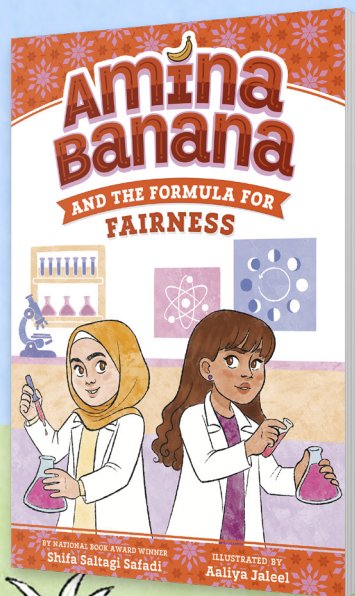
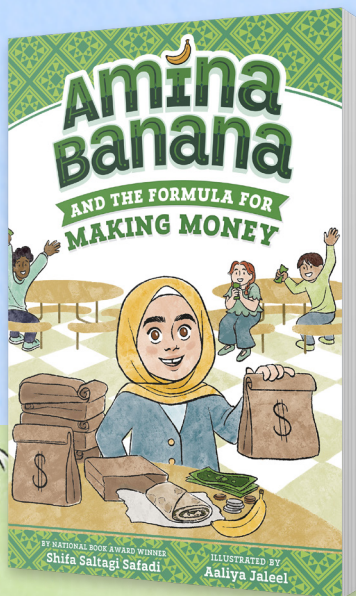
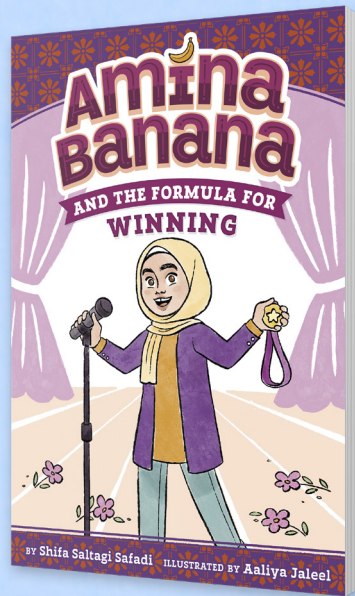
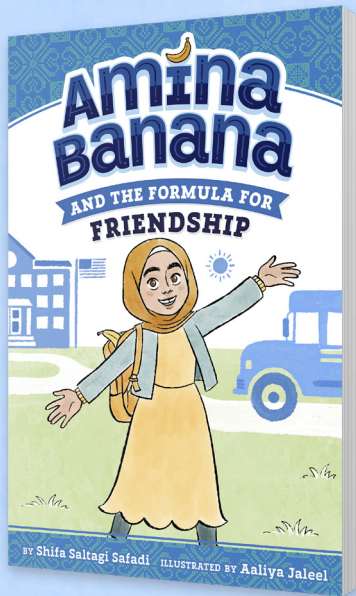


An Educator Guide to

Amina Banana



Activities and Discussion Questions with STEM, ELA, and Social Studies Applications!



Praise for the Series!

Meet Amina Banana! She's starting at a new school and has a formula to help with every situation, from making new friends to dealing with the science fair and the rest of third-grade life!

AN ALA ALSO NOTABLE

★
“**[A] HEARTFELT AND PURPOSE-DRIVEN chapter book series opener.**”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★
“**A winning series starter with LAYERS OF DEPTH.**”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“**Safadi plumbs Amina’s anxieties with a MIX OF SENSIVITY AND HUMOR.**”

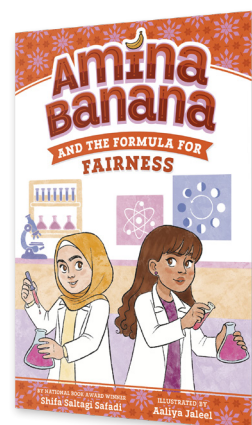
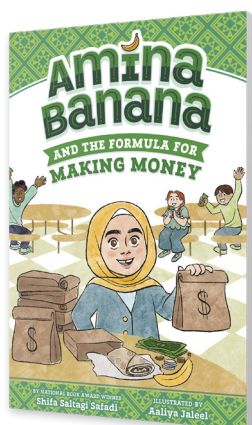
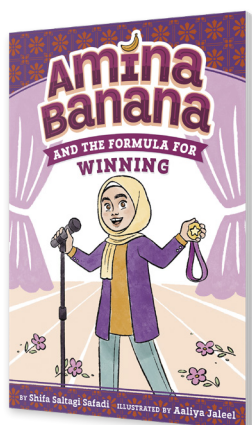
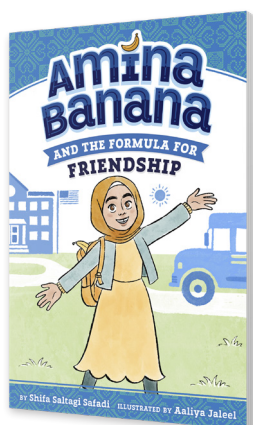
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“**[An] INSPIRING series.**”

