

When Michael Met Mina

by Randa Abdel-Fattah

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When Michael Met Mina

Introduction

'Before Mina, my life was like a completed jigsaw puzzle. Mina's come along and pushed the puzzle upside down onto the floor. I have to start all over again, figuring out where the pieces go.' (Page 134.)

When Michael first sees Mina, they're at a rally for refugees – standing on opposite sides. Michael is with his father, the leader of Aussie Values, a new political party that believes 'if you come by boat, you've jumped the queue' (page 30). Mina is a teenage girl who fled Afghanistan via a refugee camp, a leaky boat and a detention centre.

Despite the physical and emotional distance between Michael and Mina at the rally, the moment is intimately drawn, with Mina's eyes the first thing that Michael notices. 'Hazel and green' with 'flecks of autumn and bits of emerald' (page 4). It's the start of a story where generalisations and stereotypes are stripped away as two people reveal the small details of one to the other; begin to trust, and to fall in love. Racism is personal, Michael argues, and that fact is drawn exquisitely in this novel.

Michael and Mina meet officially on the first day of Year 11 at Victoria College, a school that has awarded Mina a scholarship. To attend, she and her family have moved from Auburn, her first real home since leaving Afghanistan, to the lower North Shore of Sydney. Mina loved Auburn, loved the 'cacophony' of morning sounds, the smells, the sight of Sudanese men 'smoking, sipping coffee and talking' (page 7). But on arrival at Victoria College she feels like 'the ethnic supporting character' (page 41).

She clashes with Michael immediately, in a wonderful scene set in the school's Society and Culture class, where Michael argues his parents' belief about 'queue jumpers'. It's not personal. 'It's just general facts.' (Page 33.)

Learning about Mina's own experience forces Michael to question his inherited political view. One of the

great strengths of the novel is that Michael doesn't rely on Mina to change him. She sparks his search, but he arrives at his conclusions the hard way: by reading, by listening, by considering the facts.

Mina is an incredibly strong character who also learns from Michael. She moves from feeling like an outsider to feeling like a best friend, a girlfriend and part of the school community.

When Michael Met Mina has a cast of strong, interesting characters that raise a range of ethical questions for class discussion. Michael's parents are not easy to dislike. They're presented as good people. Michael loves them, he continues to love and respect them. He just can't agree with them. Terrence, Michael's best friend, is sexist and a bully, but loyal to Michael. He's also sympathetic to certain sections of the community, highlighting the idea that our sympathies and our prejudices come from our environment, but it's our responsibility to weigh what we believe.

The romance in *When Michael Met Mina* is cleverly handled. The main love story highlights that this debate is personal. The infatuation that Jane feels for Terrence highlights how dangerous it is for a person to be consumed completely by anything – by another culture, by inherited beliefs, by a relationship.

The novel is an incisive exploration of the influence of family and friendship. Paula is a warm character, who immediately connects with Mina. Differences in economic background don't matter. They connect over a love of books and ideas.

When Michael Met Mina is a great text for class study. Students will discuss and test what they believe, opening the door for discussion on a range of critical and important topics.

Australian Curriculum Areas

The following codes (which are indicative only broadly of the relationship between the points or activities below and the relevant Curriculum area), have been created to link to the Australian Curriculum as follows:

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM AREA/STRAND/MODE/GENERAL CAPABILITIES/CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES e.g. ACELT1812/Language/Writing/Intercultural Understanding (LA/W/IU)

STRANDS: LA – Language; LT – Literature; LY – Literacy

MODES: R – Reading; W – Writing; S1 – Speaking; L – Listening

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Literacy (LY)

Intercultural Understanding (IU)

Personal and Social Capability (PSC)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capability

Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT)

Ethical Understanding (EU)

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (ATSIC)

Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia (AAEA)

Sustainability (S2)

For more detail re curriculum areas, refer to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

www.acara.edu.au/curriculum

Pre-Reading Activities

Reading Journal ACELT1812/LT/R,W/LY/CCT/EU

The characters in *When Michael Met Mina* confront important social, moral and ethical questions. As you read, keep a journal. Note in it:

- Your opinions on the issues raised, including evidence to support them.
- Statements in the novel that are not supportable by fact.
- Questions you would like to discuss.
- Similarities and differences between yourself and the characters.
- Predictions about upcoming events.

