



SWIMMING TOWARD A DREAM

Written by Reem Faruqi
Illustrated by Asma Enayah
Published by Page Street Kids

ACTIVITY GUIDE

Growing up in Damascus, the pool was Yusra Mardini's happy place. She learned to swim before she could walk. And with swimming came a dream—to compete in the Olympic games.

But when war came to Syria, Yusra's home—and her pool—were no longer safe. Yusra and her sister set out on a harrowing journey, crossing the sea in search of safety.

In the inspirational tale that follows, Yusra's courageous spirit shines. Crammed on a too-small refugee boat, disaster strikes when the boat's motor breaks! Scared but determined, Yusra plunges into the water and starts swimming.

Infused with hope, Yusra's story encourages readers to pursue their own dreams, revealing how she met waves of danger with strength and perseverance. One breath at a time. Readers will dive into this courageous tale of an athlete, refugee, and hero who inspired the world with her resolve to pursue her Olympic dream.

Reem Faruqi is the award-winning children's book author of *Lailah's Lunchbox*, which is based on her own experiences as a young Muslim girl immigrating to the United States. She also wrote *Amira's Picture Day*, *I Can Help*, *Miloo's Mind*, and the middle grade novels, *Golden Girl*, *Unsettled*, *Anisa's International Day*, and *Call Me Adnan*. Her award-winning books have received many starred reviews and appeared on various "Best of" lists, including *Amira's Picture Day*, which was selected as an ALA Notable Book for 2022. After surviving Atlanta traffic and the school drop off, Reem spends her days trying to write, but instead gets distracted easily by her camera and buttery sunlight. She lives with her husband and daughters. You can find her at www.ReemFaruqi.com.

Asma Enayah, like Yusra, grew up in Damascus, Syria, and is honored and thrilled to illustrate a story so close to her heart. A full-time children's book artist, Asma has illustrated several previous books including *Olive and Charlotte*, a tale of two princess sisters, and *The Unbreakable Thread* about the bond between a mother and child. Besides creating art for her next book, Asma enjoys crafting sweet treats in the kitchen and playing her sport of choice: tennis. An enthusiastic traveler, Asma has visited more than 27 countries, and currently lives in Dubai with her husband and two daughters. Find her online at www.asmaoriginal.com.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did things change for Yusra when the Syrian Civil War started?
2. How do you think Yusra felt on the boat with the other refugees?
3. What does the word resilient mean?
4. How does Yusra make it clear that she is resilient?
5. Yusra and her big sister, Sara, have to leave their home. What do you think it would be like to have to leave your home and some of your family and move to an unfamiliar place?
6. How did Yusra still chase her dreams despite the war?
7. What is one thing that you can start doing to chase your dreams?

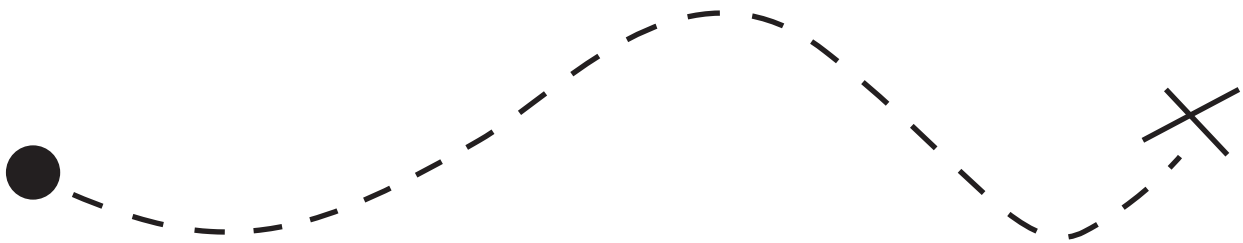
FOLLOW YUSRA'S JOURNEY

Yusra and Sara flee their home and journey to Europe in hopes of a better future and a chance for Yusra to swim again. Fill in the blanks of the places Yusra journeys to. (Hint use the map in the back matter of the book.)

1. At 17 years old, Yusra leaves _____ with her big sister, Sara; their father's two cousins; and other refugees.
2. Yusra and Sara reach _____ by plane.
3. Then, Yusra and Sara reach _____ by plane. Here, they take a boat with eighteen other refugees. The boat's engine dies after about twenty minutes, and the dinghy takes on water. Passengers throw their bags overboard. The sisters and a few male passengers take turns in the choppy 4. _____ to keep the boat afloat. Finally, the engine turns back on.
5. After three and a half hours in the sea, the passengers reach _____. In many parts of Europe, refugees are not welcome. Yusra deals with struggles such as taxis not stopping for them, restaurants turning them away, and being banned from riding the trains.