—*School Library Journal* series review

“**A STRONG CHOICE for early-chapter-book shelves.**”

—*Booklist*



Topics and Themes Covered:

Friendship and Anxiety | Working Together | Financial Literacy
Self-Reliance and Motivation | Science | Math | And More!

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This guide was prepared by Hadeal Salamah and Ariana Sani Hussain, school librarians and two of the cofounders and bloggers at Hijabi Librarians, which examines Muslim representation in youth literature. Find more of their work at hijabilibrarians.org.

Dear Educators and Librarians,

Amina Banana is a fun chapter book series that combines math, science, and more in a story about a girl who moves to a new school and is just trying to figure out friends, family, and all the other elements that come with moving to a new place. Amina is a third grader who loves STEM and all things that can be solved with a formula. As a way to introduce this fun series and character, show this [series introduction video](#) from author Shifa Saltagi Safadi.



There is back matter in each of the books in the series that provides more info and activities, but this guide is intended to broaden the experience in your classroom or library with fun STEM activities, discussion prompts, and more. There is also a section at the end of the guide specifically for educators and librarians. While this is a fun and accessible chapter book series, there are underlying themes and current events in Amina's world that students should be aware of. Amina and her family are refugees from Syria. As you prepare to read this series with your students, exploring this background information and context about Amina and her family will help to frame and guide deeper conversations around identity and community, encouraging students to reflect on their own experiences and connect with others. **Please check out the "Considerations for Educators and Librarians" section at the end of the guide or [CLICK HERE](#) to jump to that section so that you can prepare and ensure your class or library can celebrate and share Amina's story together.**

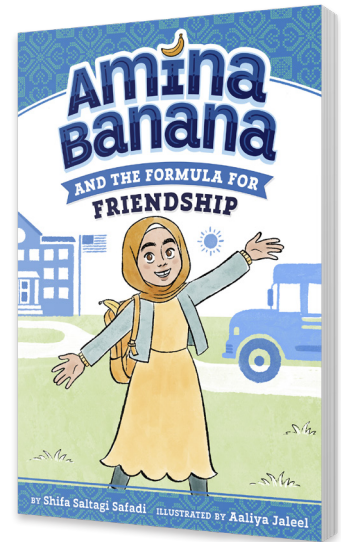
Thank you for taking the time to read and share Amina and her story with your readers.

Sincerely,

Penguin Young Readers School & Library Marketing Team



Amina Banana and the Formula for Friendship



Discussion Questions

1. If friendship were like a science experiment, how did Amina try to figure it out, what didn't work, and what did she learn from her mistakes?
2. What challenges does Amina face with language or cultural differences, and how can those be similar to a time when you didn't understand the "rules" in a new place?
3. What does it mean to belong somewhere? Can you belong to more than one place at once?
4. Amina's family had to leave their home quickly, taking only what they could carry, but they still brought important parts of their culture with them in their food, language, and traditions. If you had to choose just a few things to carry from your own home or family history, what would you take, and why might those choices matter?
5. Through an interaction with Fatima, Amina realizes that there is more than one way to be an American and still belong. How does identity change and how does it stay the same throughout the story?
6. Food is one of the ways Amina's family carries their culture with them. What foods appear in the story? What do they tell you about her family?
7. Is there a food in your family that tells a story about where you come from, a celebration, or a person you love? Describe what this food is and how it is important to you.

Activity 1: Recipe & Interview

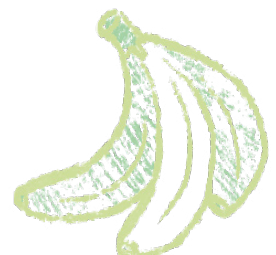
For Amina and her family, food is more than something to eat—it's a way her family carries Syria with them. Every recipe in the book holds memories, love, and identity. This activity helps you find the same kind of story in your life.

What You'll Do:

1. Interview an adult. This could be a family member or someone from your community. Ask about a recipe that means something special to them. It could be a cultural dish, a food eaten around holidays, or something that reminds them of home. Use the worksheet on the next page to ask questions and learn the story behind the recipe.
2. Write down the recipe using the provided worksheet. Include ingredients and steps, just like in a cookbook, to share with your class.
3. Try making it! Follow the recipe and notice how it feels to cook something with history behind it.

