

# THE RISING TIMES

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## Hijabi Rights

By: Marib Saeed 10th

In recent days, the hijab has become a controversial symbol, with some viewing it as a form of liberation, and others viewing it as a form of women's oppression. The hijab is defined as "a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women." Yet, the hijab is more than just a piece of cloth; it is the concept of modesty and liberation. The hijab in Islam is meant to empower Muslim women and thus should not be forced upon them, not to undermine the fact that it is fard (mandatory) in Islam. Additionally, hijab is a choice, or a step, that a Muslim woman takes on her journey to further strengthen her iman (faith). Yet, others still believe that they have a right to dictate what a woman decides to wear, and how much of her body she desires to cover.

There is an ongoing debate on this subject. Some countries are banning hijabs and/or burkas, and others are forcing it. For instance, the majority of countries in Europe, such as Austria, France, Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, have a partial ban or prohibition of burkas in public settings. The most well-known of these countries for this prohibition is France. This year, French lawmakers voted to ban women from wearing the hijab while playing sports, voting 160 to 143 in favor of the ban on wearing the hijab and other conspicuous religious symbols in sports.

competitions. Lawmakers argued that the hijab could risk the safety of athletes wearing it while playing sports. For some context, France is home to roughly 5.7 million Muslims and the largest Muslim population in Europe, according to the Pew Research Center. According to Statista, as of 2019, 31% of French Muslim women were wearing hijab. This sports ban will have a profound impact on many women. “France’s attempt to liberate and save Muslim women from our headscarves is a racist, colonial project dressed up as upholding the country’s secular values. The project heaps Islamophobic harm on Muslim women” (Shaista Aziz). This is just one example of where the hijab is being prohibited in France. It is discriminative and oppressive to force women to remove their hijab, just as much as it is discriminatory and oppressive to force women to wear hijab.

This leads me to bring up my next point: the very controversial events currently occurring in Iran. In Iran, the hijab is mandatory for all Iranian women in public, even non-Muslims and tourists. Thus, naturally, people are starting to fight back against this outdated form of controlling the liberties of women. Furthermore, this has given Western and European politicians another reason to use to further spread their Islamophobic agenda, using the oppressive government of Iran to pass the narrative that the hijab and burka are innately dehumanizing objects. The objective definition of empowerment is “the process of one gaining control of their life through a set of actions,” but how we feel empowered as individuals is subjective.

To elaborate, people feel empowered in different ways. One person can feel empowered by wearing a blue shirt, while another person can feel empowered by wearing a red shirt. Would it make sense for the person wearing the blue shirt to go up to the person wearing a red shirt and enforce a blue shirt? To relate this to the hijab, in Iran, a woman who is indifferent to wearing the hijab and is forced to do so, the hijab would not be empowering to

her, it would be oppressive. Then, take a Muslim woman in France who wants to wear the hijab because she feels it empowers her. Now, if it were to be stripped off of her, would that be empowering or oppressive? As a hijabi myself, and a self-acquainted “feminist,” I believe that the only solution for this issue is for us to respect each other, and give women the freedom of self-expression and autonomy. Freedom, liberty, self-empowerment, or however you want to phrase it, is a right every woman should hold and decree for herself. No person other than her should have a say.

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## Interviews: New Teachers

*By: Imane Alami and Zara Sheikh, 11th*  
**Sr.Ghada Soliman**

Imane: “How are you liking the new school environment?”

Sr. Ghada: “The thing I like most about the school is the relationship between students and teachers. I love how collaborative the environment is between the staff.”

Imane: “Did you feel welcome when you started teaching at RSA?”

Sr. Ghada: “I feel welcomed in the school and feel that everybody is trying their best to welcome me in.”

Imane: “Did moving schools feel like a big change?”

Sr. Ghada: “There is not really a big difference. I feel like the values held in both schools are great!”

Imane: “What motivates you to work?”

Sr. Ghada: “Seeing my impact on the bright students in front of me motivates me to continue working.”



**Br. Tahar Dob**

Imane: "How are you liking the new school environment?"

Br. Tahar: "It is nice and beautiful. I have felt very comfortable, and it is like a family."

Imane: "Did you feel welcome when you started teaching at RSA?"

Br. Tahar: "From the first hour and second I met Sr. Hala and Sr. Fatima, I felt very welcomed."

Imane: "Did moving schools feel like a big change?"

Br. Tahar: "Yes, because moving from teaching in my home country to here is very different. It is like a new adventure."

Imane: "What motivates you to work?"