From here, they travel by land, walking and taking trains and buses to... 6. _____, 7. _____, 8. _____, and 9. _____.

10. 25 days after leaving, Yusra and Sara reach _____.



LOCATIONS

Izmir, Turkey

Darayya, Syria

Budapest, Hungary

Macedonia-Greece Border

Beirut, Lebanon

Belgrade, Serbia

Aegean Sea

Berlin, Germany

Vienna, Austria

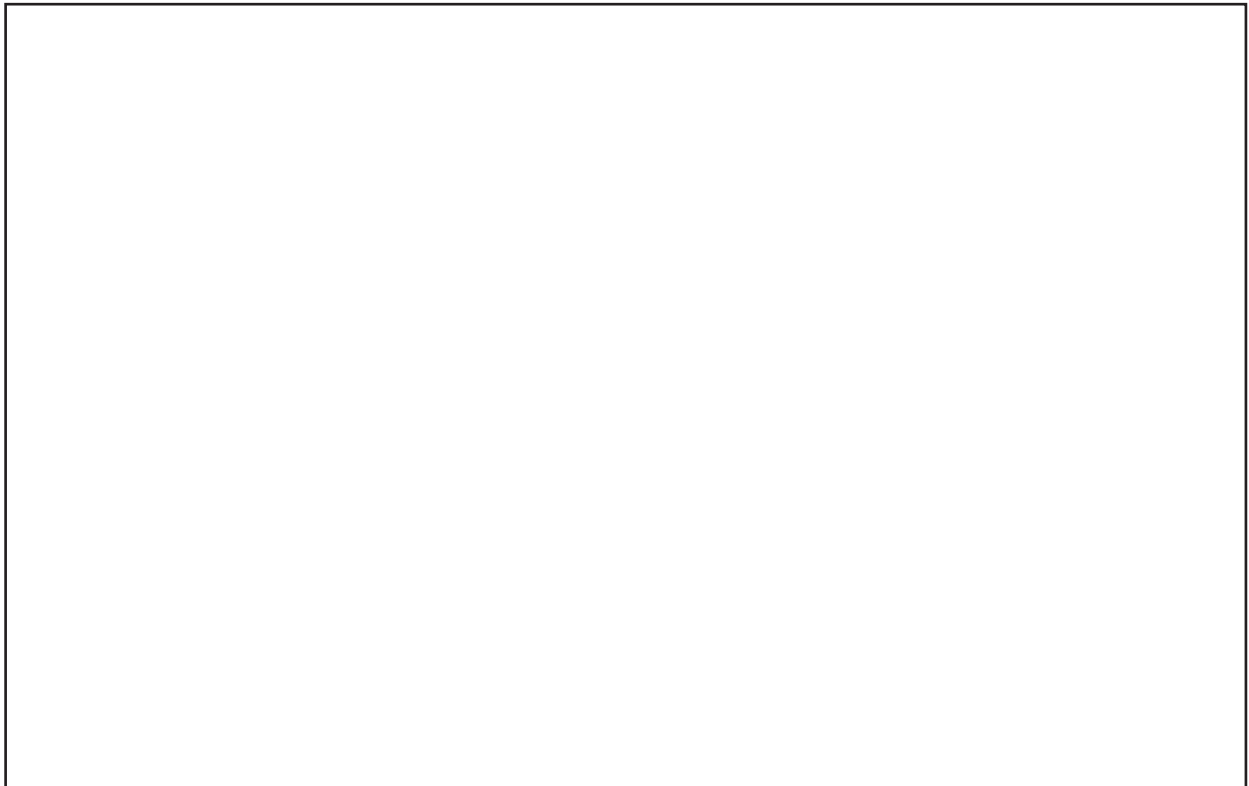
Lesbos, Greece

Answer Key: 1. Darayya, Syria 2. Beirut, Lebanon 3. Izmir, Turkey 4. Lesbos, Greece 5. Macedonia-Greece Border 6. Belgrade, Serbia 7. Budapest, Hungary 8. Vienna, Austria 9. Berlin, Germany

ONE BREATH AT A TIME

Yusra followed her dream of swimming in the face of adversity, ONE BREATH AT A TIME. What's a dream that you have? What are some obstacles you might face in making it come true?

Draw a picture of you accomplishing that dream.



WORD SEARCH

S W I M M E R F X J
O L Y M P I C S Z A
X B B U J Q N C L E
S A D B R E A T H G
P A S S E N G E R E
S P O Q T A U R X A
Y O S H I S E H A N
R O D A M A S C U S
I L H R E F U G E E
A A Y U S R A U W A

KEY

passenger

Damascus

swimmer

Aegean Sea

Olympic

breath

refugee

Yusra

Syria

pool

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WORD SEARCH (ANSWERS)



KEY

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