Cover ACELT1641/LT, LY/R, W, S1/L

Study the cover of *When Michael Met Mina*. Based on the title, fonts and graphics make some predictions about the conflicts that might arise between the characters.

The Arrival LA, LT, LY/R, W, S1/LY, IU, CCT

As a class, 'read' *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan.

- How does Shaun Tan convey the difficulties of arriving in a new place? How does he 'put you in the shoes' of his characters? (ACELA1564)
- Imagine you have been forced to leave your home. Write a piece about the experience. Include your fears, and what you will miss the most. (ACELY1756)

Human Rights – The Facts ACELY1753/LA,/R,W/LY,IU,ICTC,AAEA,

Visit the UNHCR Australia website and the Australian Human Rights Commission website.

- Find and record a definition of 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'stateless people'.
- What are Australia's human rights obligations in relation to asylum seekers and refugees?

Fact Versus Opinion ACELY1754/LY/W, S1, L/LY, CCT)

When Michael Met Mina explores the difficulty of deciding what you believe in.

It shows that often we accept the opinions of our peers, our family and the media without questioning them for ourselves.

- What's the danger of accepting an opinion without question?
- In a world where people are faced with information from so many sources – parents, friends and the media – how is it possible to form your own opinion? Explain your answer.
- In pairs, make a list of ways to 'test' an opinion. (Can it be supported by facts? Is the opinion based on a stereotype? Is the opinion based on a generalisation? How convincing is the counter-argument?) Share your list with the class.

Reading Activities

Michael's first chapter is confronting. There are racist statements and language that disempowers and excludes people. (Pages 1–6.)

- Make a note in your reading journal about your first impressions of Aussie Values. How does the writer highlight the inherent prejudice in its opinions? ACELT1641/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, PSC
- What is the effect of referring to a group of people as 'they'? ACELA1564/LA/R, W, S1, L/LY, PSC
- What language features does the author use on page 4 to highlight the importance of Mina? Consider sentence structure, vocabulary choice, and figurative language. Also consider how the writing highlights the personal and specific. ACELT1641/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY CCT

In Mina's first chapter, we read that Auburn is incredibly important to her.

- Write a paragraph describing a place you love. Try to recreate the atmosphere as Mina has done – appeal to the reader's senses. ACELT1815/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

How does Terrence's language on page 14 disempower women?

ACELT1641/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, PSC

Read the wonderful description of Paula and Mina bonding on page 38.

- Write a paragraph describing a moment when you bonded with a friend. Share this paragraph with a partner. ACELT1814/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY

'How do you go from North Shore Sydney to a war zone? How can you go in and out and still be the same person?' (Page 82.)

- Predict if and how you think Michael's dad will change. Compare and contrast your predictions with a partner's. ACELT1640/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

By page 87, the reader is aware that Michael and Mina are very different.

- Make a list of the things they have in common. Use quotes to support your statements. ACELY1754/LY/R, W/LY, CCT

Why is the location of Kabul Kitchen important in the narrative? Make two predictions about how this may affect future events in the novel. Compare and contrast your predictions with a partner's. ACELT1640/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

Mina describes her love of music on page 97.

- In a paragraph, describe what it feels like to do or experience something you love. (Consider how you feel when you listen to music, play sport, read or swim.) Share this paragraph with a partner. ACELT1814/LY/R, W, S1, L/LY

Why is Mina unsettled by the exhibition on page 110? Does it unsettle you? Give reasons for your answer. Share and discuss your viewpoint with a partner. ACELT1640/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, PSC

'Let's do complicated for a second, shall we?' Mina says to Michael on page 153.

- Read this speech, and her subsequent inner thoughts. What language features make her

arguments powerful? Why is her experience so much more effecting than Alan's during his time on *Don't Jump the Queue*? ACELT1642/LT/S1, L/LY, CCT

Alan argues that refugees 'cost a lot in welfare' (page 144) and yet he doesn't want people to break the conditions of these visas. The author shows people needing asylum to be in an impossible position (page 216).

