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Ten Things I Hate About Me

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Like her first book, **Does My Head Look Big in This?** this is the story of the coming-of-age of an Australian-Muslim teenager. However, unlike the spiritually committed protagonist of her first novel, the central character Jamilah is ashamed of her Lebanese-Muslim identity and does everything she can to hide it. At school she calls herself Jamie, dyes her hair blonde, wears coloured contact lenses, flirts with boys she doesn't actually like, and makes endless excuses to her friends about why she can't go out with them at the weekend. In the face of the negative stereotyping where people assume that she 'drives planes into buildings as a hobby' and the real life Australian context of recent serious crimes, tensions and gang fights between the Lebanese and 'Anglo' communities, Jamie just wants to be anonymous. On the other hand, she loves many things about being from a Lebanese family and feels most herself at the after-school madrasa, the Arabic school where she is learning to play the darabuka. And whilst keeping a low profile seems to be the best solution, it does, of course, raise as many problems as it solves.

This story is written in a lively, first person narrative and covers many of the traditional areas of friendship, boyfriends and family strife in any teenage novel. British readers will like the familiarity and the differences of a novel set in an Australian suburb. Jamilah, like many a teenager in the UK, speaks one language at home and another at school and often acts as a translator for her highly educated widowed father and uncles whose English is still poor after many years. She rails against the double standards, where she is subjected to a sunset curfew whilst her brother comes and goes with impunity and where, in the absence of her mother, any Lebanese friend or relative can make critical comments on her behaviour or manners.

It's a bit over-long and repetitive in the middle section, but this book will find a place in the hearts of many young teenage readers. The ending is upbeat and all kinds of knots are tied together. She does get to go to the ball, is kissed by her prince (the reader will see this coming long before Jamila does) but not in a way that means she is deceiving her father and gets to play in the cool funk/Lebanese band in front of the whole school. Not perfect, but an interesting choice for class or library discussion between readers from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Running Order:

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