



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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***“God does not look at
your appearance or
your possessions, but
He looks at your heart
and the things you do.”***

– Prophet Muhammed,
from *Salaam: A Muslim
American Boy’s Story*

Every week new children’s books arrive at my library. I usually take several home to read; in fact, much of my daily reading includes these books. Fiction is my favorite, particularly novels written for fourth to eighth-graders, but I sometimes discover amazing non-fiction books as well.

The past few weeks there have been a wonderful selection of both. Kimberly Willis Holt, has a new novel out called *Part of Me*. A family tree at the beginning of the book helps guide readers through the four generations that are represented. The transitions between the generations are sometimes subtle and it can take a few pages before it is clear what the relationship is between the current character and previous ones. However, the story ties together beautifully and the ending is perfect. I like, too, that books, reading and libraries play significant roles in this sweet story about relationships and families.

Mitali Perkins’ *The Not-*

So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen is another one I loved. Eighth-grader Sunita Sen, known as Bontu (“little sister”) by her family, is struggling to weave together her Indian roots and her American life. Life is made even more challenging when her grandparents come from India to stay with her family and her independent professor mother suddenly stops teaching and starts wearing saris. What I particularly appreciate about this story are the imperfections in the characters: they make hurtful comments to each other and there are lots of misunderstandings. But the final result is characters – adults and children – who mature and gain in self-awareness and mutual understanding.

My favorite of the new non-fiction books is Tricia Brown’s *Salaam: A Muslim American Boy’s Story*, with photographs by Ken Cardwell. This first person book begins with a black-and-white photograph of a smiling young boy holding a

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balloon. Opposite this picture are the words “Assalamu alaikum,” which means “peace be with you.” The text then continues, introducing the main character: “My name is Imran and I am a Muslim American boy.” On the next page we see Imran being pushed on a swing by his father, while the sentence below says: “I am an American.”

The black-and-white pictures continue throughout the book, as Imran tells us about his dog, birthday parties with friends, school, the peanut butter sandwiches he eats and his dream of being a rock star. In addition, he gives a glimpse into the daily lives of a Muslim family, including the mean telephone call his mother got one day because of the family’s beliefs. At the end of the book is a simple glossary to define words like mosque, salaam and Qur’an, as well as an explanation of the Five Pillars of Islam. I hope this gentle yet pow-

erful story will help children (and parents) understand more about Islam and those who practice it and perhaps even change some misconceptions.

Finally, *Into the West: From Reconstruction to the Final Days of the American Frontier* by James McPherson. This beautifully illustrated history book is well-organized, easy to read and full of information I didn’t learn in school. For instance, we certainly never read a chapter called “The First Settlers: The Native Americans.” The text is vivid and organized, the Quick Facts are worth reading and the glossary at the back explains terms like typhoid fever and enfranchisement.

These four books are only a small representation of the many new titles now on our shelves. For those with children or those who love good children’s books, I recommend taking a look next time you’re in a library.