- What is a bridging visa? In what ways do they make life incredibly difficult for people who hold them?
- Based on the facts and what you've read in this novel, what is your opinion of bridging visas? ACELT1812/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, EU

What's on your bucket list (page 242)? Compare and contrast your list with a partner's.
ACELT1814/LY/R, W, S1, L/LY

As a class, discuss who has changed the most in the novel – Michael or Mina? Defend your answer with evidence from the text. ACELT1640/LT/ R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

Themes

(The main themes of the novel and supporting quotes are outlined below as a teacher aid.)

- As a class, list what you consider the themes of the novel.
 - In pairs or small groups, choose one theme.
 - Write two discussion points for your theme, and use them to guide a class discussion on the theme.
 - Provide the class with quotes from the text to illustrate the theme.
- ACELT1640/LT/ R, W, S1, L/ LY, CCT

Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Racism

'It's cheating. What about all the people who have been waiting in refugee camps and can't afford to buy their way up the queue? And then there's the fact that if you can afford to pay a people smuggler all that money, how bad a situation are you really in?' (Page 33.)

'Just because we want to protect our borders doesn't mean we're heartless. There are wars all over the world. More and more refugees. There has to be a limit, or we'll be flooded . . .' (Page 63.)

Discussion Point: In what ways do you like Michael's family? How has the author made Michael's parents relatable and racist? Why might she have chosen to do this?

Discussion Point: What does Michael learn throughout this story? Consider the facts he learns about Mina's situation, but consider also what he learns about the reasons he accepted his parents' arguments for so long.

Discussion Point: What drives the racism of the characters in the novel? How do the characters show that racism can be fought?

Discussion Point: 'I didn't mean anything personal' Michael argues to Mina on page 33. The novel shows that racism is always personal. How does the author show this?

Change and Growth

'How do I explain to him that I went along with everything my parents said because it never occurred to me that they could be wrong? I never dared to think I could question them until I met Mina.' (Page 299.)

'But the thing is, I wear my politics like hand-me-down clothes: some bits feel like they don't fit properly, but I expect I'll grow into them, trusting that because they're from my parents they've come from a good source.' (Page 32.)

'How do you go from North Shore Sydney to a war zone? How can you go in and out and still be the same person?' (page 82.)

Discussion Point: The least satisfying characters in *When Michael Met Mina* do not change. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

Discussion Point: Michael may have met Mina, but he changed by himself. Map the key events that changed Michael's mind about Aussie Values.

Discussion Point: The environment we're born into does shape us, but it shouldn't define us. Discuss in relation to the novel and society.

War and Loss

'I have nothing left of my life in Afghanistan except faded memories. The Taliban destroyed most of my life. What wasn't destroyed, we left behind, including my father in his grave.' (Page 9.)

'Being in a new country is like learning to walk with a prosthetic. It takes time for body and mind to adjust.' (Page 68.)

'Hasan died quietly. Just slipped away in his sleep one afternoon, a couple of months before we found the boat that brought us to Australia. It's hard to admit even to myself, but I can't remember what his face looked like.' (Page 39.)

Discussion Point: There are many types of loss in this novel. How does the writer show that loss is a point of connection for people?

Discussion Point: There's no point in a show like *Don't Jump the Queue* because the 'guests' can return home. Do you agree? Or is the message of the novel something entirely different?

Memory and Home

'I cannot return to my homeland. And so I must simply stay in somebody else's homeland, as an outsider and a guest.' (Page 324.)

Discussion Point: We are a product of our home, but sometimes we must move beyond it. Discuss how home can trap and/or liberate us.

Hope

'The more I stare at my baby brother the more I am reminded of Hasan's face.' (Page 343.)

'Thunderous applause, like a storm has erupted, the sound of rain crashing down onto the top of a tin roof. It washes over me like a midday rainstorm. It's pure and beautiful and I've never felt so alive.' (Page 349)

Discussion Point: 'There's a lot of ugliness under this sky. But there's plenty of beauty here too.' (Page 337.) Is this what the novel shows? Explain your answer.

Discussion Point: 'That's the way the world works, isn't it? A lottery for winners and losers.' (Page 208.) How does the writer show that things are not this simple? What does the writer suggest is the responsibility of the 'winners'?

Culture, Identity and Assimilation

'But what I don't get is how you can tell if somebody's assimilated enough. Who decides?' (Page 226.)

