



Our Favorite Day of the Year

Written by A.E. Ali

Illustrated by Rahele Jomepour Bell

Salaam Reads, 2020, 40 pp

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Our Favorite Day of the Year was written by A.E. Ali, a writer based in California. It is a beautiful picturebook about a little boy named Musa, who is nervous about his first day of school. He meets three other boys that he is not sure are his friends. To Musa, they look like strangers. Musa's teacher has each student teach classmates about their personal favorite day of the year. As the year goes on, Musa and the other students learn that through the presentation and celebration of their differences they can learn about one another and become friends. This book is a beautiful celebration of diversity in the classroom.

The story of four different children from different backgrounds are presented in this text. The main character, Musa, presents his favorite holiday, Eid Al -Fitr, which is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. Mo's favorite holiday is the beginning of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. Moises's favorite holiday is a Christian holiday called Las Posadas. Lastly, Kevin shares about his favorite day to celebrate called Pi Day. Kevin's favorite day is the only day that is not a religious holiday, but a day that honors the importance of the number 3.14. At the end of the book, the readers can find additional information about each of the favorite days highlighted in the story. Muslim, Jewish, and Christians are represented in this story but the purpose does not appear to omit a particular story or only value certain holidays. The story of every possible favorite day cannot be told in a single picturebook. The clear intent of this text is to represent and value diversity.

The social issue presented in this beautifully illustrated book is the significance of the celebration of diversity. The format of the book is vertical. The front cover art shows a group of diverse students and a teacher holding hands in a circle suggesting that the story takes place in a classroom setting. The back cover depicts Musa and his new friends sharing items that represent their favorite day of the year. A consistent simple font is used throughout the text with the exception of when the individual students' favorite day of the year is introduced. Each time a new holiday is presented, the font changes to all caps and is bolded. This change in font is significant and can create a sense of excitement around the holiday. The end papers look like a quilt with square patches representing many important days and symbols across cultures, for example the four-leaf clover or the Hamsa, also known as the Hand of Fatima.

In terms of layout, each illustration is spread across both pages, so readers feel like they are within the setting along with the characters and that you are not merely observing from a distance, but are part of the classroom. The exception to this pattern is when the teacher hands out a calendar with all the holidays students presented throughout the year. The text is positioned at the top of most of the pages with the illustrations making up the largest portion suggesting that the illustrations hold just as much importance as the text itself. The illustrator's style could be

described as traditional, using deep, rich colors throughout the illustrations as well as different weights and directions in lines that create varied textures. The point of view creates a sense of connectedness with the characters and reader.

Our Favorite Day of the Year can appeal to both young children and adults as parents and educators. The illustrations provide opportunities for children of a variety of backgrounds and cultures to see themselves in text. It also allows the reader to see and learn about the perspectives of others.

Our Favorite Day of the Year can be paired with additional titles that celebrate diversity in the classroom like *All Are Welcome*, by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman (2018). Building upon the concept of a child's favorite day of the year, *My Heart Fills with Happiness* by Monique Gray Smith and Julie Flett (2016) invites readers to think about what makes their heart fill with happiness.

The author, A. E. Ali, is a writer based in California and her favorite day of the year is Eid al-Fitr. *Our Favorite Day of the Year* is her first book. The illustrator, Rahele Jomepour Bell, is originally from Iran and moved to the United States in 2011. Some of the recognitions her work has received include the Portfolio Award Grand Prize and the Social Media Mentorship for Illustrators, both at the 2018 Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) National Conference. Her work can be further explored in <http://www.rahelestudio.com/bio>

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