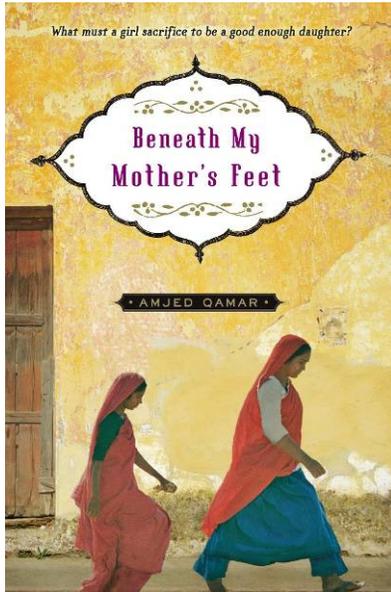


Beneath My Mother's Feet

by Amjed Qamar
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

Nazia doesn't mind when her friends tease and call her a good beti, a dutiful daughter. Growing up in a working-class family in Karachi, Pakistan, Nazia knows that obedience is the least she can give to her mother, who has spent years saving and preparing for her dowry. But every daughter must grow up, and for fourteen-year-old Nazia that day arrives suddenly when her father gets into an accident at work, and her family finds themselves without money for rent or food.

Being the beti that she is, Nazia drops out of school to help her mother clean houses, all the while wondering when she managed to lose control of her life that had been full of friends and school. Working as a maid is a shameful obligation that could be detrimental to her future -- after all, no one wants a housekeeper for a daughter-in-law. As Nazia finds herself growing up much too quickly, the lessons of hardship that seem unbearable turn out to be a lot more liberating than she ever imagined.

Beneath My Mother's Feet by Amjed Qamar, published by Atheneum, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing. Permission to use book jacket image and book description granted by Simon & Schuster (<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Beneath-My-Mother's-Feet>)

Book details:

Beneath My Mother's Feet by Amjed Qamar.

Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008, ISBN 978-1-4169-4728-8, Grades 7-up

Other formats: ebook, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4424-0705-3

<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Beneath-My-Mother's-Feet>



About the Author

Amjed Qamar graduated from The Ohio State University with degrees in English and psychology. She currently resides in Ohio and works for the Dublin City School District. Amjed lived in Pakistan for several years and returns regularly. ***Beneath My Mother's Feet***, her first book, won the 2009 Ohioana Juvenile Book Award.

A conversation with Amjed Qamar:

Q. How did you come to write ***Beneath My Mother's Feet***?

A. By now, so many people have asked me this question. Generally, I say, well, I travelled to Pakistan, lived there for many years, and I enjoy writing. But in reality, it goes beyond that.

There was a point during my stay in Karachi where I'd seen so many families facing misfortune that I almost turned away. There was one time I was sitting in a car waiting and a little boy came up to my car window and begged me for money to buy food. I had already given so much too so many like him, but I did it again.

It was hot, I was tired, pregnant, and desperately wanted to get home and have an ice cold diet Pepsi. The little boy asked for more. And more kids came. I rolled up my window. I turned away. They tapped and tapped. I wished them away. They didn't tap harder or raise their voices. They just prayed for my unborn child and asked me to pray for them. That just broke my heart.

My soon to be born child would have everything, including their prayers. What would they be left with? I gave again. And wondered how long would it be before I forgot about them. Who would remember these kids on the street?

I think that was when the seed was first planted in my mind. The seed of a story about children who struggled for everything, but still had heart. They were good people caught up in bad times. It was not their fault. Someone had to share their stories.

There were so many stories. Nazia, the main character in *Beneath My Mother's Feet*, came to be when I started wondering about the backstory of these kids and their families. Hopefully, I did them justice.

Author biography, interview, and photograph courtesy Simon & Schuster; used with permission.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Author Resources:

Amjed Qamar's official website

<http://www.amjedqamar.com/>

Author page on Simon & Schuster site

<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Amjed-Qamar>

Author page on Poets & Writers site

http://www.pw.org/content/amjed_qamar

Interview with Amjed Qamar from *A Year of Reading*

<http://readingyear.blogspot.com/2008/05/sneak-peek-keep-your-eye-on-this-new.html>

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Stasia Kehoe, Simon & Schuster

Author.Appearances@SimonandSchuster.com



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Talk About it!