'You all seem to be pretty big on assimilation for migrants too. So help me to understand because I'm struggling. Is there some kind of scale? What about a woman who wears a sari and speaks the Queen's English, compared to, say, a guy in jeans and a T-shirt with an accent? How would you rate them?' (Page 152.)

Discussion Point: How does the writer show that culture is complex – that it's both constant and evolving?

Discussion Point: How does the writer show through Michael and Mina's love that diversity is essential and beautiful?

Romance

'We are worlds apart in every sense and I want to know everything there is to know about her.' (Page 80.)

'If only she knew that she didn't have to be the kind of girl who only knows how to exist when she's wanted by a guy.' (Page 293.)

Discussion Point: Romance can be life-changing. Discuss.

Discussion Point: How does the novel suggest that assimilation (romantic, cultural, within family) can be dangerous? How does the author show the importance of not being consumed by others?

Social and Economic Inequity

'I'm starting to realise that being born into this social world is a little like being born into clean air.' (Page 110.)

'I saw mansions in Kabul and Pakistan too. But spending most of my life since then in Western Sydney – happy and contented – I'd forgotten about how truly uneven the world is.' (Page 138.)

Discussion Point: Mina recognises that there is inequity in the world. Paula has things that she doesn't have. Mina has advantages that other people don't. Mina is a wonderful character because she doesn't judge people on their wealth, but on their views. Do you agree? Explain your answer.

Isolation

'I want to know people and for them to know me. But it's all on the surface here. Nothing personal. I stick to good morning and, maybe if they smile long enough, the weather. But we're strangers and that's how people want it.' (Page 93.)

Discussion Point: Through the events of the novel, how does the author show that there is strength in community?

Friendship

'When we say goodbye it's as though we both know we've crossed a threshold into that wonderful, intense and slightly terrifying place only true friends can enter.' (Page 170.)

Discussion Point: Friendship changes lives. How does the novel illustrate this?

Personal Responsibility

'Can't you see that you've given the people who threw the brick permission to hate?!' (Page 331.)

'At some point in your life you have to decide what you believe in.' (Page 299.)

'Sorry, Michael, I don't have time to babysit you through your enlightenment.' (Page 194.)

Discussion Point: Michael's journey is so satisfying because he does not rely on Mina to change him. He takes responsibility, questions the facts and changes himself. Discuss.

Ethics and Morality

'Bad things happen when good people remain silent.' (Page 285.)

Discussion Point: 'Right and wrong is always personal.' (Page 286.) How does the author show this in the novel?

Discussion Point: To what extent are Michael's parents responsible for the actions of the members in Aussie Values?

Government Responsibility

'Legally, we have to help these people. Instead, we lock them up. We abuse them. Then we bring in laws so that we can jail people who report the abuse. I don't get how we can let that happen in a democracy.' (Page 318.)

Discussion Point: How does this happen in a democracy? Consider language, media, inherited opinions, leadership, fear and stereotypes.

School and Study Pressures

'But you were also smuggled out of a war zone, lived in a refugee camp, travelled here on a leaky boat and were locked in detention for a month. By all means be scared . . . But just remember, I'm expecting you to be top of your class.' (Page 12.)

'I feel as though I'm about to hand myself over to be clipped, trimmed and sheared into the shape of a good private schoolgirl.' (Page 20.)

'Being top of the year is not something I intend to give up.' (Page 53.)

Discussion Point: Despite the differing backgrounds, the teenagers in the novel have a lot in common. Discuss.

Sexism and Representation of Gender

'Girls talk enough already without getting political on a guy too.' (Page 14.)

'We walk up William Street. Terrence can't resist commenting on every girl he sees – at the top of his lungs. 'You're gorgeous!' 'You're hot!' 'Go easy on the junk food, sweetheart!' 'Check out those tits!' (Page 46.)

Discussion Point: How does the writer subvert Terrence's sexist views of women through her female characters?

The Media

'Like Islam claims to be about peace but all we hear about is violence.' (Page 28.)

'One of the current affairs programs picks up the fight in a story that manages to mix several hot topics at once. First it's "youth street violence", then it's "binge drinking" then it's "bystander racism".' (Page 54.)

'It's perfect reality TV. Dramatic, shocking, raw, intense.' (Page 197.)

Discussion Point: How does the novel show that we must be informed citizens, not passive consumers of the media?

