

## Book reviews

May 19, 2020

### **The Proudest Blue: A Story Hijab and Family**

Written by Ibtihaj Muhammad, with S.K. Ali

Art by Hatem Aly

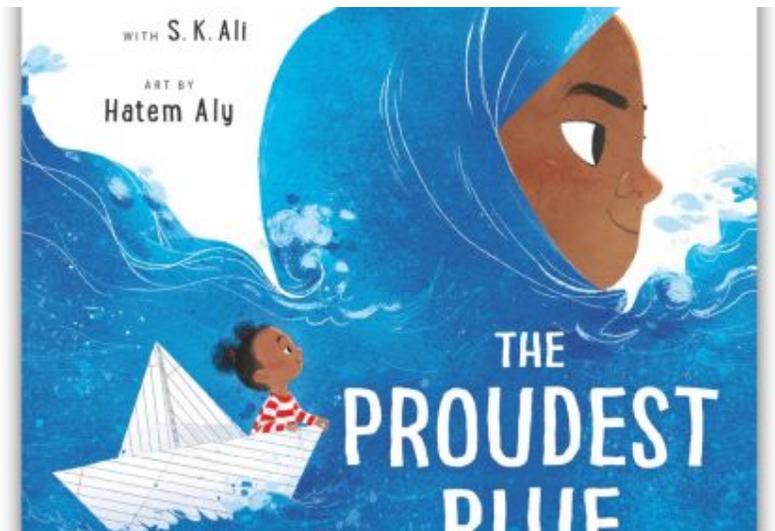
*The Proudest Blue* is a powerful and touching story of being proud of who you are, composed by the first Muslim American woman in hijab to win a medal for the United States in the Olympic Games. It explores the universal themes of pride in family, self-belief and the importance of being true to yourself, enveloping readers in the excitement of a day of “firsts”: little Faizah’s first day of school and big sister Asiya’s first day of wearing a hijab. These sweet and significant firsts are then complicated by the first stares, the first whispers and the first feelings involved with experiencing instances of being different and being bullied because of this.

Aly’s vibrant colours, realistic illustrations and artistic comparisons of Asiya’s beautiful, blue hijab to the ocean and the sky, allows Muhammad to interweave the symbolism of nature’s beauty and strength with the messaging that one’s difference provides an opportunity to bring understanding to others, so always be proud and stand tall.

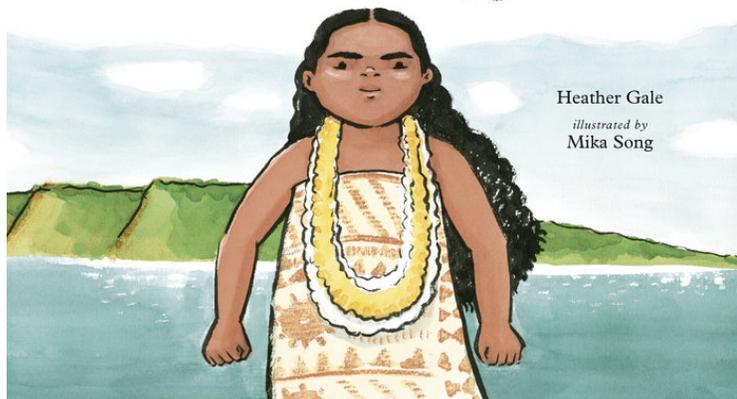
Using the hijab as a subtle focus on “difference” enables Muhammad to both explicitly and implicitly highlight how in everyone’s world, there are some who will never see difference and those who always will. Inspiring words of wisdom from the sibling’s mother provide messages of hope to readers. We learn not to “carry around hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep. They belong to those who said them”. So reader, don’t react to nasty words, don’t change, just keep being you.

*The Proudest Blue* concludes with images and words about the importance of family; a warm-hearted ending to an uplifting story of multiculturalism. This is a must-read for primary students. Read it for Refugee Week, read it for the values it will teach or read it for pure enjoyment. Most of all, read it to learn about difference, acceptance, pride and success. Your culture and beliefs are unique to you; they are both important and normal intertwined. Be you and embrace your difference.

**Mandy Wells is the Multicultural Officer/Organiser**



# HO'ONANI HULA WARRIOR



**Ho'onani: hula warrior**

By Heather Gale, Penguin Random House, 2019

Based on a true story, *Ho'onani: hula warrior* is a celebration of Hawaiian culture, and an empowering story of a young person who learns to lead and to accept who they really are.

This book for children tells the story of Ho'onani, who doesn't see themselves as wahine (girl) or kāne (boy),

within a culture that many people consider to be structured on binary gender roles.

The story follows Ho'onani's desire to be part of a school performance of traditional kane hula chant, navigating some family relationships and ultimately finding their place.

In the spirit of the Hawaiian tradition of every person having a role in society (including those who did not fit into a gender binary), this book conveys that we can make space for all people to be who they are and be treated with acceptance and respect.