Br. Tahar: "Being able to teach and work everyday."

Imane: "What is your favorite aspect of being a teacher?"

Br. Tahar: "Learning everyday. For me, teaching helps me with my English and I learn something new everyday. There is a French proverb that says '*enseigner c'est apprendre deux fois*,' which means 'to teach is to learn twice.'"

Imane: "What is the biggest challenge of this job?"

Br. Tahar: "Teaching these subjects the right way, and hoping they understand what they are learning."

Imane: "What is your favorite aspect of being a teacher?"

Sr. Ghada: "The ability to help raise muslim children with an islamic upbringing."

Imane: "How would you describe the responsibilities of this job?"

Sr. Ghada: "In general, I feel that there should be more outside-of-the-classroom interactions between the teachers to gain a stronger relationship with one another."

Imane: "What is the most challenging part of this job?"

Sr. Ghada: "The biggest challenge for me is grasping the students' full attention and getting them fully interested in what they are learning."

### **Sr. Samia Butt**

Zara: "How are you liking the new school environment?"

Sr. Samia: "It is reliable, worthy, and very supportive."

Zara: "Did you feel welcome when you started teaching at RSA?"

Sr. Samia: "Yes, it was a very warm welcome. I feel that I am a part of the family already."

Zara: "Did moving schools feel like a big change?"

Sr. Samia: "Yes, it is a big change because transitioning from any level to another is always a big change."

Zara: "What motivates you to work?"

Sr. Samia: "It is my passion!"

Zara: "What is your favorite aspect of being a teacher?"

Sr. Samia: "I love teaching, and I love science. I want everyone to learn and gain knowledge that they can apply to their critical thinking and get results close to perfection!"

Zara: "What are the biggest challenges of this job?"

Sr. Samia: "Responsibilities are a lot, and I know that I have to bear and fulfill them. I am not afraid of heavy work or working under pressure."

## Interviews: New Students

By: Abdelkader Gassama, 11th

### Abdelaziz Abdullallah: 9th-grade

Abdelkader: "How do you like the school so far?"

Abdelaziz: "Alhamdulillah, the school so far is very nice, and many of the teachers are very understanding and patient. I don't feel like I need to change myself to fit in with the student body, and the classes in general are nice. A lot of the students seem very nice, and I have some friends that already go to the school, making it easier to meet new people. The school uniform is very comfortable and modest. I like how we have a built-in masjid that people can visit and pray in so we do not miss our prayers during school. The many events that are held at the school help with getting involved and interested in the school."

Abdelkader: "What is your favorite class and how does the class differ from your previous school?"

Abdelaziz: "My favorite class is Physical Education. I have a huge love and passion for exercise. I love how we do real exercises that shape us to be stronger. There is nothing I love more than the fire that I feel when I finish P.E. and then go to the gym after school for more. It's like my body knows that keeping itself healthy is an act of worshiping Allah in itself. It's this drive that fires me up to work more even when not exercising. In my old school, we didn't have these exercises; instead, we just played around and if we wanted to, we could exercise by ourselves. We didn't have a separate room, so we would sometimes go outside to play and race each other."

Abdelkader: "What impression did the teachers/school give you?"

Abdelaziz: "The teachers are usually calm and not too strict when it comes to teaching. We can express ourselves just enough so we aren't just robots in a class. They teach very well and are quick to ensure no time is wasted, and we can still have some time for ourselves to get ready

for class. One of my favorite teachers is Sr. Fadia Darwish. Although literature is my least favorite subject, Sr. Fadia makes it more interesting to learn, because she is involved with the students' learning experience. There are teachers that make me feel similar like Sr. Hala, Sr. Nehaya, Br. Said, and many more."

Abdelkader: "How did you find out about the school and what made you transfer?"

Abdelaziz: "I found out about the school from my older brother, Abdulrahman Abdullallah, who transferred in the 9th grade. When he graduated, he was still the same but matured over time there. The reason I transferred was because Rising Star Academy was an Islamic School that had grades 9th-12th, making it possible for me to graduate while also keeping Islam as a top priority. My main goals for myself are to become the smartest in science and math, and strengthen my Islamic knowledge even if it's by just one piece of information. I have some friends that go to this school, and they make going through hours of school just a little more fun with just a single handshake. Some teachers and students know me because of Abdulrahman, making my first day here feel like I was meant to be there."

Abdelkader: "What are you looking forward to in the school year?"

