

TEACHERS' NOTES

Good Muslim Boy

By Osamah Sami



hardie grant books

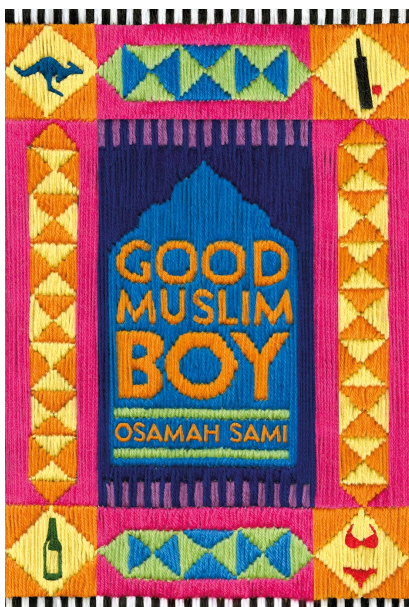
A READER'S INTRODUCTION

Judges Comments (NSW Premier's Literary Awards, 2016)

"This is an often hilarious, equally moving, and always entertaining memoir of trying to find your place in the world — from the martyr-strewn graveyards of the Iran-Iraq border to the peaceful streets of suburban Melbourne. *Good Muslim Boy* is an enlightening and affectionate account of the struggles many new Australians face in balancing the demands of the society they left behind and those of their new home. Ostracised as Iraqi Arab refugees in Persian Iran at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, Osamah Sami's family, led by his wise, compassionate father, arrive in a country as alien to them as Iran must be to many Australians. With humour and grit, they adjust to their new home with the same spirit and courage that helped them survive the post-revolutionary theocracy.

A gripping tale of exile and return, *Good Muslim Boy* alternates between Sami's journey to Australia and to adulthood, and the often harrowing and heartbreaking account of Sami's last trip to Iran with his father. It is a powerful saga about discovering the true meaning of home. Sami deftly uses humour and a light, compassionate touch in this deeply affecting and thoughtful memoir.

Constantly subverting stereotypes and confounding expectations, Sami is a master of comic writing, particularly in the candid depictions of his adolescent misadventures and the culture shocks he later experiences in his new homeland. Equally, Sami does not shy from describing the horrors of war and death, and he does so with raw and sometimes unflinching honesty. An inspiring account of survival, *Good Muslim Boy* is a beautifully written memoir that offers a powerful and hopeful message of love, understanding and universal humanity."





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Osamah Sami was born in war-torn Iran to Iraqi parents and escaped to Australia with his family when he was a teen. His experiences left him a confused soul. His choice to forge a career as an artist (actor–writer–comedian) has caused his loved ones much anxiety.

As a writer, he has completed scripts for three films, including *Ali's Wedding** – a romantic comedy based on his life (co-written with Andrew Knight), *Be Less Beautiful*, a drama filming in 2017, and *when the birds aren't free to be buried*, a feature animation in development based in part on his memoir.). He has also written a number of plays and poetry; created an eight episode sitcom *Baghdad to the Burbs*; and co-created the comedy web series *2 Refugees & a Blonde*. He also writes social commentary for various print and online publications, including Fairfax, Mamamia, Right Now and SBS.

His memoir, **Good Muslim Boy** was highly commended in the 2016 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and won the 2016 Multicultural Award in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Osamah is a Green Room Award nominee for Best Lead Actor for his role in the Melbourne Theatre Company play *I Call My Brothers*.

He has performed for Belvoir St., Big West, La Mama, Melbourne Theatre Company, Theatre@Risk, and over two dozen other independent shows including *Tales of a City by The Sea*. Osamah also played the title role in *Saddam the Musical*, which got him deported from the U.S., having been mistaken for a terrorist.

On screen, he has played other lead roles in films, *Saved* (directed by Tony Ayres) opposite Claudia Karvan and in Dee McLachlan's award winning *10 Terrorists!* and the expansive international tele-movie *Journey*. He has also appeared in *Kick*, *City Homicide*, *East West 101*, *Sea Patrol*, *Rush*, *Jack Irish*. Contrary to popular belief, he has played a terrorist only twice.

Osamah is listed as a 'notable Australian Muslim' by the Commonwealth of Australia. He is currently investigating how this could have occurred. He is also working on being a better father to his two beautiful daughters.

