

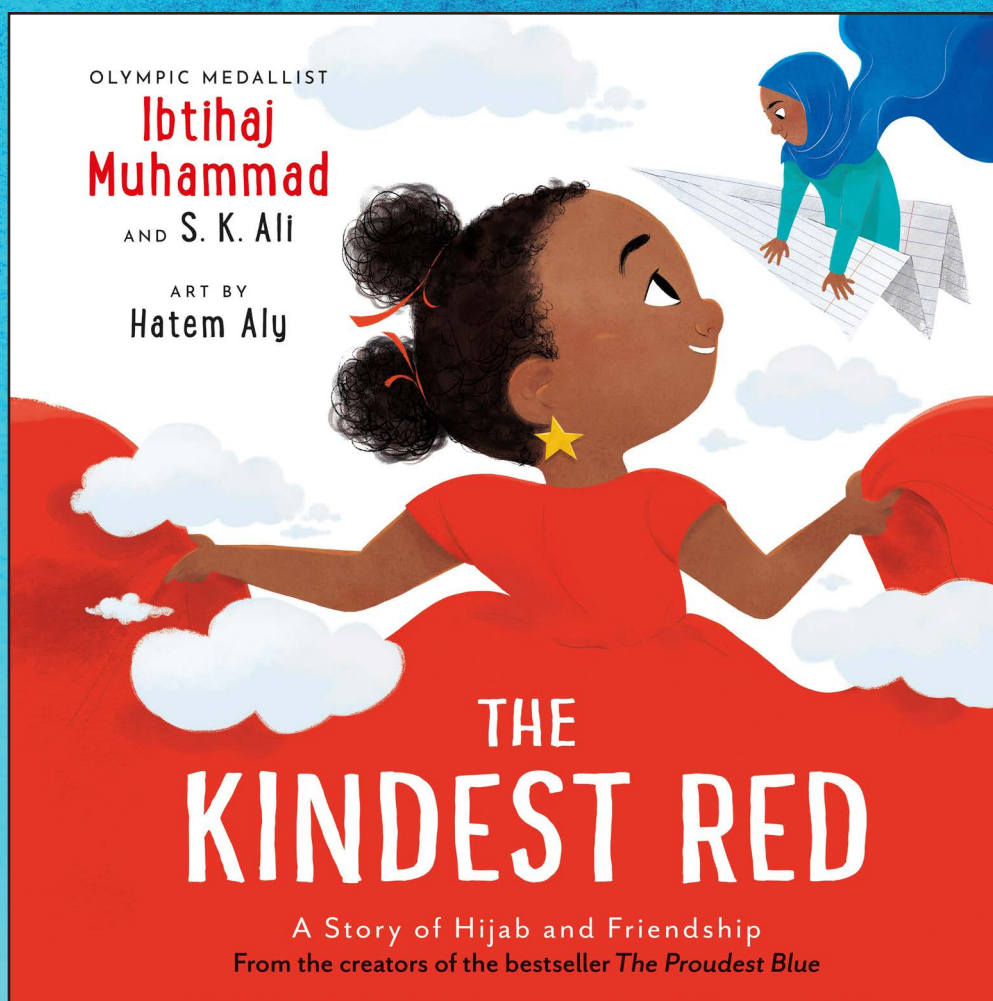
# TEACHING NOTES FOR

# THE KINDEST RED

## A STORY OF HIJAB AND FRIENDSHIP

Written by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S. K. Ali and illustrated by Hatem Aly

Published by Andersen Press



These notes have been written by the teachers at the [CLPE](#) to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

These teaching notes are most suitable for children in Years 1-3.



## Before you start:

- Although it is not essential, it is highly recommended that you have shared *The Proudest Blue*, written and illustrated by the same creators before reading this book. *The Proudest Blue* introduces us to the characters Faizah and Asiya who are sisters. Within *The Proudest Blue* we discover the incredible bond between sisters; how to be proud of yourself and what the true meaning of identity is.
- If the children already have a knowledge of Faizah and Asiya's relationship, they will infer and interpret *The Kindest Red* in a different way. However, children do not need to have a prior knowledge of the two sisters and will gain a great deal from reading this book.
- Children will need to have a basic understanding of what a hijab is and why people wear them. Sharing images and video clips will support children's understanding. If possible, bringing a hijab in for children to see would add another layer of understanding. If members of the school community wear hijabs or headscarves, they may want to share their first-hand experiences.
- One of the authors Ibtiyah Muhammad is an Olympic Medallist. You can learn more about her by visiting her website at <https://www.ibtiyahmuhammad.com/>