Extension Questions:

- Why do recipes sometimes say "to taste" or "a handful"? What does that tell us about how knowledge gets passed down? How is this different from a science experiment where you measure exactly?
- Amina's family brings recipes and the knowledge inside them from Syria. What is lost when families have to leave quickly? What do they carry?



Amina Banana and the Formula for Friendship Continued

Activity 2: Refugee Research & What We Carry

Vocabulary:

- **Refugee:** a person who has fled their country because of war, persecution, or natural disaster and cannot safely return.
- **Asylum seeker:** someone who has applied for refugee status and is waiting for a decision.
- **Immigrant:** someone who moves to another country, usually by choice.
- **Internally displaced person (IDP):** someone who was forced to flee their home but is still within their own country.

Learning about the differences between why people leave their country of origin is important. Many immigrants move for opportunities, but as refugees, Amina's family did not choose to leave their home.

Research Questions:

(Students choose one or more questions to research using the [UNHCR website](#) or another trusted source):

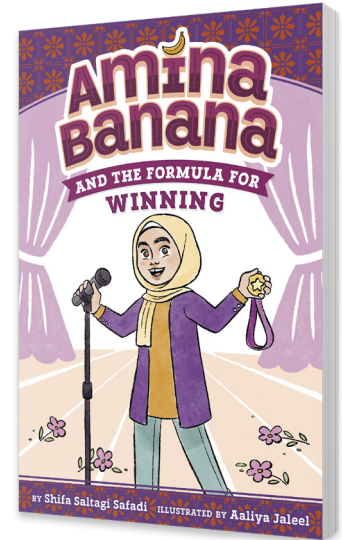
1. How many people in the world are currently displaced? Where are they from? Where do they go?
2. What is the process for a refugee family arriving in the United States? What happens first? What does it take to be resettled?
3. What countries have taken in the most Syrian refugees? What countries have the largest refugee populations in the world?
4. What physical things do you think Amina's family brought when they left Syria? What do we see in their home? What do they cook? What objects appear?

Optional extensions with teacher help (Newsela, TIME for Kids, DOGOnews, TweenTribune.com)

1. Find one story (in an age-appropriate news source) of a family who has been displaced.
2. What did they leave? What did they bring? Where are they now?



Amina Banana and the Formula for Winning



Discussion Questions

1. What does “winning” mean to Amina at the start of the book? Does her understanding change by the end of the book? How?
2. Amina uses Ms. Tanya’s spelling tricks, like breaking words into chunks and looking for patterns, and she also uses the design process: plan, test, and revise. She keeps changing her “formula for winning” as she learns. What strategies do you use to remember something that’s hard? What patterns help you? Do you use different strategies for different kinds of things?
3. How does each family member’s relationship with English shape their experiences and goals? What does it mean for Amina when her family is open about their own struggles with English? How does that change the way she sees herself and her own English skills?
4. Amina also sees a book called *Teaching Kids Spelling for Dummies*, and it embarrasses her. Why do the words we use to describe struggles with learning matter, and how can they affect how students see themselves?
5. Amina hides her spelling struggles from Crystal because she’s afraid that Crystal will think she isn’t smart enough to be friends with. Have you ever hidden something you found hard from a friend? Did it affect your friendship? How might having been honest and studying together have made things easier?
6. **Teacher Activity:** Teacher writes both of the following phrases for students to see and explains that some schools say “English as a Second Language,” and others say “English as an Additional Language.” Though these terms sound similar, they suggest different things. (“Second language” makes it seem like English is the only other language a student knows or needs, or that they’re “second place” to their peers. “Additional language” shows that English is just one more language a student is learning and that knowing more than one language is normal and valuable.)
 - Ask students: What do you think when you see these labels? How might they affect how students feel about themselves?

Activity 1: Idiom Connections

Objective: Understand what idioms are, why they matter, who uses them and why, and how they can include or exclude people.

1. Brainstorm idioms as a class. Write them on the board. Start with ones you know: break a leg, under the weather, cost an arm and a leg, hit the nail on the head, piece of cake.
2. For each idiom, ask:
 - What does it actually mean?
 - What would it mean if you took every word literally?
 - Draw it—the literal version.
3. Discuss:
 - Why might idioms be especially confusing for someone new to English?
 - Why do we use idioms at all? What do they add to language?
 - Can an idiom that’s confusing also be funny? Can it be frustrating?