* Matchbox Pictures will release the feature film, *Ali's Wedding*, starring Osamah in late 2016.



AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM AREAS

The following codes (have been created to link to the Australian Curriculum as follows:

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM AREA/STRAND/MODE/GENERAL CAPABILITIES/ CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES e.g. ACELT1812/Language/Writing/Intercultural Understanding (LA/W/IU)

STRANDS: LA – Language; LT – Literature; LY1- Literacy

MODES: R- Reading; W – Writing; S1 – Speaking; L – Listening;

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Literacy (LY2)

Intercultural Understanding (IU)

Personal and Social Capability (PSC)

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capability

Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT)

Ethical Understanding (EU)

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (ATSIC)

Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia (AAEA)

Sustainability (S2)

For more detail re curriculum areas, refer to the **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)** www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum.html



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Reading Journal

ACELT1640/LT/LY2/CCT/PSC/R/W/S1/L

Teacher note: Osamah's experiences are written with humour, but he explores traumatic events. A reading journal is one possible way for students to comment on their personal response to events, and to record questions that arise for them during reading.

As you read, keep a journal. Record:

- your answers to the questions asked
- things you have in common with Osamah
- parts of the novel that you find sad or funny or both
- any questions you have as a result of reading the text

After reading the novel, share your observations with the class, comparing notes

Predictions

ACELA1567/LA/LY2/CCT/R/W/S1/L

Make some predictions about the memoir by answering the questions below.

- Based only on the title, *Good Muslim Boy*, make some predictions about Osamah Sami and the events of this memoir.
- Take a close look at the cover and make some further predictions. In what ways might this memoir subvert the reader's expectations?
- How do stereotypes form? (Consider the media, family, peers, literature, and television.)
- What's the allure of stereotypes?
- What's the danger of them?

Discussion

ACELT1640/LT/LY2/CCT/PSC/R/W/S1/L

'When you've grown up the way I did, an *Iraqi* boy born in *Iran* while two countries were at war, you think there's not much that can scare you.' (p.ix) It's surprising how much teenagers have in common, regardless of where they're born or grow up.

- In pairs, make a list of fears, desires, pressures and preoccupations that unite teenagers.
- Number your list in order of importance.
- Share your list with the class. Discuss your ordering and the reasons for your choices.



Writing Activity

ACELT1644/LT/LY2/CCT/W/S1

Osamah makes some hilarious and, at times, terrible life choices. Write a paragraph about a time when you really messed up. How did you get out of trouble? Or did you?

Geographical/Historical Context

ACELA1565/LA/LY2/R/W/S1/L

Note for teachers

- Interactive maps useful in exploring the geography of the Middle East: http://www.rethinkingschools.org/just_fun/games/mapgame.html
- Portland State University website has Middle East teaching tools on their website page: <http://www.middleeastpdx.org/resources/original/geography-of-the-modern-middle-east-and-north-africa/>

Osamah Sami was an Arab child growing up in Iran in 1988, caught up in the Iran-Iraq war.

- Draw a map of The Middle East, marking country names and capital cities.
- Mark in Abadan City, where Osamah lived.
- When did the war start, and how long did it last?
- Research and list some of the reasons why Iran and Iraq went to war.
- The war caused terrible losses in human life. As you read the memoir, make notes on what Osamah reveals about these losses, and his reflections on why the war started, and it's impact on him. Note, too, Osamah's observations about what life was like for him as an Arab growing up in Iran.



GENERAL VOCABULARY LIST

Activities

- Using the dictionary and Osamah Sami's memoir, record the meanings of the words listed below as you encounter them in the text.
- Design a game to test a player's knowledge of these words and their meanings.

Secular (Viii)

Trenchant (viii)

Benevolence (ix)

Coveted (xi)

Aspirants (xi)

Plausible (xi)

Flaccid (2)

Treason (p.2)

Dishdashas (p.2)

Sowmeh (p.3)

Pious (p.9)

Assuage (p.11)

Conjures (p.16)

Apostasy (p.19)

Temerity (29)

Enervation (p.40)

Indolently (p.50)

Lucrative (p.52)

Seraphically (p.87)

Abaya (p.104)

Pagosha (p.118)

Ubiquitous (p.148)

Magnanimous (p.164)

Latmia (p.170)

Quixotic (p.177)

Algedonic (p.206)

Zealous (p.208)



READING ACTIVITIES
ACELY1754/LY2/CCT/R/W

Foreword by Andrew Knight

- How does Osamah subvert Andrew Knight's expectations of the son of the head cleric of Melbourne's Shiite community? (In what ways does Osamah surprise him?)

