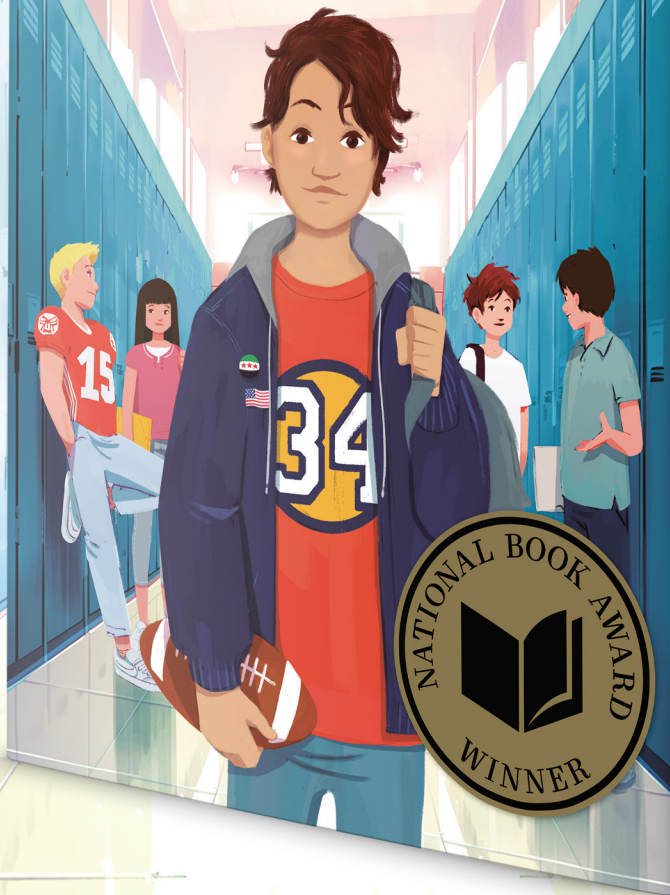


An Educator's Guide to



SHIFA SALTAGI SAFADI

KAREEM BETWEEN



**A heartfelt coming-of-age novel
in verse about the between years.**



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by Oriol Vidal

PRAISE FOR **KAREEM BETWEEN**

**A National
Book Award
Winner!**

**A 2025
GLOBAL READ ALOUD
SELECTION**

**A JANE ADDAMS
CHILDREN'S BOOK
AWARD FINALIST**

**An ILA
Notable Book
for a Global
Society**



★ **“A masterfully written,
DEEPLY RESONANT tale.”**

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ **Dynamic and engaging,
DRAWING READERS IN
FROM PAGE ONE.”**

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

**“For fans of
Kwame
Alexander.”**

—*Booklist*

**“A BEAUTIFUL STORY
of hope, empathy, confidence, and courage.”**

—*Teen Librarian Toolbox*

ABOUT KAREEM BETWEEN

Seventh grade begins, and Kareem's already fumbled it.

His best friend moved away, he messed up his tryout for the football team, and because of his heritage, he was voluntold to show the new kid—a Syrian refugee with a thick and embarrassing accent—around school. Just when Kareem thinks his middle school life has imploded, the hotshot QB promises to get Kareem another tryout for the squad. There's a catch: to secure that chance, Kareem must do something he knows is wrong. Then, like a surprise blitz, Kareem's mom returns to Syria to help her family but can't make it back home. If Kareem could throw a penalty flag on the fouls of his school and home life, it would be for unnecessary roughness.

Kareem is stuck between. Between countries. Between friends, between football, between parents—and between right and wrong. It's up to him to step up, find his confidence, and navigate the beauty and hope found somewhere in the middle.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shifa Saltagi Safadi is the National Book Award winning author of *Kareem Between*, the *Amina Banana* chapter book series, and several picture books, including *The Gift of Eid*. She has a bachelor's degree in English literature, is a former English teacher, a former Muslim book reviewer, and is passionate about spreading her love of reading and writing through school visits and story-times. Shifa was born in Syria and immigrated to the US with her parents as a young girl. She lives near Chicago with her husband and four children.

Visit Shifa online at ShifaSafadi.com and on Instagram @[ShifaSaltagiSafadi](https://www.instagram.com/ShifaSaltagiSafadi).

Pre-Reading

HISTORICAL SETTING

Kareem Between is set in the months of August of 2016 to March of 2017 in America. During this time, it was election year—and in early 2017, new President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13769, nicknamed “The Muslim Ban” due to its limitations on people entering the United States from seven predominately Muslim countries. Kareem lives in Northwest Indiana, near Chicago, and his family immigrated from Syria. He is directly affected by this ban.

As a teacher, [familiarize yourself](#) with this historical moment so you can better facilitate questions from, and conversations with, students.

COVERING THEMES

Covering a variety of themes and classroom topics, *Kareem Between* engages readers with themes of sports, friendship, hope, bullying, identity and belonging, civics, activism, citizenship, family, and faith. Before reading, show the cover to your readers and ask what themes the book may cover. Discuss why they think that and introduce some of these themes.

GENRES

Kareem Between is a mix of genres and format. If your readers are not familiar with these, discuss these genres and formats with them prior to reading. Consider asking what they think, know, and wonder about these.