Amina realizes that her family also uses idioms such as “patience is the key to relief” and “tie your camel.”

Make a connection:

1. Ask your family about an idiom that they use. It can be in English or another language.
2. Share it with the class: What does it mean literally? What does it really mean? When would you use it? Are there idioms in other languages that carry a similar idea?
3. Compile a class “Idiom Book”—one page per idiom, with an illustration, the literal meaning, the real meaning, and the language of origin.

Amina Banana and the Formula for Winning Continued

Activity 2: Arabic Words in English: Language Detective

Connecting to the text, students explore the everyday English words that have Arabic roots, and then go hunting for more! This activity reframes language learning as archaeological discovery.

English Word	Arabic Root	How It Traveled
sugar	<i>sukkar</i> (سكر)	Came to English via Arabic trade routes
lemon	<i>laymun</i> (ليمون)	Arabic from Persian and Sanskrit origins
cotton	<i>qutn</i> (قطن)	Traded across the medieval world
algebra	<i>al-jabr</i> (الجبر)	From mathematician Al-Khwarizmi's work
algorithm	<i>al-Khwarizmi</i> (name)	Named after the same mathematician
coffee	<i>qahwa</i> (قهوة)	Spread globally from the Arabian Peninsula
sofa	<i>suffah</i> (صفاة)	A raised platform or bench
magazine	<i>makhazin</i> (مخازن)	Meaning "storehouses"

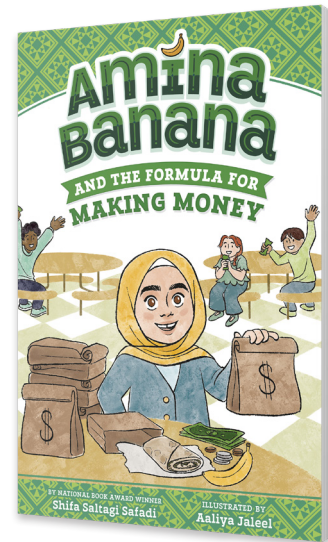
Read this [Kiddle article](#) on what loanwords are. Explain it to your neighbor and tell them one example of a word that you found from another language. What was the word and where did it come from?

Going Further:

- Using the websites etymonline.com or merriam-webster.com/kids, look up the etymology (origin) of five words you use every day. How many come from Arabic? From Spanish? From French? From a language in your own family?
- Create a class "word map" showing where English words come from. What does the map tell you about history?



Amina Banana and the Formula for Making Money



Discussion Questions

1. Amina uses coupons to save money on groceries. How does she use math to save money when she shops? What does she have to figure out before she decides what to buy? What does using coupons teach her about how math is part of everyday life? What are some other ways math can impact a family's budget at home or at the store?
2. Amina tries different ideas to earn money. When she sells her homemade treats, she forgets to include the cost of the ingredients. What's the difference between the money you earn (revenue) and the money you actually keep after paying for supplies (profit)? Why is this important? *Math Connection: If Amina spends \$8 on ingredients and sells 10 treats for \$1 each, did she make money or lose money? Explain your thinking.*
3. At the doctor's office, Amina gets confused because she was thinking in metric, but the doctor uses inches and pounds. What does it feel like to switch between two different measurement systems? Can you think of other times Amina has to move between two "systems," like using different languages, eating different foods, or following different customs?
4. Ms. Tanya tells Amina that a mathematician named Al-Khwarizmi helped create ideas we still use in math today. How does learning this change the way Amina feels about math? How does it change the way you think about math? *Going Deeper: What does it feel like to see someone from your own background as part of the history of a subject you enjoy or find challenging?*
5. Amina doesn't want to tell her friends about her family's money problems at first. What helps her finally open up? How does talking with her friends help her change her formula?
6. The cashier at the grocery store assumes Amina's family can't do math just because they are speaking Arabic. Has anyone ever assumed something about you that wasn't true? How did that make you feel?

Activity 1: Community Fundraiser

Amina's friends organize a fundraiser at the masjid where everyone brings food and goods from their own cultures to raise money for Amina's mother's exam fees. This market connected math, community, and identity.

Using the design plan chart below, have students identify a cause and use empathy to think about who they want to help and what those people truly need. [For inspiration, read the kindness guide for Jada Jones: Dancing Queen.](#)

Our Design Plan

Ask (Empathy Step): What is the problem? Who needs help? What do they really need?

Imagine: What are different ways we could help? What kinds of fundraisers could work?

Plan: Which idea is best? What materials do we need? Who will do what?

Create: Make posters, set up the fundraiser, gather supplies, practice your pitch.