Prologue

- What's Osamah done to get him in trouble with the elders?
- We all have communities that can judge us. (Family, friends, relatives, members of organisations to which we belong.) In pairs, discuss some of the times you've been judged by your community.

Mortar melodies

- Osamah's life is terrifying in some ways, and yet, in a lot of ways, we can relate to it. In what ways can you relate to Osamah's experiences?
- What's the effect of the chapter title? Why is it so memorable? (Consider the impact of alliteration and juxtaposition.)

The day God died

- Osamah visits Mashhad Iran in 2013. Mark Mashad on your map. Find out some key facts about Iran in 2013. (Collect facts about its political system, leader, stability, key events of 2013, currency.) Find some photographs of Mashad and create a photo file.
- How does Osamah make us laugh and cry in this chapter?
- Why is the title of this chapter so effecting? In what ways are our parents gods to us?

A merciless magic

- What does the game of Drunk Russian involve?
- In pairs, discuss some crazy games you've played before.
- How would you describe Moe Green?
- Why is Adnan's story, retold by Osamah, so strange and compelling?
- Why is the chapter called 'A merciless magic'?

The tall male was of excellent hygiene

- How does the chapter subtitle create suspense and momentum?

Cheeky son of a cleric man

- Mark in Qom on your map. Record too, any details that you learn about this city.
- Why does Osamah describe living here as 'bizarre'?
- How does Osamah create sentences that surprise and shock?
- What does it mean to 'self-immolate'? As a class, discuss your response to The Mister John Walker story. Were you shocked by then end? Why or why



not? Why might Mr Rashidi have self-immolated? What is the effect of the final sentence?

- As a class, discuss the punishments that Osamah had to endure.
- Why was literature and poetry so important to Osamah?
- Who were the Monkerat?
- What made the unforgettable summer 'grim'?

Sipping tea with sugar

- What is the fatiha?
- Osamah is experiencing a mix of both harsh and sympathetic reactions, sometimes from the same person. What connection can you make between this mix of reactions and the title of the chapter?

Girls, girls, girls

- What's your opinion of temporary marriage? Are you surprised by it? What problems can it cause?
- In pairs, discuss your favourite part of this chapter, and some things you have in common with the writer. Discuss too, the parts of the chapter that you found disturbing.

We'll get there when we get there

- How does Osamah get some perspective on his situation in this chapter?

The great escape

- Why must Osamah and his family only speak Arabic at the airport?
- What do you learn about Iraq in 1979? What shocks you?
- How does the inclusion of this story add to the suspense?

Than you for your cooperation

- Why do you think the Kurds help Osamah?

Culture shock

- What does 'inshallah' mean?
- What are some of the problems/difficulties that Osamah encounters after arriving in Australia?
- Culture shock isn't limited to a person moving to another country. People can experience culture shock by going to another suburb, or a different school. In pairs, discuss some times you've experienced culture shock.

Sleeping rough

- 'Sometimes people just fall apart through no fault of their own.' (p.125)
There's a great deal of sadness in this memoir, but a great deal of humour. Would the book be as compelling without the humour? Why or why not?
- Osamah, antihero or not, has some wonderful qualities. List some.



Lessons to learn

- The writer creates humour from misunderstandings in this chapter. Discuss your favourite part.

Paperwork is paperwork

- Osamah is running out of time. Write a paragraph about a situation when you just didn't have enough time.

Truth isn't the best medicine

- Osamah's note to the examiner is hilarious. Write your own note to an examiner, explaining why you should pass an exam without having studied.

Inshallah

- The most moving moments in this memoir are not the descriptions of trauma, but the descriptions of humanity. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Faking it

- Do you sympathise with Osamah or Luay? Why or why not?
- What's your opinion of arranged marriage? What are the pros and cons?
- Predict how Osamah will react to his parents arranging his marriage? Do you think he'll go along with it?

Market trading

- Has Osamah changed during the course of his story? Or is his story not so much about change as remembering? (Consider, how, at the end of this chapter he remembers freedom, flying out again as he flew the first time.)