(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)

- We learn early on that Nazia likes school and has the respect of her teacher, Ms. Haroon. How is her school similar to your school? How is it different? Why is Nazia so devastated when her mother pulls her out of school to work? Discuss the part school plays in Nazia's hopes and dreams.
- As the book opens, we meet Nazia's neighbors and friends, Maleeha and Saira. As Nazia's circumstances change, she again meets her friends who respond to her in very different ways. When Nazia encounters Saira in the market, how does Saira react and what are her reasons for her behavior? What happens when Nazia asks Maleeha for help? Who is the better friend and why?
- Soon Nazia must grow up fast to help her family stay together. She longs for her older brother, Bilal, to return home so she can "be a little sister again." What does she lose as she gains more responsibility? What does she find out about herself and the members of her family as each responds to his or her changing circumstances?
- When her husband is unable to work, Amma must make choices to enable her family to live. How did your perception of Amma change as the book progressed? Discuss the relationship between Amma and Nazia, as well as the relationship between Amma and Abbu. At the end, where does Amma's loyalty lie?
- Amma's concern for her daughter's *jahez* is her way of ensuring her daughter's future happiness. How do Amma's perceptions of her daughter's destiny change over the course of the book? Why does she keep the dowry money secret until the very end, even though the family had been reduced to pleading for a place to live?
- When Nazia becomes friends with Sherzad, she loses some of her innocence as he tells her of his mother and his life of hardship. Why does Nazia risk everything to help Sherzad escape? Do you think Sherzad succeeded in reaching his grandmother? How does Sherzad affect Nazia's understanding of her own mother and her decision to flee?
- The dowry money will help Nazia, but perhaps the most important gift Amma gives her daughter is her blessing to leave. Why does Amma insist Nazia wait until the morning so that she can accompany her daughter? What does this have to do with "The gates of heaven lie beneath the mother's feet?"

Discussion questions courtesy Simon & Schuster; used with permission.

<http://books.simonandschuster.net/Beneath-My-Mother%27s-Feet/Amjed-Qamar/9781416947288>



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcintro>

Learn & have fun!

Educators: These activities align to Ohio Academic Content Standards as indicated in parentheses after each activity. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.

Teens, parents, and others: These ideas are useful for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic content standards define what students in K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information on the Ohio Academic Content Standards, see the Ohio Department of Education website at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us> and click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.

- Many belief systems have specific guidelines on how to treat mothers. Research and record teachings of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism about motherhood and family life. Expand your search to Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism. Copy your notes into Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net>). This free word art tool provides a visual representation of text. Share your word cloud with your group or class and discuss. (*SS People in Societies 11-12 Benchmark A; T Technology and Communication Applications 6-8, 9-12*)
- Research the history of Pakistan using print library resources and electronic resources available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>). Make a map of Pakistan including Karachi. Given the clues in the book (near the Arabian Sea), where do you think the Defense district is? Note the border countries and the references in the book to people from those countries including Afghanistan and India. (*SS History 9-10 Benchmark E; SS People in Societies 9-10 Benchmark A; Library Technology Literacy 9-12*)
- Use print or online library resources to learn about Reader's Theatre. Choose a section from the novel and recreate it via Readers' Theatre. Select passages with lots of dialogue, such as the scene in which Amma begs Seema for lodging. Stage your Reader's Theatre production for your class or group. (*A Drama/Theatre Creative Expression and Communication 9-12 Benchmarks A,B; Library Information Literacy 9-12*)
- Using the micro-prose style of Twitter, write statements in 140 characters or less representing each of 3 of the main characters. Read your phrases aloud to the group and have them guess which character your phrase represents. Post your statements if you have access to a Twitter account. (Example: "Men are not to be trusted, no matter whether husband or oldest son! Allah protect us women!" The character is Amma.) (*ELA Reading Applications: Literary Text 8-10, 11-12 Benchmark A; T Technology and Communication Applications 6-8, 9-12*)

Some activities from Simon & Schuster's **Beneath My Mother's Feet** Readers Guide; used with permission.
<http://books.simonandschuster.net/Beneath-My-Mother%27s-Feet/Amjed-Qamar/9781416947288>



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Explore more!

Ohioana Book Awards: *Beneath My Mother's Feet*

<http://www.ohioana.org/awards/2009/juvenileba2009.asp>

Amjed Qamar won the Ohioana Juvenile Book Award in 2009.

Inside Islam: Dialogues and Debates

<http://insideislam.wisc.edu/>

This collaboration between the University of Wisconsin and Wisconsin Public Radio seeks to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical perceptions about Islam and Muslims worldwide.

CIA World Factbook: Pakistan

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>

An overview of Pakistan's geography, people, government, economy, and more.

Pakistan Virtual Library

<http://www.vl-site.org/pakistan/index.html>

A clearinghouse of links to web resources about Pakistan and Pakistanis.

State of the World's Mothers

<http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/state-of-the-worlds-mothers-report/>

This annual report from Save the Children explores the condition of mothers around the world.

Half the Sky

<http://www.halftheskymovement.org/>

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide, a book by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, and this companion website seek to empower women in the developing world.

Interviews with Muslim Women of Pakistan by Chiara Angela Kovarik.

Syren Book Co., ISBN 978-0-929636-49-8, Grades 7-10.

An American teenager speaks with Pakistani women about their lives at the intersection of traditional Islamic society and modern Western culture.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.