

Art for All

INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY



by Olivia Wood
illustrations by Mariem Lasheen



ASHOKA



Worldreader

Art for All is inspired by the true story of a young girl in Egypt who noticed that the refugees in her community sometimes had difficulty in adjusting to their new home. She wanted everyone to feel welcome and to have the chance to be happy! Determined to take action, she used her love of art to help the refugees integrate into the community.

This children's picture book is the result of a collaboration between Ashoka and Worldreader. It is intended to inspire children everywhere to become Changemakers and encourage adults everywhere to support them in their journey.

Amira lives in Alexandria with her family. Alexandria is in Egypt — it's a big, ancient city on the Mediterranean sea. Egypt is a country in Africa. The sun is very strong, and the sea is bright blue with sandy beaches.



Around the city, Amira sees lots of refugees. They are often on the streets and need help. At school, Amira asks about the refugees. She learns that refugees are people who have to leave their homes to find protection in another country.



Amira's teacher explains that refugees are trying to escape war, violence, or starvation in their home countries. They come to Egypt looking for safety. "Egypt is a welcoming country. Families from different geographies and cultures come to Egypt to find a better life," her teacher tells the class.





Amira's classmate and friend, Rama, is a refugee from Syria. One day after school, Amira asks Rama about her experience.

Rama shares how much she misses her friends and hometown. "It was hard to leave," Rama says, "but my family needed to be somewhere that is safer." Rama loved to sing and dance with her friends in Syria.

Amira listens while Rama talks about her family's culture and traditions.



After learning about Rama's story, Amira starts to notice more refugees in her area. At home, she asks her mother about their lives.

Her mother explains, "They have experienced many awful things in their homes. And it isn't always easy when they come to Egypt. It can be difficult for them to get jobs, and housing. Sometimes they don't speak the same dialect¹ of Arabic as us, which can make their new life here even harder."

Because of language and cultural differences, sometimes refugees are bullied and made to not feel welcome. "They've already had such a hard time, we should all show them kindness and love!" she tells her mother.

Amira asks her mother what they can do to help the refugees in their neighborhood. They spend a long time talking about how they can help make refugees feel welcome.

Amira's mother says, "What about using your art to help the refugees?"

¹ A form of a language that is spoken in a certain region or by a certain group



Amira loves painting and drawing. Her walls at home are full of artwork with bright colors and shapes. Like her friend Rama, Amira loves all forms of art, like singing, dancing, and performing. Art makes Amira happy, and she likes to tell stories in her work — about her family, and her life.



The next day, Amira visits a refugee center. She wants to plan an art class, and invite all the children in her neighborhood, both from refugee families and Egyptian families. The Refugee Center thinks it's a great idea, and Amira gets several of her friends to help out.



On the day of her first class, Amira is warm with excitement. At the Refugee Center she has a room filled with paper, paint, and pencils.

Slowly, everyone starts to arrive. At first, everyone is quiet. Amira invites everyone to introduce themselves and share something special about their hometown. Rama goes first, performing a dance from her childhood.

One by one, everyone begins to open up and share something unique about themselves. Afterwards, they draw and paint together.



The next art class is more lively. Everyone is talking to each other, and sharing their stories and cultures through pictures, song, dance, and theater. Amira watches and listens to them. She is in awe of their strength.

Some families have crossed oceans and deserts to get to Egypt. Now in one room, everyone has something special to share.



At the end of the month, Amira and her friends hold an art show. Everyone pins their paintings and drawings to the wall. Young people stand up to sing, dance, and perform skits for their friends and families. People from the town come to watch.

The paintings are amazing! The performances are powerful! There are so many emotions for each piece of art. Some are very sad, and some are full of joy and hope.



At the end of the show, several families come over to Amira. “Thank you so much for holding this workshop,” they say. “Our kids have enjoyed sharing their stories with each other. They feel more confident and welcomed to the Neighborhood.”

Amira and her friends feel incredibly proud. They are already thinking about how to involve more families in more neighborhoods! “I can’t wait for everyone to feel welcomed to Alexandria, and Egypt,” Amira shares.



Art for All Activities



Activity 1: Mindfulness

Age Group: All ages

Skill: Empathy, Emotional competency

Materials: Paper, pen or marker

Why? Research shows there is a strong correlation between mindfulness and our ability to empathize. Mindfulness is a practice of bringing one's attention into the present moment while acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Quite literally, mindfulness creates the mental space for children and young people to both connect with one another and to learn.

