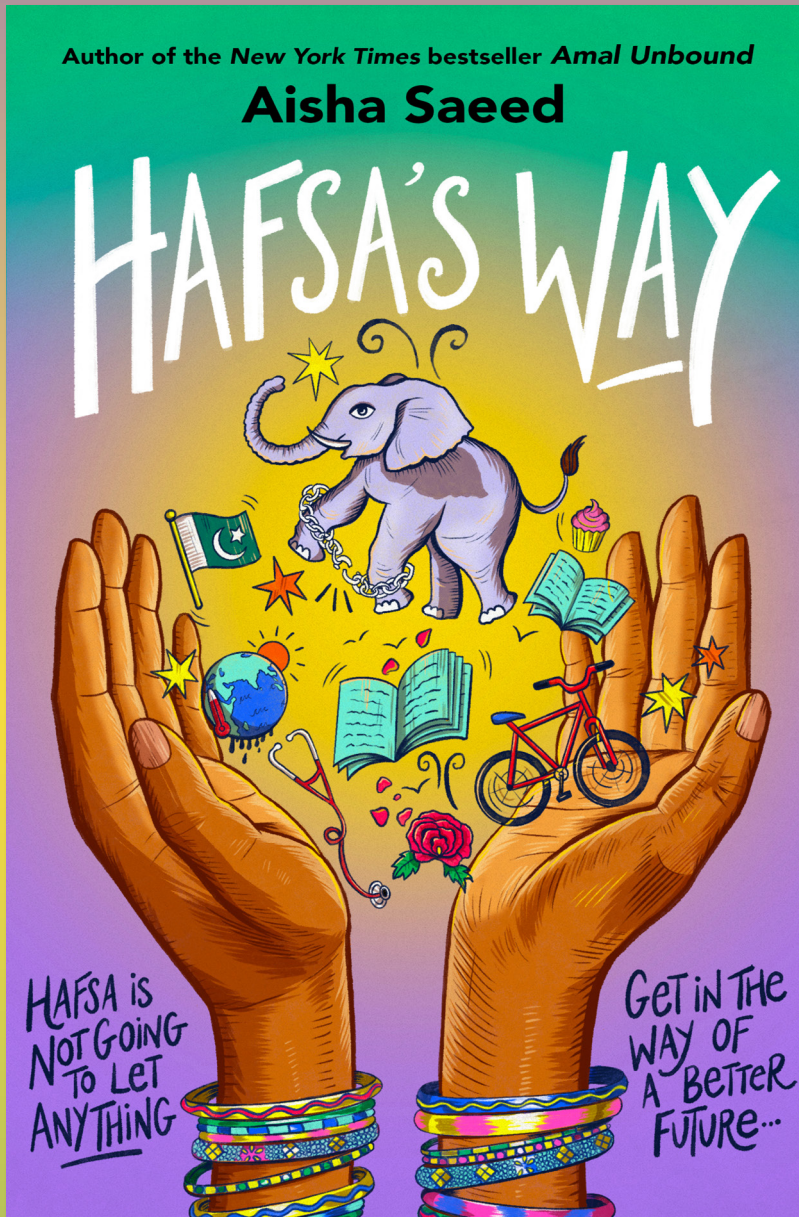


# A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO



And the world of the bestseller  
and classroom favorite  
**AMAL UNBOUND!**



## About Hafsa's Way (Lexile: 640L)

Hafsa intends to be a doctor one day, so she's thrilled to be accepted into Bukhari Summer Science Camp for kids who share her dream. Her parents, however, do not share her enthusiasm.

They don't support the idea of girls being doctors, the camp is expensive, and they don't want to send her off to the big city of Lahore unsupervised. But when her brother-in-law offers to pay, and he and her sister invite her to stay at their house instead of in the dorms, her parents grudgingly give in. Hafsa couldn't be more excited, but things get off to a shaky start when it immediately becomes apparent that she accidentally signed up for the wrong program. And since she's the only one not staying in the dorms, her fellow students treat her like an outsider—and a country

bumpkin. On top of all that, she's worried about her sister, who seems to have set aside her own career goals to please her in-laws.

But Hafsa's way is to forge ahead, whether that means finding ways to pursue her medical studies, immersing herself in the climate studies program, or taking a pivotal field trip to the zoo—where an encounter with an elephant leads to several unexpected outcomes. It's not easy to negotiate being part of a community—and a family—that doesn't support her dreams, but Hafsa's never been the type to take no for an answer. She's determined to grab any chance she can for a better future, no matter what the odds stacked against her are.



