



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary
(ages 11+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Technologies, Languages
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Discussing new experiences and challenges
- Exploring a school setting
- Examining different cultures
- Understanding common teenage issues
- Learning about invention and robotics

THEMES

- Multiculturalism, differences, social stereotypes, religious beliefs, opportunities, bullying, power, helping others, language, feelings, persistence, forgiveness, courage, humour

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia, Jean Yates and Yassmin Abdel-Magied

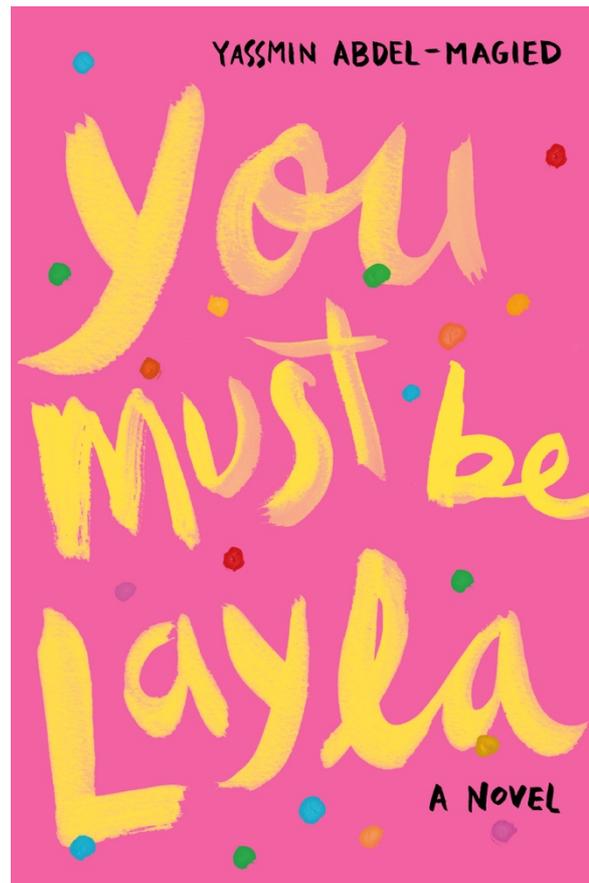
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You Must Be Layla Yassmin Abdel-Magied

PLOT SUMMARY

With her long skirt and headscarf Layla certainly stands out at her new high school. Everyone thinks they know her, just from a glance. But do they? And does Layla really know herself?

Layla's mind goes a million miles a minute, so does her mouth – unfortunately her better judgement can take a while to catch up! Although she believes she was justified for doing what she did, a suspension certainly isn't the way she would have wished to begin her time at her fancy new high school. Despite the setback, Layla's determined to show everyone that she does deserve her scholarship and sets her sights on winning a big invention competition. But where to begin?

Looking outside and in, Layla will need to come to terms with who she is and who she wants to be if she has any chance of succeeding.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yassmin Abdel-Magied is a Sudanese-born Australian mechanical engineer, writer and social advocate.

Yassmin worked on oil and gas rigs around Australia for almost half a decade before becoming a full-time writer and broadcaster. She published her debut memoir, *Yassmin's Story*, at age 24, then became the presenter of *Australia Wide*, a national weekly current-affairs show on the ABC and *Motor Mouth*, a podcast on becoming an F1 driver. After hosting the documentary, *The Truth About Racism*, she created *Hijabistas* for the ABC, a series looking at the modest fashion scene in Australia. Her writing has appeared in publications like *Teen Vogue*, London's *Evening Standard*, the *Guardian* and numerous anthologies.

With over a decade's experience in non-profit governance, Yassmin founded her first organisation, Youth Without Borders, at the age of 16. She has since served on numerous boards and councils, including the Council of Australian-Arab Relations and ChildFund, and also serves as the Gender Ambassador for the Inter-American Development Bank.

Yassmin has been awarded numerous awards nationally and internationally for her advocacy, including the 2018 Young Voltaire Award for Free Speech and Queensland Young Australian of the Year in 2015. In 2017, Yassmin created Mumtaza, dedicated to the empowerment of women of colour, and most recently founded Kuwa, a platform tackling cultural change around sexual harassment in workplaces.