Test & Improve: How did it go? What worked well? What could we change next time?

Amina Banana and the Formula for Making Money Continued



Activity 2: Budget Builder

Students receive a fixed budget and make choices about how to allocate it, experiencing firsthand the trade-offs that Amina’s family navigates every day.

Objective:

Practice basic financial literacy: addition, subtraction, and the concept that spending on one thing means not spending on another. Connect math to real decision-making.

Instructions:

1. Give each student or group of students a budget. *Extension: Give each group of students different budgets and reflect at the end on how that affected their choices.
2. Provide a menu of choices: supplies, food, savings options, and activities, each with a price.
3. Students fill in the Budget Builder below, making decisions about what to spend and what to save.
4. Debrief: What did you choose? What did you give up? Did you save anything? Was anything harder to decide than you expected?

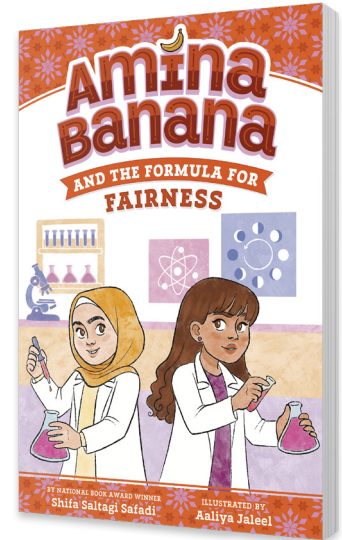
My Budget: \$ _____

Item / Category	Cost (\$)	Buy or Save?	Why?
TOTAL SPENT		TOTAL SAVED	

- What was the hardest thing for you to give up in your budget? What does that show you about what you care about most?
- How did it feel when you realized you couldn’t afford everything you wanted? If you had more money, what would you choose to do differently?
- Amina’s family has to make choices like this every time they go grocery shopping. How do these decisions feel different when they’re real and not just pretend?



Amina Banana and the Formula for Fairness



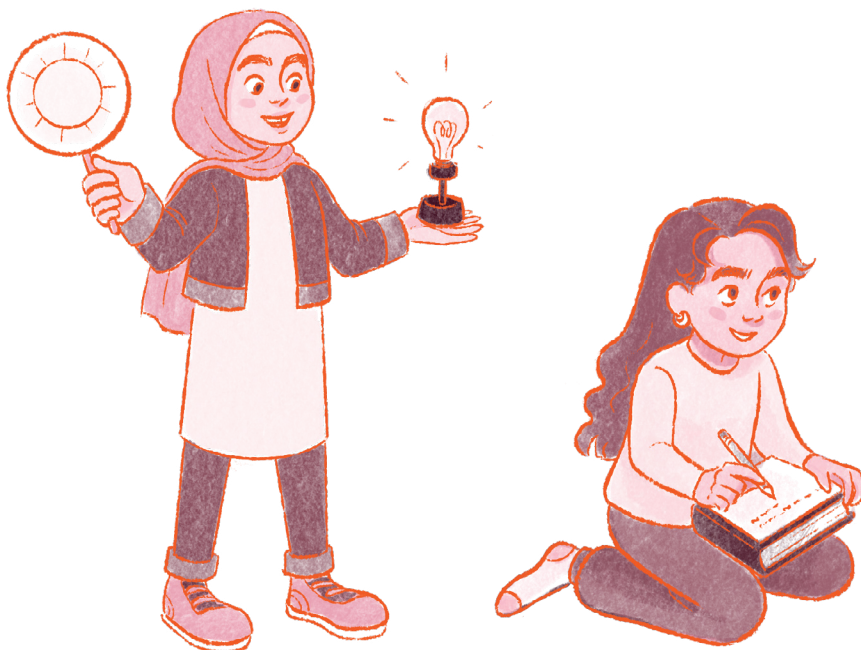
Discussion Questions

1. What does “fair” mean to Amina at the start of the book? Does her understanding change by the end of the book? How?
2. After Tara visits Amina’s house, their feelings toward each other change. What happens that allows them to see each other’s point of view?
3. How do you know Amina feels more comfortable at the mosque than at school? What is it about that space that makes her feel like she belongs?
4. Amina never met her grandfather, but she still feels a deep connection to him. How is that possible? Have you ever felt connected to someone you never got to meet?
5. Why do you think Amina took Sami’s watch? What was she really looking for when she took it?
6. Amina’s family and Judy’s family both had to leave Syria even though their parents were doing good work. How do you think Amina feels about that? What does this scene show about why people sometimes have to leave their country even when they haven’t done anything wrong?
7. Amina and Tara each brought something different to their combined project. What did each girl contribute? Why was their project together stronger than either one would have been alone?