## Reading aloud and key talking points:

- Share the title of the book ***The Kindest Red. A Story of Hijab and Friendship*** and give children time to talk in pairs or groups. *What do you think this book will be about? What are you expecting to be on the front cover? Who do you think will be the main characters? What kind of message might this book provide for the reader?*
- Give the children an opportunity to engage in discussion with their peers then reveal the front cover, encouraging the children to revisit their predictions. *Is it what they expected? Why? Why not? What strikes them first about this image and why? What do they think is happening; what are the characters doing? What do you think it means?* Open out the book to reveal the back cover illustration too. *What do you notice about the red dress? How would you describe it? How do you think the girls wearing it, feels about the dress and why? How might this relate to the title ***The Kindest Red. A Story of Hijab and Friendship***?*
- Observe the finer details of the front cover, firstly inviting the children to share what they notice from closer observation before drawing attention to details together. *Who do you think is the main character and why? What could be the girls' relationship? Do you think they are the same age? Why? Why not? How do you think they feel about each other? What tells you this? What might be the significance of the flowing red dress, the flight of the lined paper aeroplane, the sky and the clouds, and the way the girls are interacting with them? What do you think the illustrator is trying to show here?*

- Share some of the blurb with the children, beginning with; **‘What kind of world do you want?’** Give children post-it notes to record their ideas in response to this prompt or scribe them for younger readers. Encourage children to be imaginative and creative with their ideas. Display the notes and discuss some of the responses and then share the ones from the blurb (not yet revealing the rest of the text), inviting the children’s responses and giving them opportunity to clarify their understanding:
  - **Mama would say ‘a beautiful world.’** *What does this mean to you? What kind of beautiful might she mean? What makes you think this? What do you think is beautiful about our world?*
  - **Asiya would say ‘a strong world.’** *What does this mean to you? Do you think the world we live in now is strong? What makes you think this? How might we make the world stronger?*
  - **Faizah wants ‘a kind world.’** *What does this mean to you? Do you think the world we live in is **kind**? What makes you think this? How can we make the world kinder?*
- Now read aloud the rest of the blurb and consider with the children how this relates to what they have seen and heard so far.
- Open the book, pausing at the bookplate page to discuss what the image shows about the sisters then turn to page to share the end papers with the children and ask them what they can see. Explore the different pictures in frames and allow children time to create a story for who they might be. Encourage children to use the names Asiya and Faizah when they are discussing the images.
- Turn to the first page of the book and invite the children’s responses to the illustration before sharing the text. *How is everybody feeling in these opening page? How can you tell? What do you think is happening? What tells you this is a special moment for the whole family?* Now read aloud the text and reveal the opposite page, inviting the children’s responses. *How long do you think Faizah has been waiting? Why is this red dress so special to her? Why do you think she has been given it today? Encourage the children to make connections with their personal experiences. Have you ever had special clothes or objects passed down from an older family member? How did it make you feel?* If the children haven’t yet noticed, draw attention to the fact that Asiya and her mum are both wearing hijabs and why Faizah is not yet wearing one.
- Read the second double page spread with the children. *‘How well do you think Faizah and Asiya get on? How do we know that Faizah thinks Asiya’s hijab is special?’* Highlight the adjective in **‘sparkliest scarf pin’** and why they think the author has chosen it and the phrase **‘to hug it tight’** and discuss how clothes sometimes hug us and keep us warm or comforted but this sparkliest of pin is hugging the hijab.