Yassmin has delivered keynotes in over 20 countries on unconscious bias and leadership. Her TED talk, *What Does My Headscarf Mean to You?*, has been viewed over two million times and was chosen as one of TED's top ten ideas of 2015. Yassmin is currently based in London.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

I loved young adult fiction growing up. I read – nay, inhaled – every single book in the YA section at our local library, put my name down on the waitlist for new editions of almost every fantasy series and dreamt of being one of the many characters I admired. I never really saw myself reflected in these stories though. I stretched and strained my empathy muscles, learning to understand what it was like being a 13-year-old Aussie skater boy, or a young American cheerleader, but there were certainly no Muslim or Sudanese characters in sight. *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah was my first taste, at the age of 15 or 16, and I couldn't believe my luck. It was truly life changing, seeing someone who resembled me on a book cover. But since then – and that was almost a decade ago – there have been too few stories published for young people with different experiences of the world, and the

power of representation is unparalleled. That's why I wrote *You Must Be Layla* – to give voice to a type of experience and character we don't see or hear enough of. I hope you enjoy the story as much as I loved writing it!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Where is Sudan?
2. Why might people be forced to move from Sudan to Australia?
3. What challenges would they face in moving here?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Multiculturalism

Discussion questions

1. Australia is often described as a multicultural country. Do you agree that it is?
2. What does true multiculturalism look like?
3. Do you think people from overseas should be allowed to live in Australia? What are the benefits? What are the disadvantages?
4. What challenges does a nation face if its people are from many different cultures?
5. Should people be forced to assimilate and give up their original cultural beliefs and practices if they want to live in Australia?
6. What would be the advantages and the disadvantages of enforcing this?
7. 'You're not even Australian. Why don't you go back to where you came from?'

With that, Layla snapped. Like hell this kid was going to tell her that she wasn't Australian.

'Oi! I am Australian, you fool! Why don't you go back to where YOU came from, you convict! Why don't you go back to England? Oh yeah, they sent you away – they wouldn't want you back anyway!' (Ch 4)

What is the irony in white Australians believing that migrant cultures don't belong here?

8. How many generations of a family have to have been born here for someone to be regarded as being Australian?
9. Layla says that she is not seen as being Australian, but that when she went back to Sudan people would say she's not Sudanese either Ch 5. Why would people not see her as being Sudanese? How might this lack of belonging in either culture affect migrants?



10. Read Layla's description of the Islamic School she attended in Brisbane (Ch 2). Why would the different migrant groups have spent so much time together?
11. What is the importance of community groups for migrants?
12. Is it good or bad to have large numbers of migrant children attending the same school?
13. What academic needs do they have that can best be met in these schools?
14. What academic limitations might these schools have?
15. Layla is surprised by how multicultural her new school is.

Layla took in the sight before her. She'd thought MMGS was going to be super white. The group they were walking to wasn't quite what she'd expected: they were almost as mixed-looking as the kids from ISB! That was kinda cool. Maybe she wouldn't feel so out of place here after all. (Ch 4)

What is the difference between the migrant families here and those at the Islamic school?

16. What racist attitudes can you identify in the novel?
17. What assumption do some of the students at MMGS make about all Muslims?
'You're like one of those terrorists that are always yelling "durka durka" on the news, aren't you?' (Ch 4)
18. What are the dangers of judging people based on their religion or the colour of their skin?
19. What are the dangers of any one race believing itself superior to others?
20. Why do people readily follow racist attitudes rather than forming their own?
21. How might racist attitudes bring out the worst behaviour in those they are aimed at? (e.g. think of events such as the 2005 Cronulla Riots).

Activities

1. Research statistics to find out where Australia's migrant population comes from.
2. Read some migrants' stories at <https://immigrationplace.com.au/immigration-stories/>
3. What common challenges did these migrants face? Do you think we do enough to help our migrant population? What could we as a society do to help them fit in to society more readily?

4. As a concerned member of the public, write a letter to the editor expressing your concerns over how difficult we make it for migrants to fit into our community.

