatively, and to promote interpretation of meaning and themes behind the text. Additionally, students can examine the novel's style, voice and point of view, with questions that encourage group discussion and communication.

The following sections outline suggested questions to ask students, and activities to be performed to encourage group discussion and class engagement. They have been broken down into sections to enable teachers to identify which topics most suit their class or teaching style, or alternatively, for one or two questions to be selected from every section.

Learning Area

Sunburnt Veils is best studied in secondary years (grades 9 to 12) and can be used to teach all three strands of the Australian English curriculum (Language, Literature and Literacy). It is particularly relevant to investigating how social, moral and ethical positions are represented in texts and also explores interpersonal relationships.

5. Style

Sunburnt Veils is written in a deliberately colloquial style with lots of pop culture references – this choice was made to ground the characters in a familiar context and to also provide some relief from some of the heavier moments of the book.

6. Discussion questions and activities while you are reading the book

As you read through the novel, work through the following questions and activities:

After reading Chapter 3:

- Mitra and Tara are best friends – what do you learn about them in the first chapter? In what ways are they similar and different and what tools does the writer use to showcase their unique personalities?
- Write the first page of a novel where you and one of your close friends or family members are the main characters. Think about how you can show readers who your characters are without telling them explicitly.
- What are some of the examples of racism Tara encounters on her first day of university?

After reading Chapter 5:

Read the following excerpt from the novel and then answer the related question:

*'Look, if you want to chuck on a hug a Muslim sign and get a sh*t-ton of YouTube views, go ahead. That girl is still gonna take one look at you and see ISIS. And don't you dare tell me you think that's okay.'*

'She's just ignorant.'

*'Because she wants to be. Come on, the girl can read, can think. People don't hate each other 'cause they're ignorant. Sure, you're taught that sh*t, but it only works if you swallow it without asking questions.'*

- In chapter five, Mitra argues that 'ignorance' isn't a justification for racism. Brainstorm the different people whose responsibility it is to help prevent racism. Discuss examples of when you've seen different groups do it well.

After reading Chapter 8:

- Pretend that you're running for your school's Student Representative Council by creating a poster for your campaign. Include images and a tagline.

After reading Chapter 12:

- Why does Tara wear Hijab?

After reading Chapter 16:

- In many ways Tara and Alex are very different. As they get to know each other, what do they find in common?
- Imagine that you're running for your school's Student Representative Council – what are some of the things you would change at the school if you were elected to student government? Write a speech encouraging others to vote for you, highlighting the changes that you'd make.
- After hearing campaign speeches as a class, talk through what resonated and what stands out with different people. Note what seems to be most effective and if that's surprising.

After reading Chapter 19:

- Sima calls Tara out for stereotyping the Muslim Society. Reflect and write about a moment where you've struggled with stereotypes of a group that you belong to. What helped you realise you were doing it, and how did you navigate it?

After reading Chapter 22:

- Write two different newspaper articles about Steve's actions. In one article, try to convince the audience that Steve isn't at fault, and in the other, convey that he is at fault. Remember the five Ws: who, what, where, when and why. Include a title, by-line, subheading, image, image caption and pull quotes from the book. Use an objective factual tone, statistics, and quotes from an expert (you can make these up). What writing techniques do you use to convince your audience that Steve is or isn't at fault?

7. Questions and activities to consider after finishing the book

After you have read the entire novel, work through the following questions and activities:

What's in a metaphor?

- The book's title *Sunburnt Veils* includes a reference to Dorothy Mackellar's poem 'My Country'. Explore the different meanings of this title and who you think it's referring to in the book.

It's all about character:

- Have a conversation about how the different characters in the book change. Do they all change for the better?
- Mitra's character was inspired by the MIA song and music video 'Bad Girls'. Watch a music video or listen to a song that you love and then write a short story based on a character from that song or clip.

Run a class campaign:

- Brainstorm things that the school could change for the better.
- Vote on which issue to tackle together.
- Brainstorm about who in the school can help create that change (the principal, the P&C etc), and how you can convince them to help.
- Put your plan in action – try using online tools like change.org to create petitions, or present your ideas to the principal for their consideration.

Talking about racism and homophobia:

- Write about the different types of racism that Tara experiences. Compare the similarities and differences.
- Think about the ways that Tara and Mitra navigated their experiences with racism and homophobia. What are some strategies that you use to manage difficult situations?

Who tells our stories?

- Pick a visual news media (it can be TV, newspapers, magazines, etc.). Watch or read for an hour. Make a list of the types of different people you saw. Who speaks, who is just in the background? How is that representation similar or different to your everyday life?
- Write a short story about someone who often isn't featured in mainstream media.
- The book uses a lot of fantasy references to create meaning and illustrate Tara's character. As a class, have each person share one reference to a movie or book. Discuss who is familiar with the references and how the meaning behind them is similar or different depending on who hears it.

8. Further reading/ resources

- Video: Mipsters video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68sMkDKMias> or [click here](#))
- Article: by the creator of the Mipsters video (<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/03/the-surprising-lessons-of-the-muslim-hipsters-backlash/284298/> or [click here](#))
- Report: Racism No Way – a guide for Australian Schools (<https://racismnoway.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/guide.pdf> or [click here](#))
- Book: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* – Randa Abdel-Fattah
- Book: *Hate is Such a Strong Word* – Sarah Ayoub
- Book: *The Hate Race* – Maxine Beneba Clarke
- Movie: *Ali's Wedding* – the first Australian Muslim rom-com
- Advocacy organisation: Democracy in Colour – democracyincolour.org
- Advocacy organisation: Change.org