Freedom of Speech

"I never posted those articles," Dad says tersely. "But I won't deny people their right to free speech." I think about Mina and her family. "Free for people like us," I mutter. "Because people like them pay the price.'" (Page 332.)

"Why is it that whenever somebody uses the 'it's a free country' defence they're basically defending their right to act like a bigot?'" (Page 203.)

Discussion Point: Freedom of speech does not mean hate speech. How does the novel show that freedom to speak comes with great responsibilities?

Art and Self-expression

'Butterflies erupt in my stomach. Because there's a poem in my head. It moved in weeks ago, just like that, unannounced, big and bold, daring me to evict it . . . It's there like a challenge. And no matter what I do I can't sweep it away, or drown out the voice inside that keeps reciting it.' (Page 346.)

'I want to feel, to be affected, to get angry. Nobody changed the world by being polite. I'm going to fight with all I've got.' (Page 303.)

Discussion Point: Art is essential in forming and shaping our opinions. How does the novel show the importance of creativity and self-expression?

Plot and Structure

ACELT1641/LA/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

Dual Narrators

The novel is structured chronologically as a sequential narrative of events, from both Michael and Mina's alternating first person, present tense points of view.

As a class, discuss the following:

- Why might the author have chosen to alternate between Michael and Mina's perspectives?
- How does the use of dual narrators shape your view of the characters and themes?

ACELT1642/LT/S1, L/LY, CCT

Romantic Comedy

The treatment of people is personal, Michael argues to his father. The novel is both a coming-of-age story about serious issues and a romantic comedy. The pace is fast; the dialogue is witty, there's great chemistry between the characters. The use of humour and romance enhances the themes of the novel.

A romantic comedy generally follows the structure set out below:

- **The set up** (The chemistry between the two people is established, the interior and exterior conflict is shown.)
- **The meet cute** (The inciting incident that brings the couple together and into conflict.)
- **The complications, also known as fun and games** (The couple is drawn together but are at cross-purposes. One character is changing the other – perhaps they are changing each other.)
- **The midpoint** (A situation that binds the couple – but presents further complications.)
- **Dark night of the soul** (Everything seems lost.)
- **Ending resolution** (The characters reconcile. The characters have changed in order to be together. Usually, one main character changes to a greater extent.)

In pairs, discuss the questions below. Take notes, and share your views with the class.

- In what ways does the novel follow the romantic comedy structure?
- In a novel, or a short story, the structure is often reliant on a question that is set up and answered by the author. The question for Michael in *When Michael Met Mina* could be – Will he be able to cast off the views of his parents in order to decide what he believes in time to be with Mina?
- What other questions does the writer set up through the **plot** of her novel?

Characters

Complete the table below by adding in **key quotes** from the text to illustrate each character's **key changing points**. Choose quotes from different points in the novel to show progression. Present your quotes to the class. Discuss, as a group, the changes that occur in each character. ACELT1640/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, PSC

CHARACTER	Quote (Beginning)	Quote (Middle)	Quote (End)	Explanation of change
Michael				
Mina				
Paula				
Terrence				
Michael's father				
Mina's mother				

Style and Use of Language

Voice ACELT1643/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT, PSC

The narrative voice of *When Michael Met Mina* is first person, present tense, from both Michael and Mina's points of view, with interjections from Paula at the beginnings of some chapters, and two wonderful pieces of spoken word poetry.

- Choose a section of the narrative and rewrite it in the third person. How does this change the narrative? Why has the writer chosen to write in the first person? How does the narrative voice support the themes of the novel?

Voice is created by a range of devices including syntax, punctuation, word-choice, literary devices such as metaphor and simile, character development and dialogue.

- Michael and Mina have very different voices. Analyse and discuss how the writer creates this difference.

Neologisms ACELA1563/LA/W, R, S1, L/LY

Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel demonstrates how Standard Australian English continues to evolve. She uses words that have been in the language for centuries, while drawing on words that have recently entered the language.