Differences

Discussion questions

1. As you read, make a list of the things we learn about Layla's life: the size of her family, the foods they eat, the way they dress etc.
2. Create a Venn diagram that compares Layla's life to yours.
3. Are any of the differences in your lifestyles significant?
4. In what ways can these differences be seen to add to our lives?

Activities

1. Choose another student in the class whom you believe has the same ethnic background as you. Talk to this person about your way of life. Make a Venn diagram that compares your life to theirs. Do you have the same number of children in your families? Do your parents drive the same cars? Do both families eat at the dinner table? Do you eat the same food? Do you have the same traditions at Easter/Christmas/birthdays?
2. What does this suggest about why some people are afraid of those who live differently?

Social stereotypes

Discussion questions

1. Society often assigns people to social stereotypes. What stereotypical groups can you identify at your school?
2. What are the problems with assigning people to stereotypes? How might this affect our relationships with people and our understanding of them as individuals?
3. Make a list of the stereotypes you can identify in this novel.
4. Layla tells Ethan, *'Life is easy for people like you.'* (Ch 12). What assumption is she making?
5. How can Layla be seen to stereotype others just as they stereotype her?
6. Layla says: *She had never really thought she would make friends she trusted who weren't Muslim, not until she met Adam anyway.* (Ch 13). Why might she expect this? If this were the case, how would it help to reinforce stereotypes and segregation?



7. Layla was self-conscious about her body shape sometimes, especially since her bottom was much bigger than the shape of the other girls at school. She hated the fact that she didn't look like the girls on Instagram (Ch 14).

How does the media reinforce certain stereotypes? Which social groups are rarely depicted in the media? How would it feel to never see advertisements or television shows with people who look like you?

Activity

1. Write a letter to the editor arguing for a wider variety of social groups to be represented in the media.

Religious beliefs

Discussion questions

1. What customs and behaviours do Layla and her family practice that might be seen as being 'different'?
2. What is a hijab?
3. Layla's mother says that Layla chose to wear a hijab. This suggests that she did not have to. Why might she choose to wear one even though it makes her different from others?
4. What is meant by the term *halal*?
5. Why is Layla unsure if rubbing Ethans's back is *halal*?
6. Do you think people should be allowed to follow their own religious beliefs if they move countries?
7. Are there any dangers in forcing people to let go of their religious beliefs and adopt new ones?
8. Why do we judge others by their beliefs?
9. How do prayer and religion help Layla to keep her feelings under control?

Activities

1. Research how many religions people identify with in Australia. What do you know about each of these religions? Is your knowledge based on facts and research, or on things you have heard?
2. What are the dangers of not understanding each of these religions and yet still judging people for their beliefs?

Opportunities

Discussion questions

1. Even though Australia provides education for all young people, different schools offer students different opportunities. How are the Islamic School

and Mary Maxmillion Grammar School shown to be totally different environments?

2. What opportunities does Layla want that Mary Maxmillion Grammar School offers?
3. How might a person be shaped by the opportunities he or she has in life? (For example, you may be a world-class rower, but if you have not had the opportunity to take up rowing, how would you ever know?)
4. Is it possible to make our own opportunities?
5. Why does Mr Cox tell Layla that she is brave to change schools (Ch 2)? What struggles do you predict she will have at her new school?
6. Australia is often said to be a land of equality where everyone has the same opportunities. What aspects of our lives might support this statement? What aspects might challenge it?
7. Parents often want their children to have more and better opportunities than they had. Why might this be the case?
8. What have your parents done to increase the opportunities you have in life? What have you done to increase your opportunities?

Bullying

Discussion questions

1. Why do children often bully others?
2. Why is Layla surprised that Peter's father is also a bully? Do we expect adults to bully?
3. What does it mean to be a bully?
4. In what way is Pete's behaviour towards Layla bullying?
5. What type of people often bully others?
6. What might motivate someone to bully others?
7. What might this suggest about possible ways to stop bullying?
8. Is it fair to take your emotions and frustrations out on others?
9. Layla's brother, Ozzie, tells her '*They're bullies. You just have to be smarter than them. You're a smart kid, so work out how to outsmart them rather than outfight them.*' (Ch 6) Do you agree that this is the best way to deal with bullies? Why?