### **Tomorrow Will Be Different (Love, loss and the fight for trans equality)**

By Sarah McBride

*Tomorrow Will Be Different* is a memoir and activist handbook. The book starts with the author coming out as transgender on her last day as student president at university, and follows her life over the following years, as she interns at the White House; meets, marries and loses the love of her life; and works on law reform to provide transgender people with protection from discrimination.

While it is set in the USA — therefore referencing different laws and political processes — the book conveys the message that behind the fight for transgender rights are real people with hopes, dreams and fears like everyone else. It also illustrates the urgency of that fight for equality. As McBride says, "...when you ask marginalised people — whether they're transgender, LGBTQ, people of colour, women, immigrants, Muslims — when you ask them to sit by and allow for a slow conversation to take place before you treat them with respect and grant them equality, you are asking those people to watch their lives pass them by without the dignity and fairness that every person deserves."

Through the story of McBride's own experiences, this book shares some of the struggles faced by young transgender people, the barriers they may face and the hopes they have for their future. By sharing her story — which is unique and different from other trans people's experiences — McBride is able to reveal what life is like through the lens of a transgender person, and the hard work necessary to achieve gains in the fight for equality.

The book follows a decade of progress towards equality for transgender and LGBTIQ people in America more broadly, and specifically follows the actions of McBride. While it is acknowledged (mainly through the election of Trump and the resultant actions) that progress can sometimes be rolled back, the book maintains that knowing that change is possible provides hope to strive for a better day and motivation to work towards making it happen.

### **Mel Smith is a Trade Union Training Officer**

#### **How the Sun Got to Coco's House**

By Bob Graham, Walker Books, 2015.

This beautiful picture book highlights the sun's aptitude for nurturing people and wildlife on our living planet.

The book opens with the sun shining down on a polar bear. She is leading her two cubs across the snow, which now under threat due to a dangerously warming climate that, along with habitat loss, is pushing too many species towards extinction. The sun's rays shine into the ocean — another place of great environmental concern due to ocean warming and acidification — where they are "caught briefly in the eye of a whale". The sun shines on migratory birds as they fly south, who are also at risk of extinction as a result of habitat loss and warming temperatures.

The sun nurtures the lives and spirits of ordinary people around the world — Jung Su walking through the frozen forest with his mother; young Lovejoy entranced by the sun's rays on the wings of a plane; Kosha and his father on their way to market; and Alika breaking ice with his toe as he and his family walk through their village.

The sun "finishes its journey" with its morning rays waking a child to begin the pleasures of a building a snowman with her friends, in a new day of sunshine.

There are many messages in this book — one being that we can find hope when we commune with nature.

### **No One is Too Small to Make a Difference**

By Greta Thunberg, Penguin Books, 2018-2019.

Greta Thunberg ignited a global youth climate movement. In 2018, fifteen-year-old Greta went on 'school strike' each Friday, protesting outside the Swedish Parliament, over its inaction in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This small action went on to empower millions of young people around the world, who went on their own school strikes to save the planet.

Greta's message is clear, concise and direct. She tells us how it is. We are living in urgent times. She knows her generation has no time to waste to ensure a simple solution — no more coal, gas or oil.

As this young activist says, "Everything needs to change. And it has to start today". Greta and her generation 'get it'. It is now time for our politicians to learn from the young.

### **On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal**

By Naomi Klein, Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, 2019.

Naomi Klein's collection of essays highlights the urgency of a new Green New Deal, where climate justice is central to action on the climate emergency.

Naomi Klein's essays include the 'Greta phenomena' that has radicalised millions of young people in the global school strikes for climate action; why the neo-conservatives are so determined to resist taking action on climate change; how the New Zealand massacre, perpetrated by white supremacists, is connected to climate change; what we need to learn from BP's Deepwater Horizon offshore rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010; how the madness of geoengineering could dangerously destabilise climate even further; why the shocking smoke haze from the Canadian wildfires will continue unless action is taken to reduce emissions; and why climate justice for the Global South is so important.

The new post-COVID-19 reality makes Naomi Klein's calls to rebuild a new Green Deal economy more urgent than ever — one that prioritises the public sector, cooperatives, local communities; one that invests in activities that have minimal ecological damage; one that values the work of women teachers, health workers, artists and caregivers; one that taxes carbon and financial speculation; one that increases taxes on corporations, cuts bloated military budgets and ends subsidies to the fossil fuel industry; one that rejects rampant greed and perpetual economic growth. Klein calls for an urgent winding down of existing fossil fuel projects, while at the same time rapidly ramping up renewables. It is well overdue, she says, for a new paradigm based on a steady state economy.

All three books are all available from Federation Library. Look up suggestions for classroom activities in the digital edition of *Education* .

**Janine Kitson** is a Federation Life Member.