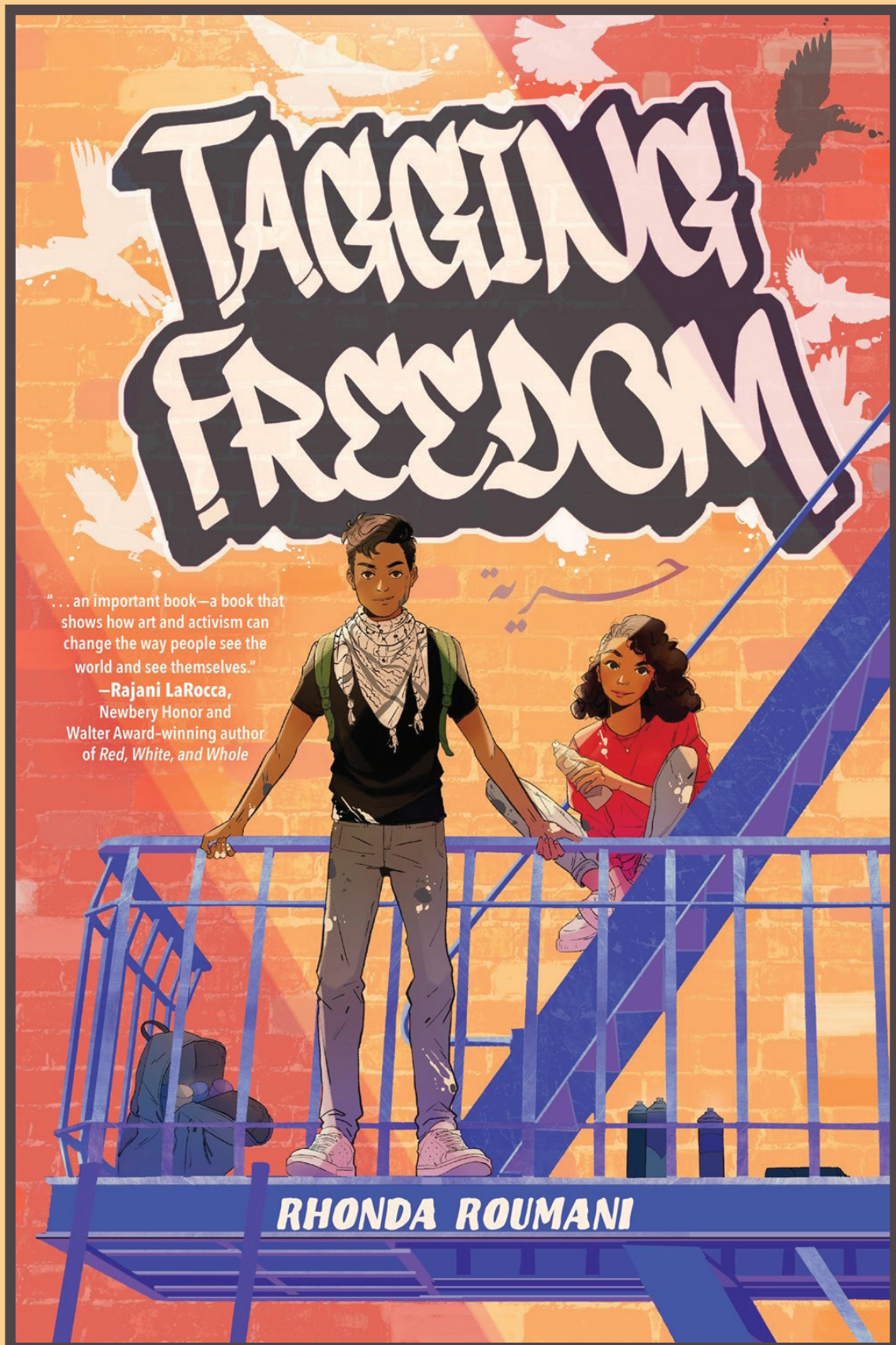


# A Curriculum Guide for Educators & Readers



## Aligned to the Common Core • Grades 3–8

Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use *Tagging Freedom* as a classroom read-aloud or as a selection for independent reading.

**Great for book clubs, too!**

### About the Author



**Rhonda Roumani** is a Syrian American journalist who lived in Syria and worked as a reporter for U.S. newspapers. She has written about Islam, the Arab world, and Muslim American issues for more than two decades. Currently, she is a contributing fellow at the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC. Rhonda lives in Connecticut with her family.

