



Title: Kareem Between

Author: Shifa Saltagi Safadi

Imprint: G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

Publisher: Penguin Young Readers

On sale date: September 10, 2024

ISBN: 9780593699263 and 9780593699287

Format: Hardcover and Paperback

Age Range*: 8-12

Grade Range: Gr 5 Up
(Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK RESUME: KAREEM BETWEEN

BOOK SYNOPSIS

This award-winning, heartfelt coming-of-age novel in verse tells the powerful story of a seventh-grade Syrian American boy and his struggles, big and small, as he navigates middle school.

Seventh grade begins, and Kareem's already fumbled it.

His best friend moved away, he messed up his tryout for the football team, and because of his heritage, he was voluntold to show the new kid—a Syrian refugee with a thick and embarrassing accent—around school. Just when Kareem thinks his middle school life has imploded, the hotshot QB promises to get Kareem another tryout for the squad. There's a catch: to secure that chance, Kareem must do something he knows is wrong.

Then, like a surprise blitz, Kareem's mom returns to Syria to help her family but can't make it back home. If Kareem could throw a penalty flag on the fouls of his school and home life, it would be for unnecessary roughness.

Kareem is stuck between. Between countries. Between friends, between football, between parents—and between right and wrong. It's up to him to step up, find his confidence, and navigate the beauty and hope found somewhere in the middle.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "A masterfully written, deeply resonant tale." —*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

★ "Dynamic and engaging, drawing readers in from page one....a story of identity, growing up, standing up for what's right, and boyhood." —*School Library Journal*, **starred review**

"Heartfelt and personal.... a tale of true depth." —*The Horn Book*

"For fans of Kwame Alexander, Daniel Nayeri, and sports-heavy books with broad appeal." —*Booklist*

"A beautiful story of hope, empathy, confidence, and courage." —*Teen Librarian Toolkit*

"At the start of the 2016-2017 school year, Chicago Bears fan Kareem (Syrian American) aspires to be a star quarterback but underperforms at middle school tryouts and doesn't make the team. When Austin, the quarterback and coach's son, offers to help Kareem get on the team in spring if Kareem does Austin's school assignments, Kareem reluctantly agrees. Austin is an unlikable bully, but

Updated 3.31.2026

Penguin Random House

Contact BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com

*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

Kareem feels an immediate camaraderie with new student Fadi, a Syrian. But when Austin targets Fadi with racist bullying, Kareem doesn't speak out to support his new friend. The personal and political collide when Kareem gets into a fight with Austin and his attempt to hide it leads to his dad's delay in booking flights for his mom and grandparents. His mom had traveled to Syria to bring her parents, including Kareem's ailing grandfather, to the United States. They are stuck overseas when the Trump Administration's 2017 executive order banning immigrants from seven countries with significant Muslim populations is announced. Kareem feels responsible, and deeply guilty when his grandfather dies before the ban is lifted and his mother, with his grandmother, safely returns. Football metaphors are a unifying element across this novel-in-verse that makes the impact of Islamophobia achingly personal and vivid through Kareem's story."—CCBC

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- National Book Award Winner for Young People's Literature
- A Junior Library Guild Sports Selection
- An ALSC Notable Children's Book
- A CCBC Choices Selection
- A Jane Addams Children's Book Awards Chapter Book Finalist
- A CBC Librarian Favorites Award, Grades 6-8
- A Children's Literature & Reading Special Interest Group Notable Book or a Global Society Selection
- A NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts Award Selection
- A NCTE Notable Poetry Books and Verse Novels Selection
- A NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People Selection
- A Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Books Selection
- An SLJ Best Books of the Year Selection
- Grand Canyon Reader Award, Tween Recommended List (Arizona)
- CDE Recommended List, Cumulative (California)
- CDE Recommended List (California)
- CDE Recommended List, Grades 6-8 (California)
- Capitol Choices, Ages 10-14 (Washington D.C.)
- Three Stars Book Award Nominees, Middle School (Washington D.C.)
- Illinois Reads List, 6-8 (Illinois)
- Young Hoosier Book Award, Middle Grade Books (Indiana)
- Iowa Teen Award, Grades 6-9 (Iowa)
- MISelf in Books, Middle School (Michigan)
- MISelf in Books, Upper Elementary (Michigan)
- Keystone to Reading Book Award-- Middle School List (Pennsylvania)
- Rhode Island Middle School Book Award, for Grades 6-8 (Rhode Island)
- Lone Star Reading List, for Grades 6-8 (Texas)
- Vermont Golden Dome Book Award, Grades 4-8 (Vermont)
- VA Reads, Middle School (Virginia)

Updated 3.31.2026

Penguin Random House

Contact BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com

*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Penguin Classroom Educator Guide](#)
- [Penguin Classroom Poetry Guide with Classics](#)
- [Book Club Guide created by Author](#)
- [Book Club Guide from The Youth Desk](#)
- [Cultural Representation Reflection](#)
- [Poetry Multi-Levelled Lesson](#)
- [Of the Publishing Persuasion Author Interview](#)
- [Read Your World Author Interview](#)
- [National Book Foundation Author Interview](#)
- [Notes from An Islamic School Librarian Author Interview](#)
- [Afoma Umesi Author Interview](#)
- [Geeks Out Author Interview](#)
- [National Book Foundation Author Speech](#)
- [From the Mixed-Up Files Author Interview](#)
- [The Islamic Schools League of America Author Interview](#)

Updated 3.31.2026

Penguin Random House

Contact BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com

*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.