- Read Mum's words again and invite the children's responses. *What message is Mum giving to her daughters? How do you think Asiya and Faizah feel when their Mum says these words? How would you feel if somebody said those words to you? Why do you think Mum is saying these words? What might this tell us of the sisters' experiences outside the family home?*
- Share the illustrations on the next double page spread with the children. *Who do you think Faizah has met? What do you think the girls are saying to each other? How can you tell what they are thinking and/or saying?* Read the text on these pages and discuss what it demonstrates about Faizah and her relationship with Sophie. Revisit the illustration and consider what is important to Faizah and Sophie about their outfits. *What kinds of conversations might they have had prior to Picture Day?*
- Share the next double page spread and read the text with the children. Revisit the list that you created at the beginning of the book to compare with Ms Ramirez's class list and invite the children's responses. Focus the children on the illustration of Faizah. *What do you notice about this illustration? What is the illustrator trying to show?*
- Share the next double page spread with the children and read the text. This is the perfect opportunity to provide the children with blank white paper so that they too can do the same activity as Ms Ramirez's class. Explain to the children that they can write words and phrases to describe their world if they do not want to draw pictures. After drawing their own pictures and sharing their ideas, focus the children on Faizah again. *Why has the illustrator drawn her in a paper aeroplane? What is the illustrator showing here? What do you think Faizah is thinking or feeling in this moment and why?* Revisit the front cover where Asiya is in a paper aeroplane too. *What does this tell us? What do you think Faizah will draw? Why do you think Ms Ramirez and perhaps the other teachers are doing this activity with the children on Picture Day?*
- Share the text on the next double page spread without revealing the illustrations. Give the children time to list what they think will be in Faizah's picture. Then share the illustrations and allow the children time to identify acts of kindness in Faizah's picture. Discuss Faizah's main point – **a kind world is one where there is always a friend nearby to help each other**. Remind the children of title of the book ***The Kindest Red. A Story of Hijab and Friendship***. *Using what we know now, what do we think will happen? How might the fact that it is Picture Day affect the plot?*
- Share the illustrations on the next two double page spreads and read the text with the children. *What kind of a teacher is Ms Ramirez? What does she want to teach her class?* The children might notice that Faizah has golden star shaped earrings and there is a golden star between her and Sophie. *How does this connect to the text? What acts of kindness are they sharing with their classmates and what difference is this making?*
- Share the illustrations on the next double page spread with the children and read the text. *Why do Faizah and Sophie feel even more powerful by the end of the scene with Asiya?* Turn the page and read the text on the next spread, giving the children time to explore what is happening in each of the scenes and any patterns that are emerging. If they haven't noticed, draw attention to what is happening to Sophie's scarf and what this tells us about being kind.

- Share the next double page spread of the class picture. The children may enjoy revisiting the previous pages and identifying as many of the children that they can – Mali, Jada, Andre, London, Priya, Mateo, Violet and Felix. *What is Faizah thinking and feeling?*
- Share the illustrations on the next double page spread and read the text. *What do we learn about how the siblings have prepared for this part of Picture Day and how it makes Faizah feel. Have you ever felt happy and sad at the same time?* Encourage the children to look closely at Asiya and Faizah and imagine what Faizah is happy about and then repeat for what she may be sad about. Revisit how she felt about her and Sophie having matching outfits and what she may be thinking now. *What would you want to say to her in this moment?*
- Show the children the next double page spread and read the text. *From where are we looking as a reader now? Why has the illustrator done this? What is the effect? What are each of the sister's thinking and feeling? What does Faizah's facial expression tell us?* Clarify and extend the children's repertoire of vocabulary they might use to describe her emotional state, supporting them to make connections with personal experiences (angry; embarrassed; confused; worried; sad etc.) and allow them to contribute their own feelings. *Why do you think the author has made the choice to capitalise the words 'AT ALL'? What effect does this have? How does this help us to visualise Faizah's mood more clearly? Why do you think Faizah wants to match her sister so much? Why does she feel she doesn't AT ALL?*
- Share just the left-hand page of the next double page spread with the children. *Is this what you expected? Why? why not? Why has the illustrator used black and white shading for the other characters including Asiya and colour for Faizah, Sophie and Jada? What is the illustrator showing by doing this? How does Sophie know that something is wrong with Faizah? Can you tell how someone is feeling from their face? Look at Jada and Sophie's facial expressions too – how are they feeling? How do you think they will help Faizah? What do you think Asiya is thinking or feeling now?*
- Pause to gather the children's predictions, again re-reading the whole title to support their ideas and encouraging the children to revisit key moments in the story and what this may tell us about this moment and what will follow. *Has this ruined the Picture Day for the siblings? How can they be helped? What do you think will be on the next page?*
- Share the right-hand page now. *What are Jada and Sophie doing? Did you have the same idea? What are they going to do with Sophie's sash?*
- Share the illustration and text on the next double page spread revealing Faizah in a beautiful red hijab and invite the children's responses. *How does it make them feel and why? Why would mum think this a 'beautiful Picture day'? How else could we describe this Picture Day?*





