

Building Bridges: Peace, Salaam, Shalom

Melissa Stoller

Callie Metler

Shirin Rahman

Kate Talbot, Illustrator

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Three determined friends encourage and support each other through their community fundraising efforts in the uplifting picture book Building Bridges.

In Melissa Stoller, Callie Metler, and Shirin Rahman's picture book *Building Bridges*, three girls of different faiths unite to raise funds for their community.

Hannah, Savera, and Molly are best friends. They learn that the bridge in their favorite park is falling apart, so they team up to raise money to rebuild it. They sell friendship bracelets, host a bake sale, and put together a concert, but these efforts don't generate enough cash. Still, having failed a few times, they persevere. Ultimately, they decide to organize a community-wide event with their class, Building Bridges Day, during which they unite the diverse residents of their town, celebrate people's commonalities, and advocate for peace and kindness.

Hannah, Savera, and Molly form a united front in spite of their different backgrounds, but they also sometimes blur together: in conversation, their words are indistinguishable from one another's, and their levels of ambition, excitement, and emotion are identical. The girls' religions are not named outright, normalizing their respectful friendship in alignment with the book's goal of encouraging peace and teamwork among groups. Details that tie in to Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions adorn the girls' homes to fill in specifics of their worlds in an unobtrusive manner, limiting their expressions to simple adornments—like necklaces, foods, and the names the girls call their grandmothers by.

The illustrations depict the girls with adorable round heads and appealing and expressive faces against backgrounds of myriad muted colors. They also show how the seasons shift over the course of the book, punctuating the yearlong process from the bridge's initial closing to its eventual reopening. Racial and cultural diversity is evident in the physical appearances of their fellow community members, too.

Three determined friends encourage and support each other through their community fundraising efforts in the uplifting picture book *Building Bridges*.

AIMEE JODOIN (December 23, 2022)

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