Abdelaziz- "During this school year, I am looking forward to becoming the strongest student within the school, both academically and physically. I am looking forward to pursuing my studies in science, and making at least one difference in the school, whether it is being a good role model for young kids, or being someone that can help classmates that struggle with the classes we take. I want to join many of the extracurricular activities that the school offers to us, and I want to be more involved with the school in general. I am also expecting to be a better version of myself than yesterday to improve my performance and get used to the new environment. More than anything, I am looking forward to becoming an Islamic role model because one strong role model in Islam can benefit many others."



Abdelkader: "How is the school culture/class environment for you at RSA?"

Abdelaziz: "The environment in Rising Star Academy for me is very good and keeps Islam as the priority. When I first arrived at the school, we started the day by saying the morning dua, and we ended the day with prayer. I noticed that we start the school day with a reminder of our religion and what we follow, and we end the school day with a reminder of our religion and what we follow. The class environment is very similar to my old school, except for more classmates and everyone seems to get along well. Although I don't want to make too many new friends, I still can't deny how everyone there acts like brothers and sisters. The only thing I found a little weird was how the students say "wallah" a lot."

### Abdulmalek Abdualлах- 8th-grade

Abdelkader: "How do you like the school so far?"

Abdulmalek: "I am enjoying being in the school so far. Alhamdulillah, I found it easy to adjust to the new school. I have made new friends quite easily. There were also some familiar people and friends that were already at the school making it more enjoyable to go to school. I have the same relaxed feeling that I had at my previous school. Overall, I would say these few months I spent here have been good."

Abdelkader: "What is your favorite class and how does the class differ from your previous school?"

Abdulmalek: "I would say my favorite class to take is History. The class is more fast-paced as compared to my previous school. This helps make it easier for me to pay attention in class. I also prefer the way the class is taught. The teacher tries to make the class fun, making me enjoy the subject more than I usually do."

Abdelkader: "What impression did the teachers/school give you?"

Abdulmalek: "I was given a very good impression the first day that I came to school.

I felt I could be myself after being there for just one day. The teachers were all very nice. I did not feel nervous at all about being there. I had a feeling of being relaxed the entire time."

It didn't feel much different from my previous school making it easy to adjust. I felt like I could be myself after being there for just one day. The teachers were all very nice. I did not feel nervous at all about being there. I had a feeling of being relaxed the entire time."

Abdelkader: "How did you find out about the school and what made you transfer?"

Abdulmalek: "I found out about the school from my brother, Abdulrahman Abdualлах, who had previously attended this school. I transferred here as my brother was going to be attending the school for his high school years. I came here because there was also a middle school here. I would have had only one year left in my previous school. So, by attending here, we would be in the same school and that was much easier."

Abdelkader: "What are you looking forward to in the school year?"

Abdulmalek: "I am looking forward to the Science Olympiad this year. I signed up because it looks interesting and fun. It would also be a new experience for me. Another thing I am looking forward to, is the student council. I joined it because it was another new experience for me. I want to get more involved in the school by helping out with decisions and voicing the opinions of the students here."

Abdelkader: "How is the school culture/class environment for you at RSA?"

Abdulmalek: "I like the energy of the students in RSA. They are all friendly toward other people. I feel that it is fun to be around them. In general, I feel like I am at home inside the school. I sometimes look forward to going to school because of it. In the classes, it is also more relaxed. Sometimes I can just talk with the teachers to get to know them better."

## NFL Mid Year Review

By: Khaled Musbeh, 11th



With a new school year, comes the start of a new NFL season. The season kicked off nearly many weeks ago, and we are already more than halfway through. We have some surprises this season. I can say, for sure, that some teams have you quite befuddled right now, and some have you asking what went wrong. Let us take a look at the top teams from each conference and discuss some sleeper teams. Starting in the NFC, the top team, which is the only undefeated team in the entire league, is The Philadelphia Eagles. All I can say is, wow, this team surprised me. Jalen Hurts is showing his true talent and why he was a top-rated quarterback from Alabama. He now has AJ Brown, Devonta Smith, and Miles Sanders on his team. The Eagles also have one of the best defenses in the league. This team is looking outstanding and is most certainly a contender. The second-best team in the NFC is The New York Giants. After all the waiting, the Giants are finally starting the season with a winning record, and they aren't stopping. Currently, the Giants are 8-5-1, and have an easy schedule. Daniel Jones is playing at a top QB level, and Saquon Barkley is back and better than ever. These two teams are also in the same division, which is the NFC East. NFC East is looking more like the NFC Beast. Moving on to the AFC, the top team in this conference is the Buffalo Bills. The Buffalo Bills are also sitting at 6-1. This was no surprise, as the bills have weapons. Josh Allen is playing at MVP Level while he has Gabe Davis and Stephon Diggs to help him out. The second-best AFC team is the Kansas City Chiefs.