Activity 1: Moon Phases Experiment

In the back of the book for *Amina Banana and the Formula for Fairness*, there is a bonus experiment. While doing this experiment, consider randomly showing different phases of the moon (with Oreo cookies) and have students identify them. An additional research element for this can be having students research what these phases mean and to answer the questions below:

- About how many days does it take for the moon to orbit the earth?
- Does the shape of the moon change throughout the month?
- What does the moon need to not be completely dark from our view?



Amina Banana and the Formula for Fairness Continued

Activity 2: Fair vs. Equal: A Sorting & Discussion Activity

Is It the Same? Is It Fair?

Equal means everyone gets the same thing. Fair means everyone gets what they need. Are those always the same? This activity helps students distinguish between equal and fair in science, in school, and in life. All scenarios are drawn from the book or from everyday classroom situations, so students are sorting situations they recognize.

Note: A teacher may need to talk about [equity vs. equality](#) (PBS video) or the [band-aid activity](#).

For each scenario below, check whether it is equal, fair, both, or neither, and then explain your reasoning.

Note to teacher: There are no single right answers. The discussion is the point.

Scenario	Equal	Fair	Why?
Everyone gets the same amount of time on the computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A student who struggles with reading gets extra time on a test	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Everyone on a team gets the same award even if some worked harder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
A student who speaks English as an additional language gets a dictionary during a quiz	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Amina is placed in EAL class while her friends play outside in the snow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tara and Amina are assigned to be partners even though they don't get along	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Your own example:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Discussion

- Were any of these hard to categorize? Which ones and why?
- Did your class agree? Where did you disagree most?
- What is the difference between "same" and "fair" in your own words?
- STEM Connection: Scientists don't treat every variable the same—they adjust based on what each experiment needs. How is that like equity?



Full Series Activities and Questions



Activity 1: Your Own Formula

The books in the series are all about a different formula that Amina makes to solve each of her different problems in the book(s). Now it's your turn to create a formula you can use in a story!

Your story must include:

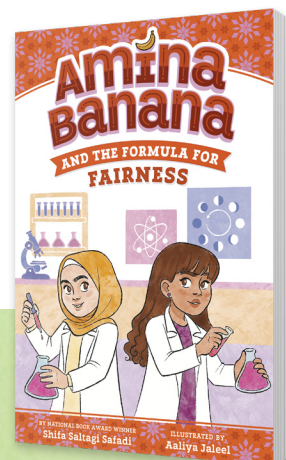
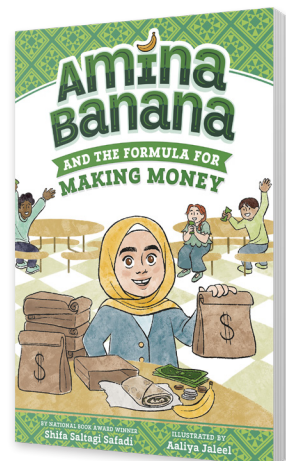
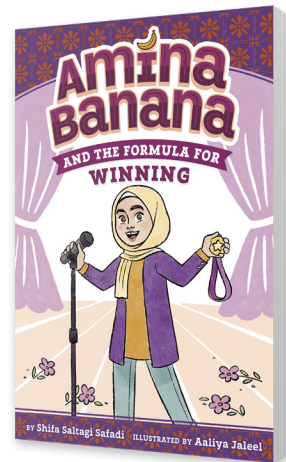
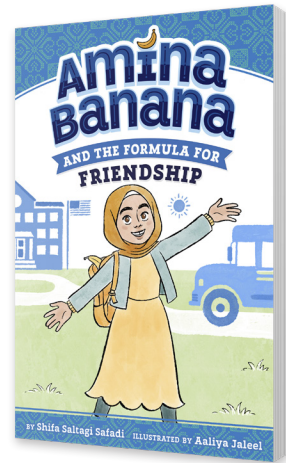
1. A unique problem Amina (or another character from the books) is trying to solve.
2. At least one moment where your first approach doesn't work.
3. A STEM connection: a formula, an experiment, a scientific concept, or a design challenge.
4. A cultural or personal detail that comes from who Amina is.
5. A moment where perspective shifts for Amina or for another character.
6. Something Amina learns that she didn't know at the start.

