



THE BUTTON BOX

by Bridget Hodder & Fawzia Gilani-Williams

TEACHER GUIDE

INTRODUCTION: *Ava is Jewish and her cousin Nadeem is Muslim.*

Yet they have always been best friends. After a bully makes them question their ties to each other, a magical button from Granny Buena's Button Box teaches them the value of staying true to each other...and to themselves. The button transports Nadeem and Ava back to the time of their feisty teenage Jewish ancestor, Ester, in Morocco. Ester is fighting for respect from her family and for help in saving a fleeing Muslim prince from deadly enemies. As a window into genuine Muslim and Sephardic Jewish ways of life, this timely book shows how our differences can bring us together, rather than drive us apart, in an increasingly intolerant world. By a Sephardic author and a Muslim author, who are friends in real life!

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Being Different: Ava and Nadeem barely escape getting into a brawl with Fern, a bully at school who calls them hateful anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish names. Why do you think Fern is bullying them? Is it possible that in some way, she is afraid? Do you think Ava is right when she says about Fern that they might be able to "reel her in from the Dark Side" (pg.128)? Or will the kids have to follow Prince Abdur Rahman's advice to "travel over these threats as quickly and as lightly as possible...Do not let enemies, or the foolish, distract or dissuade you" (pg.113)?" How might this relate to experiences you have had in your own lives with people who are mean to those who are different?

Doing the Impossible: What do you think Cousin Ester means when she says "making unlikely things possible usually takes a lot of courage"? (p.57)

Spain's Golden Age: Part of this book is about the "Golden Age" of Spain long ago, when Muslim rulers promoted peaceful partnering between Muslims, Jews and Christians in their realm. What can you discover in books and online about how, as Granny Buena said, "Together, we made Spain a center of science, mathematics, music, and poetry" (pg.15)? Does this information grow your respect for these cultures? Do you agree with the statement, "We must learn **about** each other before we can learn **from** each other"?

Making a Difference: Ester ibn Evram is a very good spice seller, but her Sephardic family in ancient times won't let her take charge of their spice stall because she is a girl. How have things changed for females in our own times? Everyone in the world has troubles, no matter what their gender, color, religion or culture. Some are worse than others. Having the courage to stand up for others who are in trouble increases the likelihood that when we are in trouble, they will stand up for us. When Ester says that Jewish teachings do not allow Jews to stand idle while someone like Prince Abdur Rahman is hurt, do you think this only applies to emergencies? What other cultural traditions, books, old sayings, movies or songs do you know of that communicate the same message? How might you use this wisdom to make a difference for people in trouble in your own lives?

For more resources and to book classroom appearances, visit FawziaGilani.com in the UAE and BridgetHodder.com in the U.S.