Guide content © 2023 by Marcie Colleen. Available free of charge for educational use only; may not be published or sold without express written permission. Marcie Colleen is an education guide creator and a former teacher with a BA in English education from Oswego State and an MA in educational theater from NYU. Marcie can often be found writing her own books at home in San Diego, California. Visit her at <http://www.thisismarciecolleen.com>.

### About the Book

Kareem Haddad of Damascus, Syria, never dreamed of becoming a graffiti artist. But when a group of boys from another town tag subversive slogans outside their school, and another boy is killed while in custody, Kareem and his friends are inspired and start secretly tagging messages of freedom around their city.

Meanwhile, in the United States, his cousin Samira has been trying to make her own mark. Anxious to fit in at school, she joins the Spirit Squad, where her natural artistic ability attracts the attention of the popular squad leader. Then Kareem is sent to live with Sam's family, and their worlds collide. As graffitied messages appear around town and all eyes turn to Kareem, Sam must make a choice: does she shy away to protect her new social status, or does she stand with Kareem?

Author Rhonda Roumani's work as a journalist infuses *Tagging Freedom* with rich details and a realistic portrayal of how war affects and inspires children. This is her middle-grade debut.

### Common Core Aligned for Grades 3–8

3<sup>rd</sup> grade: ELA RL.3.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; W.3.1, 2, 3; SL.3.1, 2, 4; L.3.4, 5

4<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA RL.4.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; W.4.1, 2, 3; SL.4.1, 2, 4; L.4.4, 5

5<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; W.5.1, 2, 3; SL.5.1, 2, 4, 5; L.5.4, 5

6<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA RL.6.1, 2, 3, 4; W.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9; SL.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 5; L.6.4, 5

7<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA RL.7.1, 2, 4; W.7.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; SL.7.1, 2, 3, 4, 5; L.7, 4, 5

8<sup>th</sup> grade: ELA RL.8.1, 2, 4; W.8.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; SL.8.1, 2, 3, 4, 5; L.8, 4, 5

## Before You Read...

1. Take a close look at the front cover of *Tagging Freedom*. Create a list of everything you see.
2. Can you predict what this book might be about?
3. Read the text on the jacket flap or back cover. What do you learn about the book from this text?
4. Look closely at the design of the book: the colors, text, illustrations, and word choice. How would you describe the design?
5. Who do you think is the intended audience for this book? If you saw this book on the shelf, would you want to read it? Why or why not?

Write one paragraph describing your thoughts about the book and include one question you have that you hope to learn the answer to when you read. Share your paragraph with the class.

## Chapters 1–7

1. Kareem's story starts in the city of Damascus in the country of Syria.
  - a. Can you find Syria on a map?
  - b. Conduct research on the country of Syria, including its geography, population, capital, and bordering countries and bodies of water. Share your findings in an illustrated poster to display in the classroom.
2. Describe in your own words what Kareem and his friends are doing in chapter one.
  - a. Why is what the boys are doing risky? Why do they still do it?
  - b. Who are the Dara's boys?
  - c. Who is Hamza?
3. Why does Sam struggle to fit in with the other girls at school?
  - a. Why do you think Sam still wants to join Spirit Squad, despite the way Cat treated her?
  - b. Why does Ellie not support Sam's decision to join Spirit Squad?
  - c. Why does Sam keep Spirit Squad a secret from her parents?

### **Who is Kareem?**

- Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Kareem, on a large piece of paper.
- Using chapters 1–7 as evidence, write any known details about Kareem inside the outline.
- Outside the outline, record any questions you may have about him.

4. What is the purpose of the protest that Kareem and the other boys participate in?
  - a. Why do Kareem’s parents react the way they do when they find out the boys went to the protest?
  - b. How does the reaction from his parents change Kareem’s plans to graffiti the abandoned building?

### ***Who is Sam?***

- Draw an outline of a human figure, which will represent Sam, on a large piece of paper.
- Using chapters 1–7 as evidence, write any known details about Samira inside the outline.
- Outside the outline, record any questions you may have about her.