Questions to reflect on:

- How did Amina's relationships and communication with friends and family change in each book? Did these relationships affect her formulas or problem-solving approach?
- How are Amina's formulas similar to how scientists or engineers solve problems?
- How can talking to others help or change a perspective or make your formula better?
- Ask a friend or classmate to read through your formula. **How did you test or improve your formula after the first approach?** Did they give you any feedback that you used to change your story or help you to make it stronger?

Optional extensions:

- Illustrate scenes at school, at home, or in a community space. What details were important for you to include in these scenes to reflect how your character acts or belongs in that space?
- Share with the class or display in the library. Did anyone have similar formulas to yours? Did you find that you approached problems in similar or different ways?



Full Series Activities and Questions Continued

Activity 2: What Is American?: A Class Discussion & Wall Objective

Explore identity, belonging, and the complexity of national identity.

Discussion Starter

Make a list: What do you think of when you hear the word “American”? Don’t filter, just write.

Now look at your list. Circle anything that:

- came from somewhere else originally (food, music, words, traditions)
- not everyone in America would recognize or agree with
- surprised you when you wrote it

Then ask:

- What are things that are “American” that came from somewhere else? (Food, music, words, inventions, almost everything has a story.)

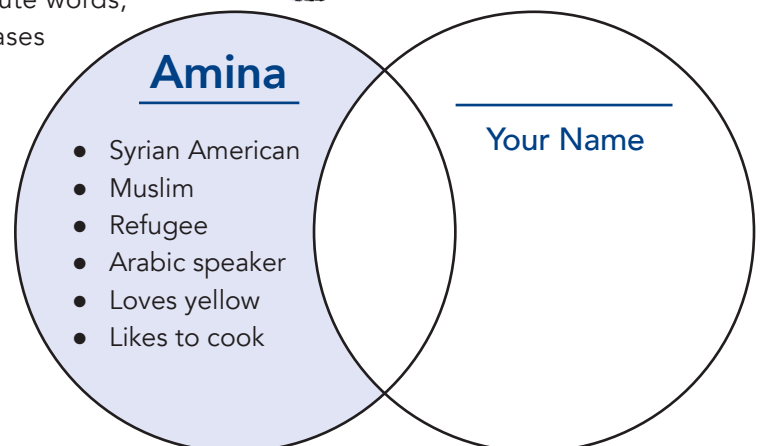
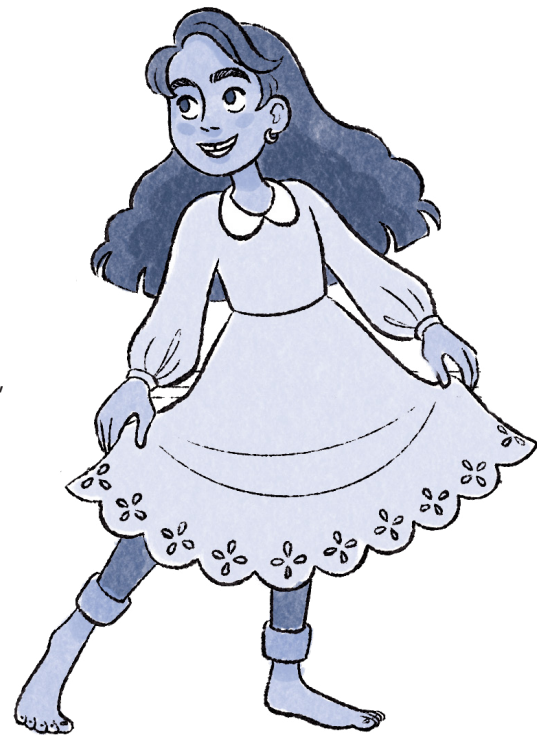
What about people?

- Is Amina American? Why or why not?
- Can someone be American and Syrian at the same time? American and Mexican? American and Chinese?
- Who gets to decide who is American? Who helps shape what “American” means? (people, families, communities)
- When you hear discussions about who is American in the media or at home, what do you hear the most often about immigrants? Is it mostly negative? Positive?
- What things do you hear the most often? (Birthplace? Language? Length of time? Citizenship? Religion? Feeling of belonging or other difference?)

Activity

Create a classroom wall: “American Is...” Students contribute words, images, family objects (drawings or photos), foods, or phrases in any language.

STEM connection: Think about the concept of a Venn diagram. Where do your identities overlap? Where are they distinct?



Considerations for Educators and Librarians



As you prepare to read this series with students, exploring this background information and context about Amina and her family will help to frame and guide deeper conversations around identity and community, encouraging students to reflect on their own experiences and connect with others.