- Use a dictionary to write a definition of the term 'neologism'.
- Use your general knowledge to write definitions for the following neologisms found in *When Michael Met Mina*:
 1. Selfie (Page 2.)
 2. Tweet (Page 2.)
 3. Pretentiousville (Page 9.)
 4. Metrosexual (Page 15.)
 5. Vanilla (Page 39.)
 6. Chillax (Page 42.)
 7. PMSing (Page 157.)
 8. Duh (Page 269.)
- In pairs, brainstorm a list of other neologisms.
- Choose three neologisms from your list.
- Using your general knowledge, write definitions for them.
- Share these words and definitions with the class.
- As a class, make a list of the reasons why language changes. Consider things such as technology, culture, gender and generational change.

The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion: ACELA1564/LA/R, W, S1, L/LY, PSC

When *Michael Met Mina* demonstrates the power of language. It can include and exclude, humanise and dehumanise. Through Michael's interactions with Mina, he learns that language is personal.

- How does the phrase 'queue jumpers' create a negative impression of asylum seekers?

'Legally, we have to help these people. Instead, we lock them up. We abuse them. Then we bring in laws so that we can jail people who report the abuse. I don't get how we can let that happen in a democracy,' Michael argues on page 318.

- How does the use of descriptors like 'boat people', 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers' create a societal view that allows for abuse?
- How do terms such as 'illegals' and 'boat people' dehumanise asylum seekers?

The arguments put forward by members of Aussie Values rely heavily on generalisations and stereotypes rather than facts, whereas Mina's arguments are powerfully specific.

- Analyse her speech to Michael below. What language features does she use to convince Michael of her argument?

'Let's do complicated for a second, shall we? My stepfather refused to fight for a Talib warlord. He was held captive for a week and tortured. He escaped and went into hiding. Eventually he managed to leave Afghanistan and ended up in Australia after paying off some people smugglers. As for my dad, well he's dead. Do you want all the gory details, or are you so cold it wouldn't even make a difference?' (Page 153.)

Humour ACELT1642/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY, CCT

Humour is a powerful tool of social commentary and subversion.

- How does the author use humour in this book to subvert racism? (How does she make racist arguments appear ridiculous?)

Poetry ACELT1643/LT/R, W, S1, L/LY,CCT,PSC

Paula and Mina's performances are incredibly powerful. Choose one of the poems to analyse. Consider the questions below.

- How does the speaker use repetition and rhyme to highlight and emphasise meaning?
- Is there a rhyming scheme? If so, what is it?
- What is the tone of the poem?
- What is the theme of the poem?
- Does the poem have any similarities to a particular style of music? If so, what and why do you think this?
- How does the poet use figurative language to add power and beauty to their message?
- Kate Tempest, a rapper, poet, playwright and author says, 'I feel like there is a moment when language lives, and that is when it is read with the same kind of electricity and vigor as it's written with.' Both Paula and Mina's poems crackle with electricity. Why do you think this is?

Setting

ACELT1641/ LY/R,W.S1,L/LY,CCT

Randa Abdel-Fattah writes vivid and convincing settings. Re-read Mina's first chapter. Discuss how she places the reader into the scene by reflecting on the questions and statements listed below.

- What do you see, hear, taste, touch and smell?
- What does 'pungent' mean? What is the effect of combining this word with 'scent'? How would the effect have been different if the author had written 'pungent smell'?
- What image does the word 'teeming' evoke? Is the word different to 'crammed'? Explain your answer.
- How is the reader intended to see Auburn? Give reasons for your answer.
- Find examples of alliteration in the passage. What is the effect?
- Write a paragraph where you evoke a sense of place by using the language features employed by the author.

Writing Ideas

ACELT1815/LT/ R, W, S1, L /LY, CCT

Poetry Slam

As a class, listen to some more spoken word poetry.

- Discuss aspects of the poems that you like/dislike
- Discuss similarities that the form has with hip hop/rap.
- Choose a subject that you're passionate about and write a poem that uses some of the language techniques employed by Mina and Paula.

Personal and Descriptive Writing

'I can remember how my father would peel my orange in one move and make me a curly snake . . . or was it a curly worm?' (Page 155.) Write a personal piece where you describe a memory that has significance for you.

'When we say goodbye it's as though we both know we've crossed a threshold into that wonderful, intense and slightly terrifying place only true friends can enter.' (Page.170.) Write a personal piece that explores the importance of a friendship in your life.

Story Prompts

Write a short story that explores one of these discourses.

'There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.' (Page 273.)

'When you feel like a dandelion/Just a wish from being blown away.' (Page 349.)