- **HISTORICAL FICTION:** While set in 2016, this book is indeed historical fiction. Historical fiction is a fictional story (nonfactual) that is written in a historical period of time and with events that actually happened. Historical fiction can teach history while also infusing emotion into a narrative.
- **NOVEL IN VERSE:** Verse is a format that is poetic writing. Verse can have rules, such as when poetry is written in rhyme, like limericks, or with specific syllables, like haikus. *Kareem Between* is written in free verse, which means it is free—there are no rules. The distinction in free verse is the story is written with lines and stanzas, and so the story takes place on only part of the page.
- **NARRATIVE FICTION:** Narrative fiction is a story crafted with a character on a journey called a plot. A plot has specific beats that drive the story, with the result of a changed, more empowered character. Look for the beats in this guide.

Kahoot!

Bring *Kareem Between* to life in your class with the [Kareem Between Kahoot Page!](#)

Discussion Questions

- 1.** What is Kareem's conflict at the beginning of the book? How do you think this changes throughout the book?
- 2.** How does Kareem feel when he watches Austin spot his name on the roster? What clues do we learn about Austin's character?
- 3.** Why do you think Kareem gets upset when Adam suggests he is moving on from being a fan of the Bears?
- 4.** Does Kareem like the nickname "K" that Austin gives him? Why are names important?
- 5.** Why do you think making the team is important to Kareem? How does this decision affect his emotions?
- 6.** How does Kareem's struggle with learning Arabic make him feel?
- 7.** Kareem loves that his mother helps Syrian refugees. But when she asks him to help the new kid, Fadi, out at school, what does Kareem do? And why?
- 8.** How is Kareem's relationship with his Jido? What does it seem to symbolize for him?
- 9.** When Mama announces she is going to Syria, Kareem experiences multiple emotions. What are they? What is going on in Syria?
- 10.** What does Kareem do when he sees Austin bullying Fadi?
- 11.** Is Fadi a Muslim? Why do you think Kareem makes this assumption?
- 12.** How does the current news and his mother going away affect Kareem and his family?
- 13.** How do Kareem's actions affect his family—more specifically, his mom and Jido?
- 14.** How does Executive Order 13769 make Kareem feel? What exactly does Executive Order 13769 say and what are the impacts on people?

Discussion Questions Continued

- 15.** How do Kareem and Jameelah act to protest the “Muslim Ban”?
- 16.** What happens to Kareem after he hears the news? Does he still have interest in football? Why do you think this change happens to him?
- 17.** When Kareem hears Mama is in danger, he stops asking questions. How does this feeling of helplessness contribute to his state of sadness? How does it impact his relationships with his family, his friends, and his classmates?
- 18.** Kareem admits to Baba his full scope of emotions, and his guilt with everything that happens. How does this conversation change how Kareem feels? How can leaning on loved ones and trusted grown-ups be healing?
- 19.** What call does Baba get? How does Kareem react to this news? Is this reaction different than how he would have reacted in the first half of the book?
- 20.** How does having hope, and friendship, help Kareem face new challenges?
- 21.** What happened to Mama? What do courts rule about the “Muslim Ban”? How does this make Kareem feel?
- 22.** Kareem is between a lot of things in the novel. Between countries. Between friends, between football, between parents—and between right and wrong. How does Kareem navigate this? Is Kareem the only character in the book stuck in between? Do you ever feel stuck in between?
- 23.** What does being “all-American” mean to Kareem at the end of the book?
- 24.** Does Kareem still feel stuck in between at the end?

After-Reading Activities & Prompts

SOCIAL STUDIES AND CIVICS

Use these questions as a guide for discussing First Amendment rights and American activism.

- **How did the Muslim Ban show the different branches in action?**

The idea of three branches of the United States government is to provide checks and balances on the governmental system. The executive branch is the one the president heads, and the other two are the legislative and judicial branches.

- **What does the word “unconstitutional” mean?**

When judges of multiple American courts in 2017 ruled against Executive Order 17369, they said it was unconstitutional. The Constitution is the founding document upon which American laws are based. The First Amendment of the Constitution prohibits laws from being made that discriminate based on religion.

- **What other First Amendment rights does Kareem point out?**

Kareem discusses free speech, is involved in a protest (which is called free assembly), and contacts local media (free press).

- **How has activism changed laws in the history of America?**

Throughout American history, there have been many moments where Americans have protested unfair laws, such as the Civil Rights Movement. Protesting and standing up for justice are part of changing the world for the better!

- **What does it mean to be American?**

At first, Kareem assumed he could not be both Syrian and American. But he realizes that being an American does not mean him forgetting his culture. How can participation in activism help Americans feel a sense of belonging? How does the blend of varying ethnicities and cultures with American identity bring beauty and joy to American society?

After-Reading Activities & Prompts Continued

POETRY

Poetry can be a powerful way to use words and language to write how you feel. Write about a time where you felt “between” like Kareem. Use figurative language to describe your emotions. Remember: free verse has no rules. The only requirement is writing in stanzas and lines (which can look however you like). For extra art points: Make your poem into a specific shape! (For examples of this, see pages 138, 318, and 324.)

JOURNAL ENTRY

Kareem is stuck between. Have you ever felt stuck in between? Write a short essay on what that was, how it felt, and how you handled it.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)
activities and info on *Kareem Between!*

