

*Discussion and Activity Suggestions
for Educators and Parents*

MY AMERICA BLOOMS

Nazanin Agange Ford

illustrated by

Fateme Mokhles



This guide was written by the author, Nazanin Agange Ford.

About the book:

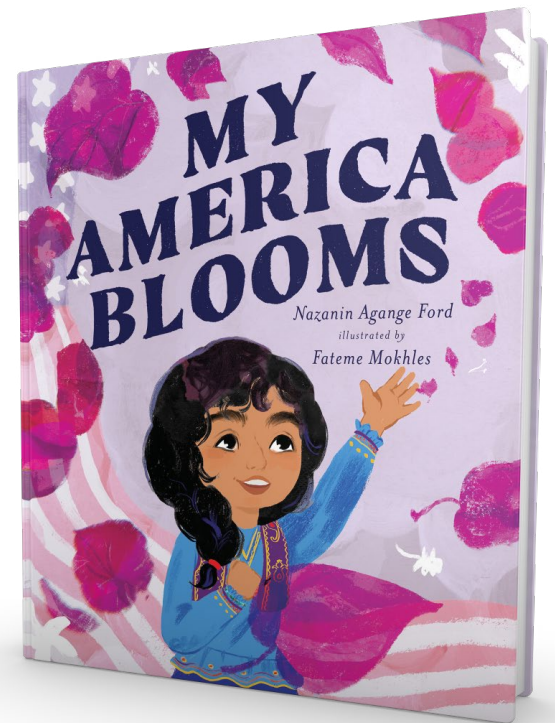
Inspired by the author's experience of immigrating to the U.S. from Iran, *My America Blooms* shares a story of hope.

In *My America Blooms* a young girl is uprooted from her home and forced to flee from Iran. She brings petals from her beloved garden to America, where she tends a new garden. Friendships and community experiences plant the seeds of hope. But every garden has its thorns and the girl must dig deep within herself to cultivate the promises of her new home.

This hopeful story embodies the American dream in all its complexity. Fateme Mokhles's evocative, impressionistic art depicts the immigrant experience through the eyes of a child, while Nazanin Agange Ford's moving words remind all readers that they belong.

"A lyrical, poignant immigrant story celebrating the true promise of America."

~Rajani LaRocca, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Red, White, and Whole* & *Some of Us*



About the author and illustrator:



NAZANIN AGANGE FORD was born in Tehran, Iran and moved to the United States at a young age. She grew up in Southern California and now lives in Nevada with her family. Her writing often reflects her Persian heritage, touches on a sense of belonging, and embraces the adventure of growing up. Naz is a former teacher and journalist. She is a member of several children's literature groups and the American Library Association. She writes stories for kids who see the world with their eyes *and* their hearts.



FATEME MOKHLES is an illustrator and interdisciplinary artist whose practice is rooted in storytelling. Born in Iran and now based in California, she often draws inspiration from her heritage and lived experiences. Fateme is also the illustrator of *Rustam's Picture-Day Pusteen*. Her illustrations bring a sense of belonging and depth to children's literature, inspiring imagination and connection.

How to use this guide:

My America Blooms features a protagonist leaving her home country and beloved garden to make a new life in America. It touches on the challenges and relatable emotional complexities of leaving home for someplace new. The story also emphasizes the hope and optimism of discovery—making friends, learning new things, and finding belonging—as well as resilience through challenges.

This guide is designed to enhance interaction with the book's themes. Each section features suggestions for younger (PreK - 2nd grade) and older (3rd - 5th grade) audiences. It offers specific suggestions and additional resources for ideas and inspiration so that caregivers and teachers can develop their own activities.

Discussion Questions:

YOUNGER AUDIENCES:

- Is this a fiction (“made-up”) or nonfiction (“true”) story?
- What happens in the beginning (middle/end) of this story?
- Where does this story take place? (“setting”)
- Why do you think the garden is important to the main character/the story?
- What is the big idea or feeling you get from this story?
- What parts/pages make you think or feel that way? (which words/images?)

OLDER AUDIENCES:

- What does the title tell you about this story?
 - What title would *you* give to this story?
 - Why?
- Who is the narrator/Who is telling this story?
 - How would this story be different if the narrator was different? (Consider friends, neighbors, the teacher, her parents, etc.)
- What is the main character’s motivation/What is important to her?
 - How do you know? (which words/illustrations?)
- When the main character feels upset, what does she do?
 - Do you think her response works?
 - Does her response change at different points in the story?
- In a picture book, the art and the words tell different parts of the story. What do you learn from the images that you don’t learn from the text?
- If you were the illustrator what would you draw for the cover of this story?



Additional resources: thecorestandards.org/ELA-Literacy for grade-appropriate ELA standards and performance expectations.



Language arts prompts:

YOUNGER AUDIENCES:

- Make a list of words you find in the story. You can use any of the following category suggestions or come up with your own:
 - sensory words (smell, taste, sight, hearing, touch);
 - words related to gardens;
 - words related to Persian culture;
 - words related to community;
 - or your own category of words.
- What do you notice about your list of words? How do the words you've listed relate to the pictures?
- Share your answer to the following prompts. Write, draw, or share in any way that expresses your ideas:
 - If you had to move, what would you want to take with you? Why?
 - Tell the story of a time when you went somewhere new.