Stolen dreams

- Write a letter to the editor where you defend Osamah's right to enter the United States, and the importance of people seeing a show like *Saddam The Musical*.

Clearance

- How does Osamah create suspense in this chapter?

Repentance

- How does this chapter surprise you?
- If you were Sisi, would you forgive Osamah?

Man of a thousand senses

- Has Osamah's time in Iran been devoid of beauty? Justify your answer.



THEMES

ACELT1812/LT/LY2/CCT/IU/R/W/S1/L
ACELT1640/LT/CCT/PSC/R/W/S1/L

Some of the main themes in the memoir are listed below, with supporting quotes, as a teacher resource.

Suggested Activity

- As a class, list in the board what you see as the main themes of the novel
- In pairs or small groups, choose one theme to explore
- Provide the class with some key quotes and examples from the memoir to illustrate your theme

Death

'I must take care of him after his death.' (p.20)

'Don't worry about your father's death. We'll all die...Life is a shithole anyway. It's sewage.' (p.23)

'And then it hit me, the worst thing, the irreparable thing. My youngest brother was still up there, transfixed by the noisy, colourful sky.' (p.34)

Grief

'If anyone from the Middle East saw my gentle tears, they'd think I was happy my father was dead.' (p.27)

'I watched him look over the street, impassively, pour the bottle on himself, shout, 'God is Great!' and then self-immolate.' (p.44)

'I tell the uncle why I'm here, and that I'm alone in Mashhad. Immediately he calls for a group of men to help. They all respond at once, taking Dad's body to the wash hall. They all kneel down and pray for his soul as well.'

'I don't want to think about what my family is going through, it will just slow me down.' (p.85)

'The whole week catches up with me in one explosive surge. I collapse on the office floor, and that's when I realise: my dad is dead, and I will never see him again in my life. I'll never see his smile again, we'll never talk about anything, we'll never eat falafels again, I'll never hold his hands like a kid.' (p.235)

Family

'Your mother will always love you. She is a upset and maybe a touch angry, but you are her son. Her first. You must come home.' (p.246)

Economic hardship



'Only the bedroom had mattresses, and although they were thin, they were still better than sleeping in the hallway, where we rolled our blankets on top of us to sleep in a cocoon.' (p.2)

'He is a working man, and a handout would be a slap in his face; it was rid him of his dignity.' (p.15)

Seeking Asylum/Loss of Home

'We had been persecuted in Iran as Iraqis for far too long and, knowing our lives were bleak, he had presented our case to give us a better future.' (p.90)

'Australia was so far from Iran, that it must have had a separate god.' (p.90)

'The customs officers were terrifying, even sans Kalashnikovs.' (p.104)

'Imagine there was a war in Australia and you had to flee to Iran. Any Bob or Jane from Perth or Wodonga could just run for their lives and start all over again, no worries, right? All they'd have to do is learn Farsi, the politics, the history and culture.' (p.109)

Racism

'The wogs had a slogan for white Australians: 'Youse came I chains, we came in plains.' (p.113)

'I'll be sure to pass on your regards to Mr Letterman. He'll be thrilled to have a Muslim fan.' (p.223)

'But I also got the feeling that our options were narrowing, in this big, little world we called home.' (p.226)

Freedom

'We couldn't raise the Iraqi flag – that would constitute treason.' (p.2)

'And how strange that fiddling with one's shows could feel so much like freedom.' (p.96)

Religion

'The mosque was...a gathering place for men unfit for war and old people....That makes it sound depressing – there was a real sense of community'. (p.8)

'Each verse you read from the Koran brightens their soul'. (p.13)

'I was a Muslim in my heart – but that same heart that felt so Muslim pumped hot blood through my body, rendering me pagan.' (p.80)

'He spoke his prayers silently. Out loud he just said, 'Shit.' (p.31)



'I remembered the simplicity of the imam's lectures, about masturbation and other sins. These had bored me back home, but now, nothing had ever seemed as comforting.' (p.113)

Identity

'I'm an Iraqi by heritage who was born in Iran, so I've always been at war with myself.' (p.1)

'There is an Arab to see the ambassador.' I want to strangle him. I call over his shoulder, in English, that I'm an Australian citizen, seeking help for an emergency.' (p.86)