5. Who is Layla?
  - a. With Layla, Sam says she doesn’t “have to explain anything. They have the same ‘rules’ to complain about.” Explain what she means in your own words, using evidence from chapters 1–7 to support your answer.
  - b. How would life at school be different for Sam if Layla went there, too?
6. Retell what happened at the Spirit Squad’s first event in chapter 6 from the point of view of the following characters:
  - a. Dylan
  - b. Ellie
  - c. Cat
  - d. Lucy
7. Imagine that you are Kareem’s mother and write to your brother asking if Kareem can live in America with him. Be sure to state your reasons for this request, including the political climate of Damascus and Kareem’s recent run-in with the mukhabarat (secret police).

### ***Making Connections***

“Sam saw people as unique fonts. Some were computerized, while others were hand drawn. They could be bubble-like, wavy and beautiful, or straight and constrained.”

Knowing what you know about Kareem, Sam, and Ellie so far, design a font for each of them that you think best represents their personalities.

Then, design a font to best represent yourself. Explain why you chose the elements that you did for your font.



## Chapters 8–14

1. Sam sneaks out for Dylan’s party. Why can’t she tell her parents where she is really going?
  - a. Where does Sam tell her parents she is?
  - b. How do her parents find out the truth?
  - c. Ellie says, “that crowd is trouble.” Do you agree or not? Support your answer using evidence from the book.
  - d. What consequences does Sam face for lying about the party?
2. Imagine that you are Kareem and create a sketch for your sketchbook that best represents how you feel about being sent to America.
3. Rewrite the dinner scene in chapter 10 from the point of view of the following characters:
  - a. Kareem
  - b. Layla
  - c. Sam’s mom
  - d. Sam’s dad

### ***Making Connections***

Microaggressions are defined as the everyday, subtle, intentional—and oftentimes unintentional—interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups.

The difference between microaggressions and overt discrimination or macroaggressions is that people who commit microaggressions might not even be aware of them.

#### **How to Respond to Microaggressions**

##### **1. Pause and say nothing.**

Your first impulse might be to react. However, if you pause the conversation, this can force the speaker to **think** about what they’ve said, and why it might be offensive, therefore allowing them a moment to rethink and pivot.

It’s also worth noting that there might be times saying nothing is the best option for safety reasons.

##### **2. Open a conversation.**

For example, you might say, “That’s an odd thing to say,” or “That makes me feel kind of weird to hear you say that,” or “What do you mean by that?”

Some people on the receiving end of microaggressions choose to clearly explain why the utterance is problematic, which can be a helpful learning moment for the speaker. However, it is important to continue your learning and not place the responsibility on the targeted person to teach and educate others on all things associated with their culture.

### ***Making Connections (cont.)***

For the person on the receiving end of the microaggression, you have the power to decide whether you want to use your energy for a conversation. It is okay to choose not to open a conversation after experiencing a microaggression. You can simply ignore it and look for a community that healthily affirms your identity.

#### **3. Be an ally.**

If you witness microaggressions, try to intervene so the target doesn't need to and/or try to address the issue with the speaker and the institution, if it occurred within a larger structure.

#### **4. Catch yourself.**

If you find a microaggression coming out of your own mouth, identify it, apologize, and continue to research and learn about inclusiveness.

*If you were a witness to the conversation in the cafeteria, how would you choose to react, knowing what you know now?*

*Write yourself into the scene, taking action against the microaggression.*

4. Rewrite the cafeteria scene so that Sam speaks up and corrects Dylan for his inappropriate microaggressions, letting him know how what he says makes her feel.
5. Sam and Kareem clash while at school. Sam thinks Kareem is very judgy and wrong for lashing out at Dylan. Kareem thinks Sam should take more pride in her culture and stand up to others when they say things that are inappropriate. Who do you agree with? Take a side and write a letter in their defense, using evidence from the book to support your opinion.

## **Chapters 15-21**

1. Imagine that you are Kareem and you open X (formerly known as Twitter) to see what is going on in Syria. How does the news make you feel?
  - a. Write a scene in which Kareem honestly shares how he feels, with a character of your choosing.
2. "Sam had tried countless times to explain that kids in the US were different." Explain this statement using examples from the book to support your answer.
3. Why do you think the other girls in Spirit Squad let Cat make all the decisions? What do you think would happen if someone pushed back against Cat?
4. What do you think are Ellie's reasons to join forces with Kareem to graffiti some buildings in Allansdale?
  - a. Do you think their art activism will have any impact on the community? How so?

