

# MASSACHUSETTS LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2023

## HONORS LEVEL I

Dear Jerry Craft,

It's what prevents us, helps us, or even saves us. In my case it's what maintained me and kept me true to myself. I recently moved to a public school and wasn't sure how my Muslim identity would be accepted among the other non-Muslim students. Now, as a Muslim we need to pray five times a day, and one of those prayers was right in the MIDDLE of my already hectic school day. When I found this out my mind EXPLODED, and thoughts rushed through my head. How would I pray? Where would I pray? What if I DIDN'T pray? And above all, if I prayed during the school day, would I be bullied by other kids for doing so? All these questions zoomed faster than a speeding plane through my mind. When the time for me to pray came around, I went down to the principal's office to ask and see if they could accommodate my request. I was actually scared about what the others would think about me. This happened every time that I went down to the office until I read your book *New Kid*. This book taught me that being different is okay and that I shouldn't be scared of what the others would think. I should embrace my IDENTITY first.

In one part of the book, Andy was bullying Jordan because of his skin color and identity. I myself have been in a situation like Jordan's. One day a classmate came up to me and started bullying me because I was a Muslim and because I have a dark skin color. He said I wasn't welcome in America, this made me feel anxious and annoyed. This went on for a long time, and I couldn't find a way to fix this situation. No one would help me or do anything about him. Until one day I found a solution. It wasn't a teacher, or even a person. It was a book called *New Kid*.

My mom recommended *New Kid* to me thinking I would relate to Jordan because both of us had moved to a new school recently. As Jordan's school year went on, he kept getting bullied by Andy because of his skin color. This was like my situation except I was getting bullied for my religion and skin color. At that time, just like Jordan, I was wondering why people were mean to people who just had a different skin color or a different religion to them. It was almost as if they couldn't accept someone being different. But then eventually, he started to ignore Andy and not talk to him as much. For Jordan, this worked well, and Andy started to stop bullying him because he wasn't getting a reaction from Jordan. I took a leaf from your book and tried not responding to the bully's taunts. At first this was hard, seeing as I wanted to respond to everything that the bully told me. But just like Jordan, I learned to start turning my face to the bully and letting his words or actions roll off my shoulder even if it hurt.

After some time, the bully started to leave me alone, and I felt relieved. Believe it or not, at the time I didn't realize it, but the book didn't only help me deal with the bully. It made me want to start drawing again. At my old school, I loved to draw, like Jordan. I would come to school with a sketchbook and draw before school. When I transferred to

public school, all this came to an end because of one mean student. On the first day of my new school, he saw me drawing in a notebook, ripped it out of my hands, and said drawing is for babies, and that I sucked at it. This made me feel uncomfortable because I didn't want to get bullied for drawing, so I stopped. This may have stopped the bully, but it broke me inside. Every day after that I yearned to draw at school, but I didn't because I didn't want to get bullied. That is, until I read your book again. Your book showed me that just because no one else draws, or isn't supportive of me drawing, I shouldn't stop.

It was your book, not a teacher, friend, or even a person, but a book. It's what has taught me to be resilient and above all to be proud of my identity. So thank you for showing me that I don't have to be stopped by mean kids and that I can pave my own path for my own life. Thanks to your book, I now know that I should be proud of my identity and not let it get in the way of me.

Sincerely,

*Saabir*