'After all the lying and the posturing and trying to please other people, it was startling to put my cards on the table.' (p.247)

War/Conflict

'There had actually been a lot of uncertainty over whether or not I'd even make it to seven alive. The air raids had been fierce of late.' (p.5)

'Anywhere there was oil, there was turmoil.' (p.1)

'Schools had been shutting down more and more regularly due to the heavy bombardments.' (p.7)

'Dozens of bodies came here on a daily basis. Young, old. Almost always men. Almost always blood seeping through their shrouds.' (p.10)

'I'd been the man of the house since age four, I'd smoked my first cigarette at seven, and I knew how to dismantle a Kalashnikov by eleven.' (p.41)

'The boy had set off the thunderous fireworks upon his dad's return – and the father, upon hearing the ear-splitting blasts, was forced into nightmarish flashbacks of his days on the front lines.' (p.53)

'The only trouble was, we weren't the same kind of Muslim. Sisi was of Lebanese heritage, and her dad was of the view that Iraqis were the nucleus of all the Middle East's problems. My mother, for her part, was of the view that the Lebanese had ruined Middle Eastern food, which was almost as serious an allegation.' (p.182)

'The reason I wanted a pair of blue jeans so much was that I was sick of being mocked by the Iranian kids.' (p.6)

Connection/shared humanity

'They loved to reminisce about old time, just like people everywhere – things like how good the football team was, pre-revolution.' (p.8)

'He was embracing one of Iraq's most wanted generals, Colonel Majid Ghaith, who also happened to be his former high-school biology teacher.' (p.33)



'Deep down, I felt the tickling knowledge that he *was* a human, and because he was a human, that he shouldn't die.' (p.79)

'What's with you people? Your culture is rich with poets and painters. Full of history and all that's left is a sad, unhelpful bunch in a stinking polluted city, more worried about where my great-grandfather's from than about how you can help me.' (p.87)

'Sometimes people just fall apart through no fault of their own.' (p.125)

Resilience/defiance/use of humour

'Once freed, the condemned man, surrounded by a dozen officers, used his hands to pull his pants down and expose his bottom to the crowd.' (p.79)

'My stomach sends me to the toilet to remind me I'm still a human being. I squat inside the cubicle, deep in thought. *Will I ever be able to smile again? Will I ever go back to telling my jokes?* Almost seraphically, the gent in the cubicle next door lets rip the most feral fart, long and loud and infinite...His sounds of joy and anguish as he tries to release are the perfect cover for my schoolboy giggles.' (p.88)

Torture

'I did not know what the word 'drunk meant, but I did know drink was prohibited and punishment ranged from lashings to imprisonment.' (p.28)

'The thing about kids is that they're prone to forget things. This is just how kids are built. It's the reason you have to punish them, the reason you have rules, but it's also the reason they'll keep breaking them, over and over, and the reason your punishments can't be uniformly brutal.' (p.45)

'The deposited us in a cell, and bashed us to their liking.' (p.55)

'Everyone had learned to recognise the knocks of the Baathist militia. They were notorious for shooting those suspected of anti-government leanings at point-blank range, feeding their bodies to ravenous dogs, and then invoicing their families for the cost of ammunition.' (p.92)

Sex

'What if I have this friend who masturbates but does not reach climax. Is that still a sin?' (p.46)

'This was a fascinating world: legal sex'. (p.67)

'We stayed away from these seedy places, not because we were afraid of getting caught, but simply because, for all our bluster, we were afraid of real sex and the guilt we knew would come crashing down on us.' (p.69)

'Beyond the fantastical loophole of temporary marriage, girls were vexing. They were distracting and satisfying, a happy crazy drug. They were hypnotic and impossible, always just out of reach.' (p.69)



Love

'He'd shot himself in the foot – literally – to get leave as a wounded soldier so he could reunite with the village girl he'd fallen in love with.' (p.29)

'A week after the engagement, we sat on a bench at the Royal Botanic Gardens. My impending marriage should have been pulsing at the back of my brain, but it wasn't. Instead, I was thinking about Sisi – I couldn't help it. Was it time to kiss her yet?' (p.190)

Stereotypes

'Are there a lot of kangaroos and girls in bikinis?' (p.25)