This also was no surprise, as it seems we are getting a repeat of last year's AFC. Patrick Mahomes continues to perform exceptionally even after losing Tyreek Hill. The Chiefs are still Superbowl contenders. Now, for my picks: Winning the NFC, I have the Philadelphia Eagles. The Eagles have an easy schedule, and I won't be surprised if they go undefeated. For the AFC, I have The New York Jets. Yes, you read that correctly. I have the Jets winning the AFC, even though they are not first in the standings currently. I believe the Jets have a skillful, youthful team and can perform better than the Bills and Chiefs. I am excited to see the comparison of my predictions and the actual outcomes.

## Student Council Elections

By: Ayah Amer, 10th



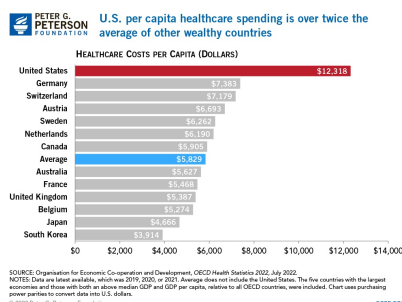
In recent days, the prominent Election Day came around, and Rising Star Academy decided to start a student council. This decision will not only benefit the student body, but the teachers as well. To go in-depth about the student council, it is an organization run by a group of elected students under adult supervision. The student council serves as the student body's voice, which allows the communication between the student body and the teachers to run smoother and more efficiently. Another purpose of the student council is to organize exciting school events and activities. This will boost school spirit in students, the teachers, and community. Every student had the opportunity to elect himself/herself or another classmate to represent their class and advocate for the issues they have. Students can now converse with their class representatives about any opinions, passions, or predicaments. It was warranted for the elected representatives to fall under certain requirements to win. Firstly, the student had to maintain a good average grade point. Secondly, the student must have good behavior, meaning no detentions or suspensions, and be responsible.

## America's Broken HealthCare System

By: Kawther Elfar, 11th

Why is America's HealthCare System so dysfunctional? Is it putting in profits over people? Let us first look at other countries and how different their healthcare is compared to the United States. We have people in Germany spending an average of \$7,383, people in Switzerland spending \$7,179, and people in Australia spending \$6,693. Now, you might be wondering, "how much could American citizens be spending?" We are spending a whopping \$12,318 on healthcare. The complicated healthcare system in the U.S. is primarily cost-driven by the market. Hospital care accounts for 31% of the country's healthcare costs, and high, unregulated prescription drug costs. Healthcare worker incomes are greater in America than in any other Western countries. The price of an individual is further increased by administrative rules, governing, billing, and coding.

The cost of healthcare in the United States is affected by a wide range of factors, and even as salaries have increased, net pay has remained the same. There is almost a fourfold difference in the cost of pharmaceutical drugs between American citizens and citizens of other developed countries. Unlike other countries, where prices are partially controlled by governments, the U.S. prices are determined by the market. People argue that the healthcare issue started with Obamacare, but even now with Congress trying to change it, the citizens of America still are not satisfied. Instead, healthcare, in general, should be more affordable and should not be so difficult to access for families living in their own country.



Thirdly, the student must maintain good attendance. Finally, the student must be an exemplary Muslim role model to represent our student body along with our Muslim community. Luckily, the election results have been tallied up and were opportunely announced on Election Day. The victors include:

**12th Grade:** Amira Siyam

**11th Grade:** Dulce Haddabah and Khaled Musabeh

**10th Grade:** Marib Saeed

**9th Grade:** Naser Kayed and Urooj Kamran

**8th Grade:** Halla Ateeli and Abulmalek Abdullallah

**7th Grade:** Louai Asouti and Malaak Hamoui

**6th Grade:** Ayah Musbeh

**5th Grade:** Zara Russel and Musabeh Musabeh

**4th Grade:** Muhammad Alkhatib and Rayann Musabeh

I congratulate all the new class representatives and hope we have a smooth communication between the student body and teachers.

