**Does My Head Look Big in This?**

**By Randa Abdel-Fattah**

It hit me when I was power-walking on the treadmill at home, watching a *Friends* rerun for only about the ninetieth time.

It’s that scene when Jennifer Aniston is dressed in a hideous bridesmaid’s outfit at her ex’s wedding. Everyone is making fun of her and she just wants to run away and hide, but then she suddenly gets the guts to jump on stage and sing some song called ‘Copacabana’, whatever that means. I’m telling you, this rush of absolute power and conviction surged through me. I pressed the emergency stop button on the treadmill and stood in my Adidas shorts and Winnie-the-Pooh T-shirt, utterly captivated by the scene. It was like stepping out of one room, closing the door behind me, and stepping into another. One minute it was the last thing on my mind. The next minute this courage flowed through me and it just felt unbelievably right.

I was ready to wear the hijab.

That’s right, Rachel from *Friends* inspired me. The sheiks will be holding emergency conferences…

I can’t sleep from stressing about whether I’ve got the guts to do it. To wear the hijab, the head-scarf, full-time. ‘Full-timers’ are what my Muslim friends and I call girls who wear the hijab all the time, which basically means wearing it whenever you’re in the presence of males who aren’t immediate family. ‘Part-timers’ like me wear the hijab as part of our school uniform at an Islamist school or when we go to the mosque or maybe even when we’re having a bad hair day.

I’ve got four days left of my school holidays. Four days to decides whether I’m going to actually start only my third term at McClean’s Grammar School as a full-timer. You should know that right now the thought of stepping into my home room with the hijab on is making my nostril hair stand on edge.

At this stage you should probably know my name is Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim. You can thank my father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather for that one. The teachers labelled me slow in preschool because I was the last child to learn how to spell her name.

My dad’s a doctor and my mum’s a dentist. Two major nerds who fell in love during their hibernations in Monash University medical library. They were both born in Bethlehem, but there are fifty-two years of Australian citizenship between them.

My dad’s name is Mohamed. He drives a metallic-red convertible because he’s under the misguided delusion that he’s still young and cool. He fails to remember that he has a receding hairline and has Italian Opera or Palestinian folk songs blasting from his car stereo system. My mum’s name is Jamila, which means beautiful in Arabic. She’s loud and energetic, loves to laugh, and is neurotically clean…

We live in Camberwell, one of Melbourne’s trendy suburbs…We moved here last year because my dad started working in a clinic in a nearby suburb… Before that we lived in Donvale, a very leafy, hilly suburb with lots of acreages and owls hooting at night. There were lots more Aussies with ethnic backgrounds there, so being a Muslim family wasn’t such a big deal. In Donvale our street was a cocktail. There were the Chings, the Papadopoulouses, the Wilsons, the Slaviks, the Xiangs and us, the Abdel-Hakims…

Our street in Camberwell is different. We’ve got the Taylors, the Johns and Mrs Vaselli. Wouldn’t have a clue who the rest are. Everybody pretty much keeps to themself.

I’m an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. That means I was born an Aussie and whacked with some bloody confusing identity hyphens.

**WORDSMITH…**

**Writing an expository paragraph using analogies**

An expository text is a type of text that explains something. It is intended to inform the reader. Examples include essays, newspaper articles, non-fiction books, textbooks and reports. In order to make something clear to the reader, the writer of an expository text can occasionally make analogies.

An analogy is a comparison between two things

**Comprehension Activities /50**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What does the narrator tell us about in the first and second paragraphs? Answer the questions who, where and what for each piece of information the narrator gives us. **5 marks**

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1. In which paragraph does the narrator tell us her name? Refer to a quote when answering. **3 marks**

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1. How many parts are there to Amal’s whole name? Explain. **2 marks**

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1. What is the decision Amal has reached? What aspect of the *Friends* episode inspired her? Why did it inspire her? **4 marks**

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1. How is she feeling about her decision? Explain. Use a quotation to support your response. **5 marks**

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In what way did Amal’s teachers ‘label’ her in primary school? What did this have to do with her name?  **2 marks**

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1. Do you think Amal’s name helps her to blend in at McClean’s Grammar School? Explain.  **6 marks**

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1. What comes first: a brief description of Amal’s parents or their names? Why? **3 marks**

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1. Why do you think Amal says that “the sheiks will be holding emergency conferences?”  **2 marks**

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1. What analogy does Amal use to describe her decision to wear the hijab? **3 marks**

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**Need to Know**

A hyphen (-) is a punctuation mark that usually appears inside a word. It can join two words and make them into a single compound word, such as hot-blooded, or metallic-red. A hyphen can also appear between a word and its prefix or suffix, as in co-worker, pre-owned and animal-like.

Not all words with prefixes and suffixes have hyphens – think of antibiotic. Likewise, some compound words can either be written as two words, with a hyphen, or closed up (fairy tale, fairy-tale or fairytale), so it is best to check a dictionary if you’re unsure.

Some compound words have more than one hyphen, such as mother-in-law and ten-year-old. People’s names can be hyphenated too; for example, Jean-Luc Picard and Shiloh Jolie-Pitt. These are sometimes called double-barrelled names.

1. What do you think Amal means when she says she’s been ‘whacked with …confusing identity hyphens?’ **2 marks**

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1. What other examples of hyphens can you find in the extract? **2 marks**

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1. Does Amal name any of her friends in this extract? **3 marks**

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1. What labels do Amal and her friends use to describe themselves? What do these nouns normally mean? What do they mean when she and her friends use them? **3 marks**

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1. What label does Amal use to describe her parents? **2 marks**

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1. From the way she talks about them, do you think Amal:
2. Does not like her parents much and is critical of them
3. Loves her parents but sees their imperfections
4. Finds her parents amusing but cannot wait to leave home?

Find evidence to support your answer. Explain your evidence. **3 marks**

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