

A Childhood Spent in the Library

By Saadia Faruqi, author of *Yasmin*

Long before I became a writer, I was a reader. As a child I read passionately, long past bedtime, under the covers and on the school bus and even in the bathroom. I adored Enid Blyton as a little girl, and then as I grew older Daphne Du Maurier and Jane Austin, and of course Shakespeare.

For my obsessions, I blame the library. I grew up in Pakistan in the 80's and 90's, before the internet and cable television, and in any case my parents were poor, so we didn't have much in the form of entertainment. But there were two major libraries that I had the privilege of attending, which left a mark on me. One was a small library in the Catholic convent I attended in Karachi, guarded by an ancient nun in a white habit. She knew each girl who came to her, and suggested the perfect book to keep her up at night, eyes glued to the page. I don't remember her name, but her library with its old bookcases and lazy fans on the ceiling are indelibly sketched in my mind.

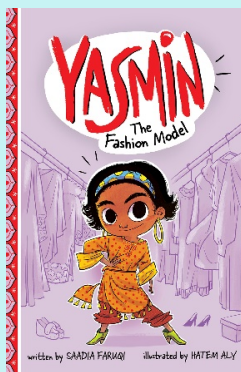
The other library that forms a huge part of my childhood and teens is the British Council Library. My mother, an English teacher trainer, would drop me there for hours while she worked. This was a modern library, nothing like the little room in my school, and it awed me. I would walk through the stacks, climbed the short ladders to get to the higher shelves, ingest tens of books in one afternoon. That library was my second home, and one where I found peace and inspiration like nothing else.

Fast forward to motherhood, and my children spend hours in the public libraries in the U.S. where I now live. My oldest, now a teenager, was a toddler when I took him to his first story time, and we have never stopped since. I want the library to be my children's second home just like it was mine, because I believe that this institution has a certain power to shape lives. Within it exist entire worlds that a child can access even if they have no money. Within it work superheroes called librarians who inculcate the love of books within readers. It is information and entertainment and education, all rolled into one.

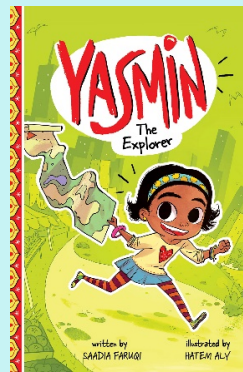


Libraries are the lifeblood of a community. When I meet readers of my books, I often inquire if they visit the library. When customers want to know where to get my books, I ask them if they've checked their local library. More than any bookstore, my heart sings when my books are available in a library, because it means every single child who wants to read them can do so. And because libraries cater to their communities, they try their hardest to include a diverse selection of literature, almost like the old nun in my Catholic school who knew which book to give to which student.

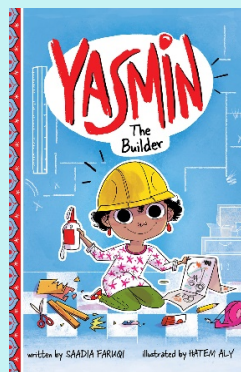
Now as a writer, this is where you'll find me, deep within the stacks, seeking inspiration.



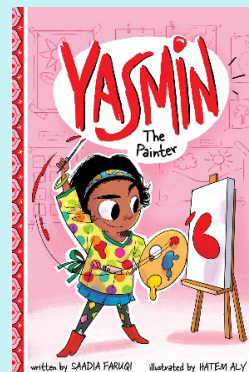
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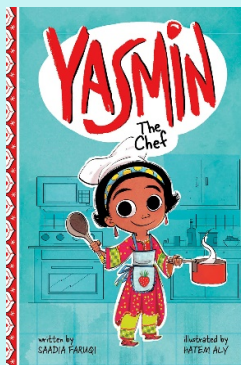
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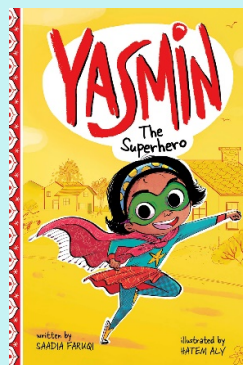
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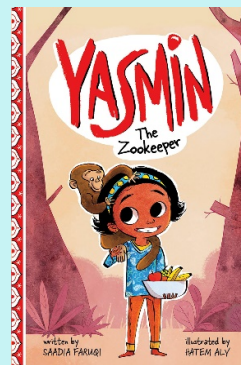
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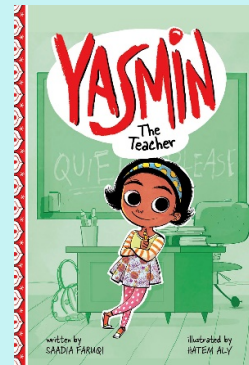
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About Saadia Faruqi

Saadia Faruqi is a Pakistani American writer, essayist and interfaith activist. She writes for a number of publications including the Huffington Post, and is editor-in-chief of Blue Minaret, a magazine for Muslim art, poetry and prose. Her adult short story collection Brick Walls: Tales of Hope & Courage from Pakistan was published in 2015. She resides in Houston, TX with her husband and children.