'Many years later, I came to appreciate the absurdity of my impressions. Then again, I was recently asked by a sincere Australian whether we'd discovered cars yet in Iran, or if we still rode on camels, so maybe every teenage boy is short on wisdom.' (p.58)

'He asks me how much the West hates Iran an, and why.' (p.61)

The importance of art

'At the Kanoon, I learned literature and I was able to write poetry; I went there to express my rage, and was encouraged to do so.' (p.47)



STRUCTURE AND WRITING STYLE

ACELT1812/LT/LY2/CCT/R/W/S2/L

Memoir

Good Muslim Boy is a memoir, a record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge of them and based on personal observation. It does not tell the author's entire life story, as does an autobiography. Rather, a memoir focuses on a particular event, or particular arc in the life of the writer.

- As a class, discuss some reasons why memoir is such a popular genre. Discuss also why Osamah Sami's memoir has universal appeal.
- Does memoir share any conventions with fiction? If so, what are they?
- As a class, discuss some of the problems that could arise for the memoir writer. (Consider the importance of accuracy, privacy and momentum).

Intertwined Narratives

This memoir is structured as two narratives. The tale of Osamah and his father returning to Iran, and Osamah's efforts to bring his father home, is intertwined with Osamah's memories of Iran, his journey to Australia where he meets Sisi.

As a class, discuss the following:

- Why might the author have chosen to alternate between these two stories? (Consider the need for pace, suspense, and character detail in a memoir.)
- How do the shifts in time further enhance the themes?

Chapter Structure

Osamah Sami's memoir is divided into twenty-two chapters, plus a prologue. Each chapter contains smaller stories, sectioned off with subtitles.

- Why might Osamah Sami have chosen to structure his memoir in this way?
- How does Osamah use the overall structure to create suspense and maintain pace, whilst still giving rich detail about events?

Prologue

A prologue is a separate introductory section of novel of a novel, play, poem or musical.

- Re-read the prologue of *Good Muslim Boy*
- Why might Osamah Sami have chosen to start in Melbourne, 2013, and not in Iran?
- How does Osamah show his father's character in the prologue? (Consider dialogue, reaction to the elders, use of nouns and adjectives.)
- How does the prologue create suspense?
- How would you describe the tone of the prologue?



Romantic Comedy

Teacher note: This memoir has been made into a film, *Ali's Wedding*, to be released in 2016. If the film is available, students could answer the questions below, and then watch the film, analysing the differences in structure between the two texts.

In the forward, this memoir has been described as 'a kind of fucked up romantic comedy'.

A romantic comedy generally follows the structure set out below.

The Set Up (The chemistry between the two people is established, the interior and exterior conflict is shown.)

The Meet Cute (The inciting incident that brings the couple together and into conflict.)

The complications, also known as fun and games (The couple is drawn together but at are cross-purposes. One character is changing the other – perhaps they are changing each other.)

The Midpoint (A situation that binds the couple – but presents further complications.)

Dark Night of the Soul (Everything seems lost.)

Ending resolution (The characters reconcile. The characters have changed in order to be together. Usually, one main character changes to a greater extent.)

Use the structure outlined above, and your general knowledge of romantic comedies to answer the questions below.

- In what ways does the story of Sisi and Osamah follow the romantic comedy structure?
- In what ways does the memoir differ from a traditional romantic comedy?
- This memoir has been made into a film, *Ali's Wedding*, to be released in 2016. If you were the scriptwriter, what part of the memoir would you use for the opening scene? (Would you start at the end and then flashback? Would you choose to have two narratives running simultaneously? What difficulties might the writer encounter, when trying to translate the memoir into a film?

WRITING STYLE

A writer's style is a combination of many elements. Word choice, sentence length, sentence rhythm and point-of-view are just some of these! Osamah Sami has a distinctive and incredibly effecting style. The memoir explores death and grief, war and torture, and yet, it is often hilarious and romantic.

Humour

ACELT1642/LT/LY2/CCT/S1/L

Osamah Sami has used humour to great effect in his memoir. Many of the events Osamah relates aren't funny. According to Mark Twain "The secret source of humor itself is not joy, but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven."



- What's the effect on the reader of including humour in recounting traumatic events? How does Sami's writing provide catharsis for the reader?
- How does his humour show that we all share a common humanity?
- In what ways can comedy and humour act as a critique of society? Can you think of examples of comedians use humour as social commentary? Discuss these as a class.