*"TWEENS WILL ADMIRE how [Hafsa] builds on her individual experiences to fight for something more than just herself."*

—BCCB



*"INSPIRING."*

—Booklist



## Praise for the World of Amal Unbound

### AMAL UNBOUND (LEXILE: HL600L)

- ★ A Global Read Aloud Selection
- ★ On 23+ state award reading lists
- ★ An NCSS Notable Trade Book selection
- ★ An ALA Rise: Feminist Book Project Top Ten selection
- ★ A YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers selection
- ★ An ALA ALSC Notable

### OMAR RISING (LEXILE: HL540L)

- ★ On 8+ state award reading lists
- ★ An NCSS Notable Trade Book selection
- ★ A Bank Street Best Book of the Year with Outstanding Merit

*"Effectively blends climate change, wildlife conservation, and the tug of cultural expectations."*

—Kirkus Reviews



This guide was written by Nawal Qarooni, a teacher educator and consultant for school districts across the country in literacy and family engagement. She and her team of coaches at [NQC Literacy](#) provide professional learning for teachers in foundational skills, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and literacy curricular work. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan, holds two masters degrees from Syracuse University and Brooklyn College, and is a member of the Library of Congress Literacy Advisory Board. She is the author of *Nourishing Caregiver Collaborations: Exalting Home Experiences and Classroom Practices for Collective Care*.



## Table of Contents

- ★ PRE-READING: SITUATING THE TEXT
- ★ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: DURING READING
- ★ EXTENSION ACTIVITIES
- ★ THE AMAL UNBOUND UNIVERSE



*Click the covers to download the guide for each book!*

### Pre-Reading: Situating the Text

The setting of *Hafsa's Way* is in Pakistan, so it's important that you situate the story on a map, and learn a little about the country, its culture, its languages, and its people before reading as a group. The story, like both *Amal Unbound* and *Omar Rising*, is about a young person who aims to break the shackles of societal boundaries based on gender, class, and status. All three stories stand alone but live in the same universe, as Amal is friends with Hafsa and Omar and each of their stories illustrate the societal and systemic issues they are pushing back against. In all three stories, readers learn that young people can make a difference and create change with their individual actions, causing bigger movement in the locus of their control.

#### PRE-READING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

- What are some of your hopes and dreams for your future?
- What injustices do you see in your community that you wish you could change?
- What are some of your hopes and dreams for the future of our world?
- What do you notice about your school, community, city, or town that seems unfair?
- In what ways do you feel like you can make a change in your community?



## Discussion Questions: During Reading

- In the first few chapters, we learn about the community in Pakistan that Hafsa lives in. How is it similar to or different from where you live? (p. 9)
- Girls and boys are often expected to do different things in Pakistan. As we read, we learn what Hafsa’s father doesn’t like for her to engage in. What are some of the differences? (p. 11)
- The author writes, “But moments like these—when the clouds do part—his smile warms me like the sun” (p. 15). This is an example of a literary device: a simile, which is a comparison using *like* or *as*. Begin a list of literary devices below across the reading of this text.

LINES FROM THE TEXT	LITERARY DEVICE
“Time is a slug” (p. 36).	Metaphor

- How do you know when your caregiver is proud of you?
- Who is Shabnam? Who is Haroon? What do we know about Hafsa’s family in the early chapters?
- Hafsa is consistently pushing up against societal norms, such as when she speaks to her mother on page 21. What do we know she *doesn’t* want for her future?
- What are some of Hafsa’s dreams? Why is dreaming important?
- What seems to be most important to Hafsa’s parents? How do we know? How are the siblings compared, and how does it make Hafsa feel? (pp. 24–25, 38, 135).
- Throughout reading, you may come across words you don’t know yet, like shalwar kamiz, keema patties, and beta. Use this space to list those words and look up the meaning.