On refugee families and finances. Amina's family are Syrian refugees. Refugees are widely considered the most heavily vetted group of travelers to enter the United States. Their journey to the United States involved leaving behind not just a home, but a whole life: jobs, community, language, familiarity, status. Even families who were middle-class or professional in their home country often face financial precarity after resettlement: credentials may not transfer, language barriers limit employment, and the social safety net can be unfamiliar or difficult to navigate. When finances appear in the story, i.e. a packed lunch that looks different, clothing, what or Amina can or can't do, these are not incidental details. They are invitations for honest, careful conversation.

Ask yourself:

- What assumptions are often held about refugees and their families? What does "struggling" look like? What assumptions are held about wealth and what it signals?
- How can I use this as an opportunity for students to think about fairness, about what it costs to rebuild, and about what communities can do when individuals can't do it alone?
- There is a specific instance where Amina is paired with Lana, a Syrian American, Christian student who does not speak Arabic. What assumptions were made in pairing these two girls? How did this impact both students? What ways could there have been more positive and deliberate adult facilitation?

On language and belonging. Multilingual students are not "behind"—they are already navigating multiple linguistic and cultural worlds. English as an Additional Language (EAL) reflects this richness. At the same time, learning in a new language can create moments of isolation, especially when everyday classroom language assumes cultural knowledge students haven't yet had the chance to acquire. Idioms, casual shorthand, and labels like "ESL" or "for Dummies" can unintentionally signal deficit rather than capability.

As educators, our language choices shape students' sense of belonging. The way we talk about multilingual learners and the way we talk around them communicates what we value. When we frame students as lacking English rather than carrying multiple languages, we risk shrinking their confidence and identity. When we notice and unpack the cultural layers of English (including idioms), we invite students into the community of meaning-making rather than leaving them outside it.

Ask yourself:

- How does the language environment of my classroom feel to someone for whom English is new? How do my school's signs, conversations, and labels frame multilingualism—as a deficit or as an asset? What idioms or culturally loaded phrases may be present in my own speech?



Considerations for Educators and Librarians Continued

On being “American.” This series gently but persistently asks: What is American? There is no single answer, and that is the point. Students will bring their own assumptions to this question. Some may have never had to think about it. Others live it as a daily negotiation. Your classroom can be a space where multiple answers coexist, where belonging isn’t something students have to earn by sounding a certain way or knowing the right cultural shorthand.

Some moments, like Sami saying “A’s are for Americans, not Syrians” or Amina’s insistence on making apple pie, show what happens when a child absorbs a narrow definition of who counts as “American.” It is important not to rush past this or to quickly provide reassurance, but rather to sit with it and ask: Where does this belief come from? What messages in school, media, or our communities teach a child that excellence belongs to someone else?

A classroom can be a place where that belief is gently, consistently challenged by expanding students’ sense of who belongs and who gets to excel. It is also a place of genuine, textured pluralism where students negotiate their cultural norms in this valued third space.

On name pronunciation. Amina is a name with roots in Arabic, meaning “trustworthy” or “faithful.” It is pronounced Ah-MEE-nah. Taking time to learn and correctly pronounce a student’s name or a character’s name is a small act that carries real weight.

On religion. Amina’s family is Muslim. This may be familiar to some students and entirely new to others. The goal is not a unit on Islam, but rather an openness to the ways faith, practice, and culture are woven into everyday life in Amina’s family, at their mosque, in their community, and in every family in your classroom.

On academics as belonging. From language roots to science and mathematics, Ms. Tanya helps make connections between Arabic and academics. Though seemingly trivial, it is a genuine reframe for Amina, who sees this as evidence that her language and culture have already shaped the world in which she now lives. She uses her knowledge of Al-Khwarizmi—the ninth-century Muslim mathematician whose work gave us algebra and whose name gave us the word “algorithm”—to both reflect herself in a beloved subject and later to push back against the words of a bigoted cashier.

The cashier says, “If you’re going to live in America, speak English.” Amina responds: “Math was invented by Muslims . . . and the numbers you use are actually Arabic numerals.” This moment is based on a real experience in the life of the author, who was once in a similar situation and was unable to respond. Amina gets to say what the author could not.

These are real and important conversations. Hold them carefully and without rushing to resolution.

Ask yourself:

- How do I respond when students make derogatory comments about immigrants, Muslims, or people who speak other languages, or have accents (even casually)? How can I approach this subject with students to recognize that it is everyday bigotry?
- Is my curriculum, particularly STEM, presented as culturally neutral? Are there students in my classroom for whom moon phases, seasons, or other natural cycles have personal or religious meaning? How can their knowledge enrich the curriculum?
- What can I do to make culturally relevant connections to curriculum that enlightens and empowers all students?