

***Girls of the Crescent:
Meet the Two Teenagers
Fighting for Better
Representation in Books***

By

Girls of the Crescent

2019



Mena and Zena, two Muslim girls living in Michigan, discover the importance of making books with female Muslim characters available in schools and libraries. As you read, take notes on why Mena and Zena decided to create the Girls of the Crescent organization.

When teenagers Mena and Zena realized they never saw characters like themselves in books, they decided to do something about it. Here, they tell us about founding their organization Girls of the Crescent...

We are Mena and Zena, two Muslim girls living in Michigan, aged 14 and 15. We go to the same high school and are interested in science, math, and art — but most of all, we love to read.

We've both visited our local public library countless times, checking out book after book. They've given us information, fun, adventure, humor, and understanding.

But one thing was missing from all of the books that we read — we never saw ourselves represented.

When reading picture books, we never saw characters that looked like us; when reading chapter books, we never read about characters with our names; when reading novels, we never felt personally connected to the characters.

Then, when we were in fourth grade, we were given a school project to research a person we looked up to. We both went to our public library with female Muslim women in mind, but we couldn't find any books about them.

Later, we began to realize that the same thing was happening in other genres, too — that there was a shortage of books about Muslim girls. In fact, the first time we saw ourselves represented was this year when we read *The Lines We Cross* by Randa Abdel-Fattah.

The feeling that we experienced when reading about characters like us was indescribable and we were astonished that we never experienced it before.

Making a change

Books have an immense impact on how children behave, socialize, and see themselves in the world, and if young kids don't see themselves represented, there is a certain feeling of not belonging or not fitting in. We knew that we had to address this problem and do something to help empower Muslim girls like us.

We decided to start our own non-profit organization, Girls of the Crescent — we collect books with female Muslim main characters through donations, and then

gift them to schools and libraries around the community.

We have compiled a list of books on our website that includes strong Muslim female protagonists, ranging from early books to young adult and adult fiction.

People are always surprised to see how long the list of books is, because most of them are not included in our local library or school collections. We are hoping to

provide awareness for these books that are so important for diversity.

We started off in our schools, talking to our school PTAs and asking them for donations. Using this approach, we managed to collect almost 200 books that have been added to the library collections of 21 schools in our district.

We have also received monetary donations from neighbors, friends, and other organizations, and authors

have even got involved by donating copies of their own books with female Muslim main characters.

What's next?

Now, we hope to get our books into other schools around the community and present our endeavor5 to mosques. And we want to hold a fundraiser in a high school and middle school in our school district to get more funds for buying books.

Word is spreading and we were even featured in Amy Poehler's Smart Girls. And in our spare time, we are writing our own book about 50 great Muslim women who have achieved inspirational things.

We hope that the work we are doing will help Muslim girls feel included and give them role models.

And our plan is to expand to other races, religions, cultures, and people of other backgrounds, so we can make sure everyone gets represented. We want our

work with Girls of the Crescent to spread awareness about the importance of diversity in books.