Power

Discussion questions

1. There are a number of different examples of power in this novel. Consider the power that certain people hold and the effect this power has on others.



Character	Power	Impact on others

2. How do people gain power?
3. How should power be used?
4. Power does not always have to be exerted in a negative way. Consider all of the people that Layla and her parents admire for fighting for justice.
 - the Prophet Mohammed (SAW)
 - Nelson Mandela
 - Muhammad Ali
 - Maya Angelou

Research each one to see what he or she achieved and the methods used.

5. What does this suggest about the best ways to use power to make a difference?
6. Re-read the story of the Prophet Mohammed (SAW) that Layla tells in Ch 6. What is the message in this story?
7. What aspects of the behaviours demonstrated by these heroes does Layla adopt?
8. What other messages can be learned from these people.
9. Who are your heroes? What changes did these people create and how did they do it?

Helping others

Discussion questions

1. Can you help people if they don't want to be helped?
2. Can you help others without asking them what they want or need?

Like, when she watched the news and the politicians were talking about African gangs. Everyone on the TV had an opinion on Africans, but nobody ever asked any other African people or the kids themselves why they didn't have a place to hang out or what they wanted to do. (Ch 8)

What does this reveal about the people trying to 'help'?

3. What are the dangers of deciding what would be helpful without talking to the people concerned?
4. Consider the following story:

A group of engineers visited a poor African village. They watched the women walk many miles to a river to collect drinking water and to wash their clothes. Then they saw them walk back from the river carrying heavy loads of water.

The men decided to help this community by building a well so that the women would not have to walk for miles. So, without asking the women what they wanted, they went ahead and built the well.

A few months later the men came back to the village, only to discover that the women were still walking to the river each day rather than drawing water from the well. When they asked what was wrong with the well, they were told that nothing was wrong with it, but that the women liked the opportunity to gather together at the river to wash clothes and gossip outside of the earshot of the men in the village.

What might this story suggest about the ways we should and should not help others?

Language

Discussion questions

1. As you read, make a list of all the non-English words used in the novel. Why do you think numbers sometimes appear in Arabic words? Read the note at the beginning of the glossary on this.
2. What is the effect of using Sudanese-Arabic words rather than substituting English words?
3. Consider the different usages of language in the novel, e.g.
 - Layla's parents can communicate with looks rather than language. *SIGH. She knew they were having a secret, silent adult understanding she couldn't access, like sending text messages to each other's brain using some adult-only wifi. (Ch 2)*
 - The kids at school use slang. *Layla had no idea what everyone was talking about, but she knew she'd figure it out. (Ch 3)*
 - Layla uses curse words that only a grandmother would use. What sort of words are these? Why might it be surprising that grandmothers would have their own curse words? Why do curse words seem to get stronger in each successive generation?
4. What does it suggest about our society that it can include all of these different languages?
5. What other 'languages' can you identify in the novel?
6. What different languages can you identify in your own social circles?
7. In what way can language be both inclusive and exclusive?



8. How can words affect our judgements?
9. How can words give people power over others?

Feelings

Discussion questions

1. Layla talks about the dangers of bottling up your feelings (Ch 16). What are the dangers of keeping your feelings to yourself?
2. Why might boys be more at risk from this than girls?
3. Why might boys hide their feelings more than girls?
4. *Ethan's voice, still husky from crying, was embarrassed. 'Sorry for making a scene. Sorry for crying. Sorry for being so weak, I suppose. Boys aren't supposed to cry and all that.'* (Ch 16). Why does society enforce the idea that boys are not supposed to cry? Why does Ethan see revealing his feelings as a form of weakness?
5. Does our society need to change the way we regard the idea of expressing your feelings?
6. Layla's experiment was to create a Huggy Bear. What are the benefits of giving and receiving hugs?
7. *'You don't get it. Your family came here to cheer you on, and they will always support you. My world is different. You don't realise that yours is a kind of privilege I will never feel.'* (Ch 21). How does Peter's father make him feel?
8. Ozzie refuses to feel sorry for Peter, *'Because at the end of the day, guys like him, even if they don't get love from their dads, they can still get a job. They can still afford nice cars and nice houses and won't get yelled at in the street. I can't even get a part-time job in a cafe. So, I'm sorry for Peter that he fights with his dad, but that is no excuse, not in my book.'* (Ch 21). Do you agree with him that Peter's privileged position means that Layla shouldn't feel sorry for him?
9. What are the dangers of Ozzie's attitude?