How?

Step 1: Deep Breaths | To kick off, have everyone close their eyes and walk them through the following steps: Get out a piece of paper and pen or marker. Then, sit up straight. Close your eyes. Breathe in and out a few times. (It helps to use a visual: “Imagine there’s a cord pulling at the top of your heads.”)

Step 2: Draw your Breath | After practicing deep breathing for a few rounds, it's time to draw our breath. Open your eyes and grab your piece of paper and a marker or pen.

With the marker in the middle of the paper, breathe in and breathe out again, this time drawing lines for each breath. Don't raise your pen from the piece of paper. When you breathe in, you draw a line in any direction. Keeping the pen on the paper and when you breathe out, you draw another line. Keep doing this as you breathe in and out, slowly drawing your own shapes and creative artwork.

After a minute or two, add color to your art piece. Draw pictures and patterns, whatever comes naturally to your piece. Give your art piece a title, and share with a friend.

Activity 2: Forget the What. It's All About the Why

Age Group: 3-12

Skill: Empathy, Critical thinking

Materials: None

Why? Stories enable us to step into an imagined world and encounter characters, circumstances, and events they would never otherwise experience. Through stories, we can step into the shoes of those whose experiences are dramatically different from our own and take on new perspectives. Researchers have found that in the process, we overcome preconceptions and arrive at a new appreciation of our common humanity. When reading or watching a story, we often focus more on what happened than on why it happened, exploring the thoughts and feelings that compelled certain individuals or characters to respond the way they did. Instead, let's explore the thoughts and feelings of Amira and Rama.

How? Take time to reflect on what you read and heard, and how their stories relate back to your own lives.

Let's talk about Rama:

- How do you think Rama might be feeling about her new life in Egypt?
- How do you know?

Let's talk about Amira:

- What led Amira to lead an art class at the Refugee Center?
- What do you think Amira felt that moment when she first stood in front of everyone gathered for the art workshop?
- Afterwards, how did this class make her feel?

Let's talk about you:

- Can you think of a time when you felt scared or vulnerable?
- When a part of you is feeling scared or vulnerable, what helps you?
- When have you been brave? Or when have you encouraged another person to be brave?

Activity 3: Your Dream for the World

Age Group: All ages

Skill: Empathy, Creativity

Materials: Art supplies, paper, pens

Why? Our world is full of complex challenges, where the decision of one person can have ripple effects through communities and cultures. Having hope for the future gives us the fuel we need to be changemakers. Empathy motivates us to build something better together and helps us do so with imagination and respect — guided by a deep understanding for the people and the world around us. Envisioning a better future can give us all the encouragement we need for finding our power as changemakers.

How? Get out a piece of paper and any art supplies you have. Let's think big and boldly about the future. Draw what your dream for the world looks like.

When drawing, think about:

- What does a world look like where everyone, like Rama, feels welcomed and a sense of belonging?
- What does a world look like where everyone is contributing, like all the young people in the art class?
- What does a world look like where everyone, like Amira, is powerful?

Hang up your art piece in your home or classroom as a reminder of your “dream for the world”. Share your art piece with a family member, friend, or teacher. Ask them what their dream for the world looks like, too!

Meet Amira



When Amira was a teenager, she interned with CARE International to help with refugee resettlement in her hometown of Alexandria, Egypt. During her internship, she met dozens of families living in refugee communities and talked to women and children from countries like Sudan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. She leaned on her passion for art and painting to launch a social venture

Ohana, to provide art and culture workshops for young people. With the goal of building a more just and inclusive community for refugees, Amira and her friends create safe spaces for children to learn about each other's cultures and express themselves through dancing, theater, drawing, and painting.

Today, she is a graduate of Political Science. She says, "I want to change our cultural norms. To change culture, we can share art and traditions across communities. This is when real change happens — when you start to change people's minds and perceptions."

About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the ability to adapt to and drive change is essential for everyone to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Ashoka is building a global community that is laying the foundation for a world where everyone is a changemaker. At the heart of the Everyone a Changemaker movement is a vision to transform the way children and young people grow up so everyone has the power and skillset to create change for the good of all.

www.ashoka.org

About Worldreader

Worldreader believes that readers build a better world. We work with partners globally to support vulnerable and underserved communities with digital reading solutions that help improve literacy and learning outcomes for children.

www.worldreader.org



2021 Ashoka and Worldreader

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

For inquiries please contact privacy@ashoka.org or publishing@worldreader.org