## Apple Picking Trip

By: Musabeh Musabeh, 11th

The annual apple picking trip that Rising Star Academy organizes is always filled with fun activities to enjoy with your classmates. Every year students anticipate the trip because they know it never disappoints. Students always have fun hiking up the hill when visiting the farm. The sights we see are incredible and the apples we pick taste really good. After eating lunch, I had so much fun playing football in the field. It feels so nostalgic going apple picking every year because it is packed with so much excitement for everyone to enjoy and remember.

The donuts that the school provides us with are also one of the many delights we get to enjoy on the trip. The bus rides going there and coming back are one of my favorite parts of the whole field trip. We laugh and talk about the trip and the memories we make from them. Going on the trip with my friends makes the experience a million times better. Rising Star Academy continues to do a great job organizing these trips. I look forward to many more apple picking trips in the future.



## Muslims Around the World

By: Nusayba Ouhemmi, 9th

It all started with Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. He received the revelation from Allah, sent through Angel Gabriel, and began preaching Islam in Mecca, modern-day Saudi Arabia. Prophet Muhammad then migrated to Madinah and spread the message of Islam there. Islam spread through the Arabian Peninsula, India, Northern Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia. This was about 1,400 years ago! Now, Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world. The Islamic community, or the Ummah, makes up most of the population in 49 different countries around the globe. Now, countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, India, and Algeria have a great population of Muslims. There are many Muslims that live in different places, but we are all part of the Muslim Ummah and Islamic community; some Muslims have fewer rights than others, depending on the country they are in. For example, women living in France are not allowed to wear niqabs, or full-face veils, in public places. There is also a ban on girls under the age of 18 wearing the hijab as well. Another example of the oppression of Muslims in foreign countries, are the Muslims living in Xinjiang, China, having to deal with genocide. Insha'Allah, one day every Muslim will be free from the temporary hardships of this world.



## Cleanliness and Purity is a Part of Our Faith

By: Amira Siyam, 12th

Earning the approval of our Creator is the most significant component and purpose of our lives as Muslims. We often will go above and beyond to achieve this, and while we should certainly be doing this, it is crucial that we consider the forgotten yet major factors that make up our faith such as maintaining proper hygiene and cleanliness. Muslims are obliged to maintain clean bodies by regularly bathing, performing proper Wudu, frequently washing their clothes, as well as keeping their homes and surroundings neat and tidy. Every Muslim is required to follow these practices as it is for their benefit. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is revealed to have said in a Hadith that, "Allah (SWT) is pure and only accepts purity (that a human may achieve)" (Hadith 1015). This indicates that the cleanliness and purification of our bodies prioritize the greatest value among the fundamental virtues.

Purification of the heart and soul is another command that we must implement into our lives, as this is what will benefit and save us in the Hereafter. Since the initial stages of the revelation in Makkah, the command to purify our hearts from sin has been essential Islamic teaching. Allah (SWT) says in the Quran: "A day when there will be no benefit in wealth or children, but only in he who comes to Allah with a pure heart" (Quran, 26:88-89). With this understanding of how our success in the hereafter depends on the purification of our hearts and souls in this life, we should always prioritize cleansing our hearts of worldly sins including selfishness, dishonesty, jealousy, and arrogance. Though we are only humans and will never be able to achieve that level of perfection, we must recognize that Allah (SWT) does not demand perfection; rather, He acknowledges effort and recognizes that genuine supplications, prayers, and acts of kindness towards others can be performed to achieve purification that will be included when He judges us on the Day of Judgement, insha'Allah.



## Should We Learn About Our Mental Health?

By: Aseel Saadah, 10th

Mental Health is what a person goes through emotionally, physically, and socially. It can affect how a person feels and thinks, leading to affect behavior. Mental problems is a result of trauma, child abuse, and it may even be genetics. Mental Health Should Be implemented into our classrooms. Why do we not take classes about mental health in school when so many people struggle with it? I ask myself this question every single day. Do any of you reading this article know anything about mental health? You might say that depression or anxiety are mental health disorders but do you really know anything about these illnesses? Do you know what people with mental illness go through or what they face in their lives? Probably not.

According to The World Health Organization, globally 1 in 7 10-19 year olds suffer from a mental disorder accounting for 13% of diseases in this age group. As we know, teenagers are more vulnerable to mental health problems than any other age group because of the physical and emotional changes that they go through. I'm pretty sure that we have all had mental breakdowns or episodes. One time, in Arabic class, I was asked to write something on the board. Walking up to the board, I felt very heavy, like a rock was being put on top of me and my lungs were closing in. Then, I started to hyperventilate. I walked out and my teacher followed me. I needed to walk out because of the embarrassment I was feeling. I felt all eyes of judgment staring me down. I did not want to go back into my class because I felt like I was being judged. I am sure that there are a lot of students that are going through struggles and mental health; however, students are afraid to express their feelings and struggles without being judged and labeled. Most people do not seek help because they do not want to be labeled.