Activities

1. Do some research as Layla did on the dangers of hiding your feelings.
2. Create a poster or film campaign that encourages people in your school community to open up and share their thoughts and feelings.
3. Research RUOK? day and consider what you could do as a class to help people talk about their feelings more.

Persistence

Discussion questions

1. Often when we are faced with difficulties, it is tempting to just give up and walk away. What is meant by the term persistence?
2. Mr Gilvarry tells Layla, *'Just because this one didn't work out doesn't mean you are a failure. It's just part of the process of learning. It would be too easy if everything worked out from the beginning, wouldn't it? ... failures make the story more interesting!'* (Ch11). Do you agree with this statement? In what ways do we learn more from our failures than from our success?
3. At many times in the novel, Layla is faced with challenges that she has to overcome. Make a list of her challenges and the ways she manages to overcome them.
4. What qualities or attributes do you need in order to persist at things?

Activity

1. Write a short narrative about a time when you faced challenges and wanted to give up, but managed to stay persistent and achieve your goal.

Forgiveness

Discussion questions

1. *But Ms Taylor's words rang in her head: forgiveness liberates the soul.* (Ch 10). What does this mean?
2. What does it mean to forgive someone?
3. What do you have to do in order to forgive?
4. Is it fair to expect those we have treated badly to just forgive us and move on?
5. Ozzie tells Layla, *'If they want us to forgive, they should stop talking about us in the news like we are all terrorists, or gang members . . . If they want forgiveness, they can start actually accepting us, hiring us, rather than wondering why we're all unemployed!'* (Ch 11).

Is it fair to expect people to forgive you for your actions if you don't change the way you treat them?

6. Why does Peter accept Layla's apology and allow her into his group? (Ch 20) Is this really forgiveness?
7. Why is it hard to forgive others?
8. What are the dangers with not forgiving and holding a grudge?



Courage

Discussion questions

1. Layla asks is it really brave to be yourself (Ch 2)? While we might think the answer is no, in what ways does it take courage to be yourself?
2. What types of courage are shown throughout the novel?
3. Why does it take courage to tell others how you are feeling?
4. Layla wonders, *Would these boys still like her if they knew she was really a tree-climbing bejeweller, or that she went to mosque all the time, or that she had never been on a holiday?* (Ch 10)

Why do many of us fear how people might judge us if they know what we are really like? What does this suggest about the person we choose to reveal to the world?

5. Why would Ethan have needed courage to be prepared to tell others his secret?
6. What happens to people who lack the courage to be themselves?
7. Why does Layla adopt the mantra 'channel the *jamel*' (Ch 8)? What positive characteristics would this give her?

Activities

1. Each student is to take a paper sandwich bag. On the outside of the bag they are to write or stick words, phrases and images about their own lives that they are happy for everyone to know. On the inside of the bag, they are to put words, images and phrases that they keep hidden, or reveal only to those closest to them. At the end of the exercise ask students to consider if they are surprised by how much they hide. Why are they afraid to reveal all of these elements to others? What does that suggest about people?
2. Given the amount of information we choose to hide, what does that suggest about how well we know other people?
3. What implications does this have for the type of assumptions we make about other people?

Humour

Discussion questions

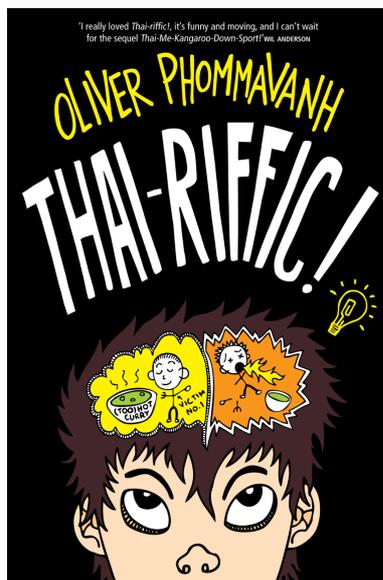
1. How does Layla use humour to help her in awkward situations?
2. How does humour make Layla feel?

