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# Does My Head Look Big In This?



## Synopsis

When sixteen-year-old Amal decides to wear the hijab full-time, her entire world changes, all because of a piece of cloth...Sixteen-year-old Amal makes the decision to start wearing the hijab full-time and everyone has a reaction. Her parents, her teachers, her friends, people on the street. But she stands by her decision to embrace her faith and all that it is, even if it does make her a little different from everyone else. Can she handle the taunts of "towel head," the prejudice of her classmates, and still attract the cutest boy in school? Brilliantly funny and poignant, Randa Abdel-Fattah's debut novel will strike a chord in all teenage readers, no matter what their beliefs.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 850 (What's this?)

Paperback: 368 pages

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Product Dimensions: 1 x 5.2 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (66 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #64,376 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#43 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Prejudice & Racism](#) [#84 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Religious](#) [#88 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism](#)

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

"Putting on hijab isn't the end of the journey. It's just the beginning of it," Amal, the narrator, says in the book. This brief statement summarizes the powerful lesson of this compelling, funny novel. The novel begins as Amal is watching a Friends rerun and is inspired to wear hijab (the Muslim head scarf) when she sees Jennifer Aniston's carefree character get up and dance in a "hideous bridesmaid outfit" at her ex-boyfriend's wedding. This comical, worldly inspiration sets the stage for Amal's third term rollercoaster ride as an eleventh grader in a private, prestigious "institution" (as the principal Ms. Walsh like to call it). Having gone to Muslim school up until the year before, Amal's

decision to cover in hijab will prove a huge test of faith for her, especially since she spent first and second term at the school appearing normal...except for her long name: "Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim". (She says, "You can thank my father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather for that one. The teachers labeled me slow in preschool because I was the last child to learn how to spell her name).As I read, I laughed out loud and shook my head in recognition of how it feels to grow up Muslim in the West, especially as a teenager in school. The book is authentic in its representation of that experience, the ups and downs, the stereotypes, the harassment, and (ah!) the "good souls" that make you smile because they prove that there really are people (however rare they are) who are actually guided by good human sense when dealing with Muslim citizens, instead of CNN headlines on "Islamic" terrorists and the like.

Randa Abdel-Fattah is an Australian and Muslim writer and her book *Does My Head Look Big In This?* is the story of a teenage girl Amal who chooses to wear the hijab. The book deals quite well with three larger social themes, one specifically is about choice in religion and one example of what it's like for a Muslim girl in a westernized society. The other larger social theme, which was quite well done regards identity, how we see ourselves, with a specific nod to dislodging the beauty myth. And finally, a critique of the sexual pressures placed on young girls to have sex. At the same time, I did struggle with some ideas in the book. Early on, Abdel-Fattah knocks at feminism, which is rather well deserved in the sense of "hard-core feminists" (her words, not mine) making an issue out of wearing the hijab when choice is involved. Point taken, but this isn't so much a feminist stance as much as western perceptions and xenophobia pertaining specifically to women of eastern cultures or cultural descent. Additionally, she also ensures a knock at atheism. This sort of misrepresentation (or misinterpretation) carries through the book in not identifying social issues as the problem. After all, in a book that deals with the problematic scenarios of misrepresenting and misinterpreting Islam - well, pot kettle black. Likewise, every page was detailed by a mass consumer mindset of shopping and buying and consuming. I did start to find this problematic and particularly as the book completely fails to escape the female young adult novel entrenched idea of female competition. Because, you know, a young adult novel can't exist without two girls verbally (if not physically) abusing each other.

Let me start out by saying that *DOES MY HEAD LOOK BIG IN THIS?* is a book that needed to be written, and one that needs to be read. It definitely fills a gap in young adult literature: it's a story about a normal Muslim girl in a non-Muslim country (Australia) who is not escaping oppression by a

fundamentalist government/family or anything like that. Amal is just a normal teenage girl, albeit a Muslim one. She has crushes on boys, she likes to go shopping, she giggles with her friends, and she sometimes argues with her parents or feuds with classmates. However, Amal's life is changed drastically when she makes a major decision: to wear the hijab, the head scarf worn by Muslim women. This would not be nearly such a big deal were she still at school with all of her friends who are also Muslim and some of whom wear the hijab full-time (meaning: whenever she is around men who are not relatives) as well. However, Amal has recently transferred to a very white-bread prep school, where the environment is completely different. Amal is subjected to racism and discrimination by kids whose experience with Muslims has largely been confined to what they see in the media. The reactions she faces at home are not all positive, either, but Amal has made a choice. To her, it is a personal, religious decision, to show her devotion to God; it's not about being oppressed as some of her classmates seem to think, or making any sort of statement. Being a Muslim is a part of who Amal is, but in showing that, she faces things a lot worse than any evangelical Christian I know, and that's a sad commentary on our society. All of that aside, Randa Abdel-Fattah's book is very well-written, and I loved Amal's voice. The characters in this book (particularly Amal) were great.

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