

Author Study - Onjali Q. Raúf



Born: February 1981

Raúf is of Bangladeshi heritage. Her work is informed in part by her experiences of racism in childhood. She often found herself looking in books and wondering where the characters were that looked like her. This inspired her to want to write. In her spare time, she delivers emergency aid convoys for refugee families surviving in Calais and Dunkirk.

The Boy at the Back of the Class

Onjali Q. Raúf is the best-selling author of *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, a touching but funny book about a young refugee boy, Ahmet, and the friendships he builds at his new school.

This book was published in 2018 and it was a Sunday Times Bestseller, winner of the 2019 Blue Peter was the Book Award, overall winner of the Waterstones Children's Book Prize was 2019, and nominated for the Carnegie Medal Children's Book Award. In the same year she was also shortlisted for the Jhalak Prize for Book of the Year by a Writer of Colour and for breakthrough author in the BAMB (Books Are My Bag) Readers' Awards.

The Star Outside My Window

Onjali's latest book *The Star Outside My Window*, about 10-year-old Aniyah who finds herself living in foster care after her mother disappears

Q&A with Onjali

(Taken from <https://www.worldbookday.com/2019/10/meet-onjali-rauf/>)

What was your favourite book as a child?

I have about fifty thousand favourite books (I counted!). But one that stands out as making me believe the impossible was *Matilda*. I spent hours locked in my room trying to move a pencil with my eyes. Hence the glasses!

If you could be a famous book character, who would it be?

Willy Wonka. Simply because the man owns a chocolate factory – and there can *never* be anything wrong with owning a chocolate factory.

Why do you think sharing stories is so important?

Because I cannot bear to imagine a world where the real world and my very small corner of it is all there is. Stories in whatever form – a book, a song, a piece of art – open up worlds, experiences, histories and imaginings we might never otherwise access. It's so crucial we have the capacity to travel as far as we can in our minds and then farther still. It's one of the most beautiful things about the human brain – the ability to imagine. Stories keep that ability alive.