Find examples of some or all of the following comedy techniques used by Osamah Sami in his memoir:

- Situational Irony: What happens is the opposite of what is expected.
- Verbal Irony: When what is said or written is the opposite of the meaning
- Hyperbole: exaggerated statements or claims
- Dramatic Irony: when the audience knows something not grasped by the characters in a text.
- Absurd: something completely and powerfully different from what was expected.
- Black humour: combining the morbid and grotesque with humour to make comment on the senselessness of life
- Oxymoron: a figure of speech that juxtaposes contradictory elements
- Incongruity: An event that is out of place
- Pun: a play on words, confusion of two homophones

Word Choice

Osamah Sami chooses his words carefully to create vivid descriptions. Reread **Rooftop views of air raids** and answer the questions below.

- How does first sentence plunge the reader into the action of the scene? What is the effect of the word 'scream'? What is the effect of the word 'shot'?
- How does Osamah create the feeling that his brother is vulnerable?
- How does Osamah use a list to evoke the fluidity of the fighter planes?
- How does Osamah foreshadow what will happen to his brother?
- What's the effect of describing the sky as 'frolicking pink'? What image does the word 'frolic' evoke?
- How does he use humour to lull the reader into a false sense of security?
- How does Osamah's use of alliteration emphasis his mother's grief?
- Analyse the structure of this short piece. How does it function as a complete short story?



SETTING

ACELT1641/LT/LY2/CCT/R/W/S1/L

Osamah Sami writes vivid and convincing settings. Re read *Mortar Melodies*. Discuss how he places the reader into the scene by reflecting on the questions and statements listed below.

- How does he recreate the feeling of the cramped flat? (Consider his use of lists, the details of the exact measurements, adjectives, the detailed description of smell.)
- How does he use smell to give the description of the flat more impact?
- Choose one more description of setting in the memoir and discuss how Osamah creates a vivid setting.
- Write a paragraph where you evoke a sense of place by using the language features employed by the author.



FURTHER WRITING ACTIVITIES
ACELT1815/LT/LY2/CCT/R/W/S1/L

'I was a child of unfortunate circumstances.' Write a story that starts with this line. Use some of Osamah Sami's comedic techniques to make your story funny.

At university, Osamah had an enemy called Luay, who is 'totally, completely accurate' in everything he thinks about him. Write a short story about a protagonist who has an enemy like Luay.

'Many years later, I came to appreciate the absurdity of my impressions. Then again, I was recently asked by a sincere Australian whether we'd discovered cars yet in Iran, or if we still rode on camels, so maybe every teenage boy is short on wisdom.' (p.58) Write a personal piece about a time when you were short on wisdom.

Osamah Sami is described in the blurb as an antihero.

- What is an antihero? Find a definition and record it in your journal.
- In pairs, make a list of your five favourite antiheroes from novels, memoirs, films or television. What are their flaws? What are their good qualities? Why do you like them?
- What do antiheroes reveal about human nature? Why are they so satisfying?
- Write a short story where the main character is an antihero.

Osamah is prevented from entering the United States and performing *Saddam: The Musical*. Write a persuasive essay where you argue the importance of using humour to critique society.

Write a review of this memoir, highlighting what you consider to be the important themes.

'Imagine there was a war in Australia and you had to flee to Iran. Any Bob or Jane from Perth or Wodonga could just run for their lives and start all over again, no worries, right? All they'd have to do is learn Farsi, the politics, the history and culture.' (p.109) Write a story where you must leave your home and go to an unknown place. This place could be another state, school, country, or universe. Explore, as Osamah Sami has done, the strangeness of moving to a new place.



QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

ACELT1639/LT/LY2/CCT/PSC/IU/R/W/S1/L

Filmmaker, Tony Ayres, describes this memoir as 'a kind of fucked-up romantic comedy'. Is this an accurate description? Why or why not?

'We need someone in the world to be our yardstick, a benchmark by which we may assess our own gaffs and shortcomings. Osamah is our man.' What do people and characters such as Osamah offer us as readers?

'I was exactly the ammo they needed against Dad.' Have you ever felt like this before? When and why?

'I'm an Iraqi by heritage who was born in Iran, so I've always been at war with myself.' Landscape defines us. Is this what *Good Muslim Boy* shows?