5. How do the following characters react to Kareem and Ellie’s spray-chalk graffiti?
  - a. Samira
  - b. Amari
  - c. Cat
6. List some of the ways the graffiti incident in Allansdale differs from that in Syria.

### ***Making Connections***

The community of Allansdale, along with the students of Allansdale Middle School, is divided regarding the graffiti popping up around town. Some believe it to be art and expression while others, like Cat, think that it is vandalism and a crime.

What are your feelings on public art, such as Kareem’s graffiti? How would you respond if graffiti was found in your town?

Take a position and write a 500-word opinion piece about your stance.

### **Chapters 22–28**

1. Do you agree with Kareem that Samira never stands up for anything?
  - a. Samira offers an explanation. What is it?
2. Samira says, “it’s easy to avoid thinking about big world stuff when things around you are good. Or maybe...it’s hard to think about things that you can’t fix.” Do you agree? How so? Use examples from the book and your own life to support your answer.
3. Who do you think Spray Man is? Use evidence from the book to support your answer.

### **Chapters 29–36**

1. When Cat says, “Muslims are behind all kinds of problems these days,” Sam doesn’t respond. She tries to ignore her. However, rewrite this scene in which Sam stands up to Cat and tells her how she really feels.
2. Why does Dylan join with Sam and the others?
3. Sam decides to go alone when they all start tagging. Why do you think she chooses to not have anyone to hide behind or help her?
4. Why do you think Kareem said he regretted the last piece he sprayed?
5. What is JEANS and how did it come about?
6. “Even if the world isn’t paying attention, it didn’t mean it wasn’t happening.” Explain this quote in your own words, using examples from the book as evidence to support your answer.

## After You Read...

### **The Syrian Refugee Crisis**

Syria is a religiously and ethnically diverse country. It is a majority Muslim country, but it also has large populations of Christians, Alawites, Druze, and other minority religious groups. Ethnically, its population is mostly Arab, but there are also sizable populations of Palestinians, Iraqis, Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians, Chechens, and other groups.

During the war, more than half of Syria's estimated population of 23 million people was displaced, either internally or outside of Syria. Approximately 5.5 million are refugees and asylum-seekers. (Asylum seekers are people who've applied for refugee status in other countries.) And another 6.8 million are displaced within Syria.

Refugees from the war in Syria have sought asylum in more than 130 countries, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Still, most live in neighboring countries like Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. Turkey alone hosts the largest population, with 3.6 million Syrians living there.

Several humanitarian organizations described the Syrian refugee crisis and war as the worst humanitarian crisis in modern history.

Research ways that you can help within your own community to put an end to this ongoing crisis.

Below are a few final project ideas for the conclusion of *Tagging Freedom*.

1. Revisit the cover illustration for the book. Explain the details that the artist chose to include, using textual evidence as support.
  - a. Having now read the book, design your own cover illustration.
2. Several themes run through *Tagging Freedom*.

**Friendship**

**War**

**Activism**

**Asylum**

**Family**

**Power of art**

**Standing up for what you believe in**

- a. Choose one of the themes from the box above on which to base a 500-word essay.
  - b. What can readers take away from *Tagging Freedom* in relation to this theme?
3. Choose a character and explore how they have changed from the beginning to the end.



4. Read the back matter included in the book.
  - a. Take notes on what you learn from the back matter.
  - b. Why do you think this back matter was included? Does it enhance your understanding of the story in any way? If so, how?
  - c. Choose three facts from the back matter and explain how this information might help readers better understand Kareem and Sam’s story.
5. Create a book trailer for *Tagging Freedom*. Carefully choose music, visuals, and words to create an overall feel for the book.

## *Art for Social Change*

Throughout history, art—and graffiti—has been used to create social awareness and change, as well as to transform public spaces into places of beauty and reflection.

Additionally, these pieces of public art are used to bring about a tighter community and make those in the community aware of issues.

Research “art for social change” or “activism.”

Look up examples of public art on the Internet: examples in subways, under bridges, and in parks. Be sure to find examples of traditional murals and graffiti painted on walls, but also sculptures and knit-bombing.

What is a social issue that you would like to bring awareness to in your own community?

How can public art be used to further this awareness?

### **Tagging Freedom**

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