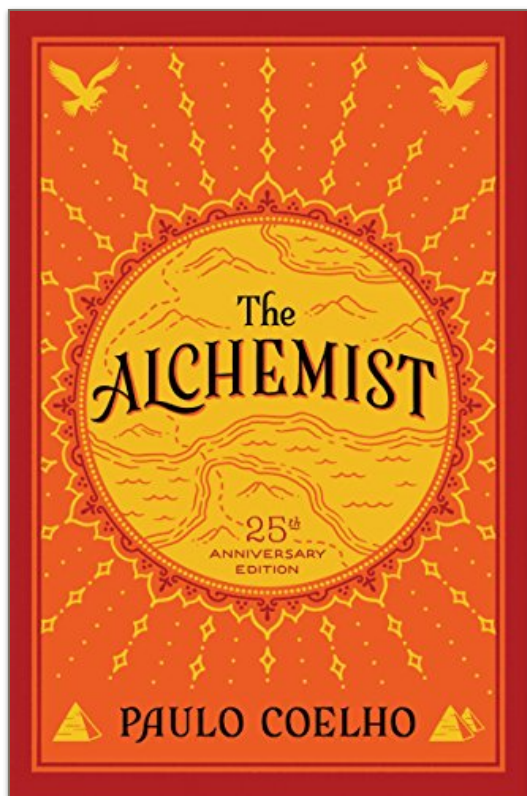
In my experience, when talking about my mental health problems, and how I go to therapy for it, I always had people telling me was nothing wrong with me.

Some would say it was because I was not close to God. Others would tell me that I was being dramatic and just trying to seek attention. Deep down, I know that none of that is true, but it still saddens me. If they understood exactly what I was going through, or had some knowledge about mental health, would they have said that? That is why if people took classes about these mental struggles, then maybe I would not have gotten these responses. Maybe people will not be so ignorant and closed-minded. We need to stop the neglectful attitude towards mental health and people seeking help.

Now, I want you to take a few minutes and imagine having a friend, someone who you think is happy but in reality is not. They come to you and tell you about their problems or how they are feeling. What do you do then? If we take mental health classes we won't have to sit and think about what we will do in these situations. We will know how to help them, take action, and Insha'allah help save a life.

Teens need to be educated and made aware of mental health to respond well to a friend or classmate in distress. As a friend and a classmate, I would like to be educated on how to act and when to act toward these behaviors. As someone who is struggling with mental health, I would like my friends and classmates to be educated on how to respond to my struggle. So, let us normalize mental health. It is okay to feel not okay, but it is not okay to label, and ignore. We need students to show empathy and care towards one another. We need to step in and show that we care without being judgmental. I am writing this to share my experience and my struggles, and to encourage others to do the same. Opening up is the first step in accepting mental health. I want students to have the courage to open up and ask for help.






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**“Don't give in to your fears. If you do, you won't be able to talk to your heart.”**

- Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist

## Salma's Book Reviews

Book: The Alchemist

Genre: Novel, Fiction, Adventure, Drama, and Fantasy

Author: Paulo Coelho

Interest Level: Grades 9-12

Reading Level: Grades 7+

The story is set in ancient Andalusia, Spain's countryside. The plot revolves around a young boy named Santiago, who yearns for more. He, like many of us, has unspoken desires and ambitions that he is hesitant to pursue, whether because of his comfort zone's familiarity or his fear of the unknown. In either case, the sensation is one to which we can all relate. Santiago, the youngster, has grandiose visions of traveling the country and desert (something considered utterly dangerous and foolish at that time). He can not ignore his dreams any longer and decides to see The Great Pyramids for himself. This young adventurous soul is willing to go to extreme lengths to make his goals a reality, and along the way, he encounters an alchemist, an experience that will permanently change his life.

This is an incredible work of fiction about dreams, magic, and fate. This book instills in us the significance of self-assurance, reflection, facing obstacles, pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone, and the inexplicable value of realizing your full potential. This book will make you think about your own aims and desires, and will make you wonder why you confine yourself to cages of comfort and familiarity when you have the ability to achieve great things. The book is simple and quick to read, yet it will stick with you for a long time. Without a question, this is a book that everyone should read and then pass on to others.