- Share the last double page spread with the children and discuss the impact of the text and illustrations on us as the readers. Write '**kindness passes from one to another**' on the board to share and focus on. *Which events does Faizah recount as acts of kindness that are passed on? Which is your favourite one? Can you think of any other examples of kindness being passed on in the book? Why do you think Faizah feels compelled to pass the story on for others to read?*
- Explore the final end papers and invite the children to identify the difference between the end papers at the beginning. There are some additional pictures of Faizah and Asiya including the photograph their mum took and their Picture Day photograph. The author Ibtihaaj Muhammad has included a photograph of herself and her siblings, alongside the sibling characters Faizah and Asiya. Share the author's note to the reader and allow opportunity to share responses and make personal connections. *What do we learn about her and what she values. How is this woven into this story and into the relationships both between the family?* Look at the Picture Day photograph where Faizah is proudly wearing her hijab. *How do you think she will remember that day when she is older? What do you think will be the most significant memory of that day for her? Why has she called the book **The Kindest Red**?*
- Now re-read the story again as a whole and provide the children time to reflect on the main human theme, what is at the heart of this story and why they think the author was motivated to write this new story, following *The Proudest Blue*? *What does she want us to feel or think about? What might it encourage us to do or to feel in our own lives?*

### After reading:

- Display a large piece of red fabric or red paper, onto which the children could record ongoing acts or words of kindness. This could be an ongoing display that can be added to throughout the school year. You could use the illustrations in the book to inspire children to create more illustrations, perhaps related to their own acts of kindness and how they have been passed on.
- There are a range of meaningful writing opportunities, related to the characters and themes within the book:
  - Diary entry as Faizah before and after Picture Day
  - Thank You card from Faizah to Sophie and Jade
  - Interview Ms Ramirez about her idea to design their world
  - A speech as Faizah explaining how her 'kind world' works and how we can pass acts of kindness on
  - Children choose someone in their life who has passed on kindness to them and write a letter to them
  - Song-writing or poetry linked to kindness and how it can be felt and seen at the same time.
- Look at both books together 'The Proudest Blue' and 'The Kindest Red' and ask children for some more titles that could follow a similar pattern- for example 'The Bravest Yellow; The Friendliest Purple; The Sweetest Orange; The Gracefullest Green; The Loveliest Grey and The Rightest Black.' Children could make stories or poetry linked to these titles – or simply enjoy talking about what could happen in the titles.

- Explore the idea of memories – depending on the children’s age they may or may not have a vivid understanding of living memory. Children and their families could create memory jars or shrine boxes with words; pictures and items to look back on in years to come. Similar to the endpapers, you might create a gallery of photographs and portraits that share the important memories that are being made and built up as a class throughout the school year.
- Using the illustration at the very end of the book with Asiya helping Faizah with her hijab, children could illustrate this page with words that convey a sense of pride, belonging and identity. They might create images of themselves wearing or doing something that celebrates their own family or community heritage.
- If you haven’t already introduced the author, you might ask the children if they know what else she has achieved aside from producing this book. If they are not aware, invite them to guess what she might do for a living. Share this instructional video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn2J3\\_hXDLE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn2J3_hXDLE) in which the author offers a short fencing masterclass and this clip which showcases the highlights from her performance at the Rio Olympics <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tprMKjBmIVU>. Discuss with the children how her vocation may have differed from their predictions and why. Conclude the discussions by emphasising the importance of keeping an open mind and valuing aspirations.

**Other titles by Ibtiyah Muhammad and S.K. Ali or to support exploration of themes from the book:**

- *The Proudest Blue*, written by Ibtiyah Muhammad with S. K. Ali, illustrated by Hatem Aly (Andersen Press)
- *My Beautiful Voice*, written by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Alison Colpoys (Frances Lincoln)
- *Between Tick and Tock*, written by Louise Greig, illustrated by Ashling Lindsey (Egmont)

**The children could learn about:**

- other iconic female sporting figures past and present by reading, *Women in Sports: 50 Fearless Athletes Who Played to Win (Women in Science)*, written by Rachel Ignatofsky (Ten Speed Press, 2017);
- other inspiring Muslim women by reading, *Muslim Girls Rise: Inspirational Champions of Our Time*, written by Saira Mir, illustrated by Aaliya Jaleel (Salaam Reads / Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2019)
- Mosques and their communities by reading, *In My Mosque: A big-hearted celebration of mosques and their communities*, written by M.O. Yuxsel, illustrated by Hatem Aly (Farshore, 2021)

**You might also choose to share fiction titles that feature strong Muslim leads or ensemble casts such as:**

- *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors*, written by Hena Khan, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini (Chronicle Books, 2015)
- *Ramadan Moon*, written by Na’ima B. Robert, illustrated by Shirin Adl (Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, 2011)
- *Going to Mecca*, written by Na’ima B. Robert, illustrated by Valentina Cavallini (Lincoln Children’s Books, 2014)
- The *Planet Omar* series, written by Zanib Mian, illustrated by Nasaya Mafaridik. Hodder Children’s Books, 2019)
- *A Hen in the Wardrobe*, written and illustrated by Wendy Meddour (Cinnamon Grove, 2012)



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