OLDER AUDIENCES:

- What were some unfamiliar words in the story?
 - Do you know what they mean from reading the story? (context? images?)
- Imagine you're the main character and you can send a postcard to your friend in Iran. What would you tell your friend about your new home?
 - How would the postcard message change at different times in the story?
- Rewrite any part of this story as a stageplay or movie script. You will need:
 - Scene(s) with setting(s);
 - Characters & Dialogue (characters talking);
 - Stage directions (character actions).
- In this story, the garden represents more than just a place to grow flowers and plants. What would you say it stands for?
 - What does a garden need to thrive?
 - What does a person, or a community, need to thrive?

Additional resources: [thecorestandards.org/ELA-Literacy](https://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy) for grade-appropriate ELA standards and performance expectations.



Gardening and Science:

YOUNGER AUDIENCES:

- Grow your own Sabzeh (wheatgrass): kidsgardening.org/resources/growing-guide-wheatgrass
- Make a garden journal using pictures of what your wheatgrass looks like as it grows.

OLDER AUDIENCES:

- Preserve your flower buds: kidsgardening.org/resources/garden-activities-preserving-buds-blooms
- Make a scientific journal entry for each flower you preserve. Include its name, description (size, color, texture, etc.), where you found/picked it, how long it took to dry, and any other details you find important.

Additional resources: kidsgardening.org for garden-related activities and lesson plans; nextgenscience.org for grade-appropriate standards and performance expectations.

Social Sciences:

YOUNGER AUDIENCES:

- In the book, we see immigrants who want to become citizens.
 - What does it mean to be an immigrant? A citizen?
 - Do you know any immigrants?
- In the book, the main character is born in one place and moves to different place.
 - Where were you born?
 - Have you always lived in the same place?

OLDER AUDIENCES:

- If you know someone who is an immigrant, interview them to learn more about
 - where they are from, and
 - what it was like for them to move to a different country.
- In the book, we see people protesting.
 - What does it mean to protest?
 - (Why) is it important for people to speak up when other people are mistreated in their community?



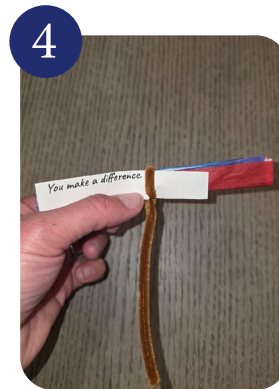
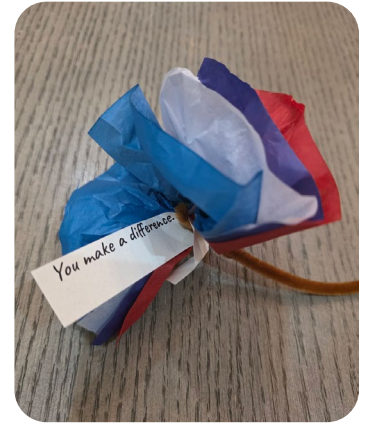
Crafts Activities:

YOUNGER AUDIENCES:

Make your own tissue paper flowers with positive messages.

1. You will need one pipe cleaner, 2-4 sheets of 6"x6" tissue paper pieces, and a narrow slip of paper (prewritten message or blank) for each flower.
2. Start by accordion folding all of your pieces of tissue paper.
3. Place your positive message slip on top of the folded paper.
4. Wrap one end of the pipe cleaner around the center to bind together.
5. Fan out the pieces of tissue paper to make a bloom with a positive message.

Refer to kidfriendlythingstodo.com/tissue-paper-flowers-for-kids-to-make-with-pipe-cleaners for images and more ideas.



OLDER AUDIENCES:

Make pressed flower bookmarks

1. You will need cardstock or heavy water color paper (140lb) cut into 2"x6" rectangles, dried pressed flowers/petals/leaves (these can be purchased in bulk or made if you have access to fresh plants); clear-drying school glue, mod podge, and a paint brush
2. Place 3-5 small pressed flowers/petals/leaves on the bookmark using clear glue to position them.
3. Let dry and then "paint" over with mod podge for a shiny protected finish.
4. You can use a hole puncher to add a hole at the top and use yarn or a tassel for an extra fancy feel.

Refer to aberlehome.com/pressed-flower-bookmarks for images and more ideas.





Vocabulary words:

In order of appearance in the story text.

- **Bougainvillea** (boo-gæn-veel-ya) - a woody vine that grows in warm climates with brightly colored, papery parts that look like flowers, but are actually a type of leaf called a bract.
- **Golnar** (gol-nahr) - Farsi/Persian word for the flowers of the pomegranate tree. They bloom in early spring.
- **Nowruz** (no-rooz) - Persian new year. It is celebrated by arranging a table (“sofreh”) of symbolic items representing renewal, good health, and good fortune.
- **Sabzeh** (sæb-ze) - “greens” grown for the Persian new year (Nowruz) most often from unpeeled wheat, barley, mungbeans, or lentils.
- **Chador** (cha-dor) - a head to foot covering chosen by some women of Islamic faith, and originally required by the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- **Omid** (o-meed) - the word for “hope” in the Farsi/Persian language. It is most often seen as a first name, but in this story it was the last name of the family.
- **Amrika-yeh-man** (Um-ree-kah-ye-mæn) - this translates to “my America.”