Persuasive Writing

'It's barbaric and inhumane and who knows what halal funds. So we refuse to eat it.' (Page 277.) Research the facts. Write a reply in the form of a letter to the editor of a major newspaper.

'There's no queue.' (Page 31.) Argue Mina's case in a persuasive essay.

'...freedom and ordinary aren't basic rights. They're luxuries you should never take for granted.' (Page 156.) Write a speech that Michael would give at the end of the novel, using Mina's quote as your starting point.

Quotes for Discussion After Reading the Novel

ACELT1640/LT/R,W,S1,L/LY,CCT,PSC

'It's Not Illegal to Seek Asylum.' (Page 4.) So why have some people formed this opinion? Where does the false view come from?

'But isn't it kind of sad that your masculinity test is based on moisturiser usage?' (Page 15.) What's your view of masculinity? How is it more complex than Terrence's view?

'We have to vox pop five strangers about how they define Australian culture.' (Page 76.) How do you define Australian culture? How is culture improved and enriched by diversity?

'How do you smash your parents' dreams and still live with yourself?' (Page 19.) Can you relate to Michael's conflict in the novel? What things do you clash with your parents about?

'People need to fit in with the majority instead of trying to mark themselves as different.' (Page 171.) Discuss how history has taught us that 'fitting with the majority' can have catastrophic outcomes. Discuss the statement in response to your life. Is it good advice to 'fit in with the majority'?

'The only fights worth having are with people who mean something to you.' (Page 162.) What exceptions are there to Paula's argument?

How does Michael describe the mosque on page 176? He confronts his prejudices in this chapter, which is a difficult thing to do. 'It's like my body reacts before my brain.' (Page 178.) What does this mean?

""Why is it that whenever somebody uses the 'it's a fair country' defence they're basically defending the right to act like a bigot?"" (Page 203.) What responsibilities come with free speech?

'Maybe it happened quicker than I expected but it's fine...' (Page 264.) Discuss Jane's statement. What does it imply? Why is it essential to develop a sense of self and not fit in with the dominant voice?

'Just because somebody can be good sometimes doesn't make up for the times they're a jerk.' (Page 269.) Nobody is good all the time, but the novel shows that we are all responsible for self-improvement and for questioning our beliefs and the positions we hold. Discuss.

'There is something the majority wants us to do in order to be fully accepted, but they never tell us what it is.' (Page 304.) As a class, make a list of ways we can change this imbalance in society.

Further Reading Ideas for Class Discussion

Read Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* Discuss and refute the comments made by Michael's mother about girls in her class wearing the hijab on page 18.

The White Australia Policy is raised on page 171 of *When Michael Met Mina*. You can read about the policy on Splash, the ABC website, <http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/digibook/613054/the-white-australia-policy>

- What was the policy?
- How was the policy discriminatory?
- Australia, like other countries, has a history of policies that discriminate against groups of people. Find examples of these policies, both past and present.

Further Ideas Using Technology

Create a book trailer about this novel.

Create an interactive map to show the journey Mina made to get from Afghanistan to Auburn, a place she called home. Mark on the map key information about the places she passed through, and the dangers and difficulties she faced.

Record a podcast where you discuss this novel. Look at characters, themes, language use and what the novel reveals about our society.

Make a visual or audio recording of your slam poetry. Publish it.

Art is shown to be an important form of expression in the novel. Take a series of photographs that illustrate the themes in *When Michael Met Mina*.

Conclusion

When Michael Met Mina is a funny and biting look at attitudes and policies towards asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The characters' journeys highlight how essential it is for people of all ages to interrogate their beliefs, to fight for a fair society and to be well informed.

Author Note

Randa is an award-winning author, former lawyer, regular media commentator and doctoral candidate researching Islamophobia in Australia. Randa is currently working on the film adaptation of her first novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* and is keen to use her intervention into popular culture to reshape dominant narratives around racism and multiculturalism. She lives in Sydney with her husband and three children.

Further Reading

Teacher Reference

Books

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Keneally, Tom and Scott (eds), *A Country Too Far*, Penguin Books Australia, 2013

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Abdel-Fattah, Randa, *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, Pan Macmillan Australia, 2005

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Marsden, John and Ottley, Matt, *Home and Away*, Hachette Australia, 2013

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