WORD	MEANING
shalwar kamiz	
keema patties, gulab jamun, kheer	
beta	



## *Discussion Questions: During Reading* *Continued*

- What is Hafsa’s understanding of marriage throughout the text? Which lines make you think that? (p. 29)
- How are girls and women in Pakistani society being treated differently than they were in the past? (p. 43)
- How is Shabnam’s married life different than when she lived at home with Hafsa? How does Hafsa experience and process these differences? (p. 54)
- There is tension between what Shabnam wants and what she does. Which parts of the story make you think that Shabnam feels pressure to behave a certain way, now that she’s married?
- Why does Hafsa want to be a doctor? (p. 61)
- Hafsa and where she comes from is mischaracterized by her new classmates. How are her classmates different from her? What judgments do they make about her? When have you felt misunderstood? (pp. 73–74)
- On page 90, one of Hafsa’s new classmates, Bushra, says: “Humans make everything worse.” How do humans harm each other, the environment, and their communities?
- How did Hafsa feel when she connected to the elephant? What evidence from the text makes you think this? (p. 96)
- The storm hits and it’s quite scary for Hafsa. When she’s back in school, her teacher says, “It’s a bit ironic to have had a storm like this when this week’s theme is about extreme weather and climate change” (p. 120). What does Miss Akhtar mean by ironic?
- How is Hafsa treated by her classmates? (pp. 123, 139)
- How is the elephant, Gulab, treated at the zoo? (p. 131)
- How does Hafsa advocate for the elephant as she slowly starts to learn about Gulab’s story? (pp. 132, 138)
- On page 150, Hafsa gets into it with the little boy who is tending to the elephant at the zoo. He shouts at her, “I’m not just a kid! I’m Tariq.” What do the two of them try to do to make things better for Gulab the elephant? How do they take action to change things? (pp. 177, 181)
- What pressures has Shabnam felt as the eldest daughter in the family? (p. 160)
- Why does Shabnam become upset with Hafsa? How has their sisterly relationship changed across the text? (pp. 169–170, 184)
- On page 194, Hafsa reflects, “My eyes well with tears. To my parents, wanting to ride a bike to get around town faster is shameful. Dreaming of becoming a doctor is shameful. Spreading awareness about cruelty to animals is shameful too. I can’t do anything right.” How do you think Hafsa feels at this moment? When have you disappointed your family?
- The end of the book results in several resolutions—about Hafsa’s future plans alongside new dreams, between the sisters, and for Gulab’s life. How do collective care and effort show up in the story? How does change ultimately happen? (pp. 203, 207–208)





## *Extension Activities*

- ★ **Sitting Still and Deeply Listening:** On page 71, Hafsa reflects, “Outside the windows, I notice a beautiful banyan tree with thick branches and wide green leaves casting shade in the center of the courtyard. My grandmother always says the ability to sit alone with one’s thoughts is an unsung strength—that in the silent moments, we truly hear ourselves.” If you had to go somewhere to hear your own thoughts—to distance yourself and really sit to think—where would you go? Draw yourself in that place, with thought bubbles emanating from your mind. What would go in the bubbles? Fold your paper; this need not be shared.
- ★ **Drawing Connections and Making Change:** On page 89, Dr. Syed says, “But being upset doesn’t change things. I didn’t bring you here to simply point out how dire things are, but to make you think about what we could be doing to make things better. Despair without action only leads to apathy. We won’t ever actually disrupt the status quo if we simply give up.” What does this part mean? Why is it important? Choose your favorite line from this paragraph on page 89 and write about it further—why is it meaningful as a message? How does it apply to your life and where you live today?
- ★ **On Gratitude:** There are many instances across the text where it’s clear that Hafsa is grateful for her experiences. On one side of a piece of paper, find several examples and explain them either in writing or in a visual form. For example, on page 141, Hafsa notes, “Today I’m at a hospital with my very own lab coat. Could things be any better?” On the other side of the paper, list or draw your own experiences with gratitude. What are you thankful for in your own life?

### **ELEPHANT ADVOCACY AND THE AUTHOR’S NOTE**

Read Aisha Saeed’s note at the end of the book about the true events that inspired the writing of this story. The advocacy for the elephant in the story was loosely based on the real-life story of the elephant Kaavan. Review the following websites about elephants being protected in sanctuaries, and list several facts that you learn. You can also pair the author’s note with reading the picture book *The World’s Loneliest Elephant: Based on the True Story of Kavaan and His Rescue* by Ralph Fletcher, illustrated by Naoko Stoop (2022).

What causes do you want to contribute to and make change for? The author writes, “Just as Hafsa used her voice to speak up for Gulab, many others speak up for the vulnerable every day.” When have you spoken up for the vulnerable?

- Elephant Valley Project: [ElephantValleyProject.org](http://ElephantValleyProject.org)
- Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary: [AsianElephantProjects.com](http://AsianElephantProjects.com)
- SAFE Worldwide: [SAFEWorldwide.org](http://SAFEWorldwide.org)
- World Animal Protection: [worldanimalprotection.org/our-campaigns/wildlife/innovative-solutions/sanctuaries/](http://worldanimalprotection.org/our-campaigns/wildlife/innovative-solutions/sanctuaries/)

# *The Amal Unbound Universe*

Reading all three titles in the world of *Amal Unbound* would lend itself well to a character study of Amal, Omar, and Hafsa. You might have student groups rotate through the reading of all three books across several weeks, generating lists of internal and external characteristics as they read. Students could be tasked with creating visual character maps, depicting what the characters are like and the pressures that each character faces. These analyses could be shared visually as a culminating showcase.

To brainstorm ahead of such a capstone project, have students record their thinking in a graphic organizer similar to this one.

CHARACTER	TRAITS	MOTIVATIONS AND DREAMS	PRESSURES	ACTIONS THAT LEAD TO CHANGE
Amal				
Omar				
Hafsa				