'When I went to light the candles, Mum suggested, cheerfully, that I should wait till they dropped a bomb on us so they'd get lit up for free.' Despite the sadness, this memoir is often hilarious. Discuss the parts you found the funniest. Why do you think Osamah has chosen to use humour in this novel?

'Son. We all die. It's our destiny. I just need you to sign this.' Discuss the differing attitudes to death in the novel. Despite the differences between Australia and Iran, the memoir shows people have a lot in common. Discuss.

The death of Osamah's younger brother is incredibly sad. As a class, discuss the elements of life in Iran, or the war, that made the greatest impression on you.

'...Osamah's writing is more seductively political and life affirming than any trenchant criticism'. (p.viii) Do you agree? Why or why not? Why is a memoir like *Good Muslim Boy* so important?

'...maybe every teenage boy is short on wisdom'. *Good Muslim Boy* shows that everyone has something to learn. Discuss.

Good Muslim Boy shows that it is love that is important, not death. Discuss.

Ritual is important in *Good Muslim Boy*. In pairs, discuss some of the rituals that are important in your life. These might be personal, religious, spiritual, or cultural.

Re read *The Public Execution of a Gay Man* that starts on page 78. What is the importance of the glasses? What conclusion does Osamah arrive at? How is this scene highlighting some of the major themes of this memoir?

'And how strange that fiddling with one's shows could feel so much like freedom.' Discuss the freedoms you think are essential in a society. Discuss the responsibilities that come with them.



'Be thankful you get to live in a country like Australia while the young men here go rotting. I have a master's degree. A fucking master's degree in Economics and I'm here on a public holiday, risking jail just to exchange some money for pompous pricks like you. Eight million is good for you. I could have ripped you off, you know. But I can see you're just like me. I can tell you're struggling. But the comparisons stop there. Your struggle is not our struggle. So shake my hand, take your money, and just. Be. Thankful.' As a class, discuss what Osamah comes to understand in this scene.



FURTHER READING/VIEWING

Articles

Abdel-Fattah, R. 2007. Racism is not human nature. A work of fiction can help us understand that. *The Guardian* [online] Available at:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/13/racism-is-not-human-nature-a-work-of-fiction-can-help-us-understand-that>

Hussein, S. (25 July 2015). Cross Cultural Meanderings *Weekend Australian*, Review, p. 22.

Lalo, M. 2015. Good Muslim Boy Osamah Sami Paints Vivid Picture of Immigrant Life. *The Sydney Morning Herald* [online] Available at:
<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/good-muslim-boy-osamah-sami-paints-vivid-picture-of-immigrant-life-20150605-ghgt5y.html>

Novels

When Michael Met Mina by Randa Abdel-Fattah, Pan Macmillan Australia, 2016 (identity, culture shock, grief, loss, love, seeking asylum)

If You Could Be Mine by Sara Farizan, Algonquin Young Readers, 2013 (identity, LBGTI, Iran, freedom)

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D Salinger, Little, Brown and Company, 1951 (anti-hero, humour, coming of age, belonging, loss)

Memoirs

A great list of YA memoirs can be found at <http://stackedbooks.org/2015/01/get-genrefied-ya-memoirs.html>

Laughing at My Nightmare, by Shane Burcaw, Roaring Brook, 2014 (gallows-humour, anti-hero, memoir)

Films

Ali's Wedding, TBR 2016

Graphic Novels

The Arrival by Shaun Tan, Hodder Children's Books, 2006 (culture shock, isolation, grief, fear, seeking asylum)

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi, Penguin Random House, 2004 (growing up in Iran, Iran-Iraq war, torture, cost of war, coming of age)



FURTHER IDEAS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY

ACELY1751/LY1/LY2/ICT/CCT/PSC/W

This novel has been made into a film, *Ali's Wedding*, to be released in 2016. Create a trailer for this film, based on events in the memoir.

Record a podcast where you discuss this memoir. Look at characters, themes, language use and what the novel reveals about humanity.

Create a website for readers of the novel. You might consider including some or all of the things listed below.

- Any historical information essential for a reader of this novel
- Any geographical essential for a reader of this novel
- A biography of Osamah Sami
- A new blurb
- A book trailer
- Important issues the memoir raises