For one moment though, Layla remembered the feeling of having everyone in the class laugh at her jokes. Man, being funny felt good. (Ch 4)

3. When successful comedians are interviewed, it is often revealed that they had very difficult or unhappy childhoods. Why might they have this as a common background experience?
4. How can humour be seen to be an equaliser?
5. What communication problems might occur when using humour? How does it often land Layla in trouble?
6. How can the use of humour influence the way others see you?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

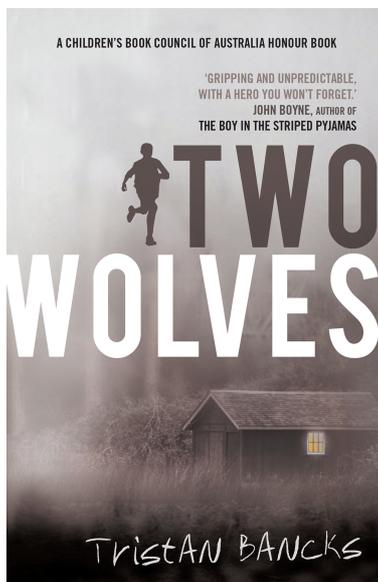


Thai-Riffic
by Oliver Phommavanh

Why this story? Read it as another example of multicultural Australia.

Albert (Lengy) Lengviriyakul, is fed up with being Thai. His parents own a Thai restaurant with the cheesy name of Thai-riffic! and Lengy is sick of being his father's curry guinea pig, longing to just eat pizza! At school he is a bit of a troublemaker, going to any lengths to hide his background. But when his best friend decides to become Thai for a day for a school project, Lengy stubbornly comes to the realisation that there may just be some pretty cool things about his culture.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



Two Wolves
by Tristan Bancks

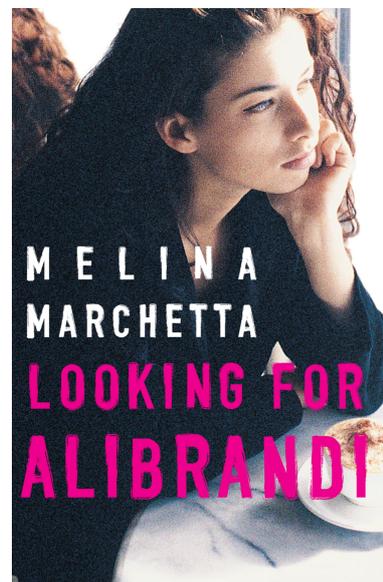
Why this story? Read it as another example of a book that explores courage, forgiveness and moral conflicts.

One afternoon, police officers show up at Ben Silver's front door. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive home. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they're going on a holiday. But are they?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realise that his parents are in trouble. Ben's always dreamt of becoming a detective – his dad even calls him 'Cop'. Now Ben gathers evidence and tries to uncover what his parents have done.

The problem is, if he figures it out, what does he do? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



Looking For Alibrandi
by Melina Marchetta

Why this story? Read it as another example of multicultural Australia and self-discovery.

Melina Marchetta's stunning debut novel *Looking for Alibrandi* is one girl's story of her final year at school, a year she sets herself free. Josephine Alibrandi is seventeen and in her final year at a wealthy girls' school. This is the year she meets her father, the year she falls in love, the year she searches for Alibrandi and finds the real truth about her family – and the identity she has been searching for.

A moving and revealing book, unusual for its honesty and its insight into the life of a young person on the brink of adulthood. Multi-award-winning, a bestseller and made into an award-winning feature film, *Looking for Alibrandi* has become a modern classic.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
You Must Be Layla	Yassmin Abdel-Magied	9780143788515	6+	\$16.99		
Yassmin's Story	Yassmin Abdel-Magied	9780857986177	10+	\$22.99		
TOTAL						

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