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Applications Open for Fellowship to Foster Authenticity and Progress in Muslim Storytelling & Children's Publishing

Muslims from all backgrounds and experience levels are welcome to apply

Honesdale, PA – The Highlights Foundation is now accepting applications for a two-year fellowship for Muslim Storytellers.

The fellowship is funded by a grant with the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art's (DDFIA) Building Bridges Program. The mission of the Building Bridges Program is to support national efforts, working with U.S. Muslims, to increase mutual understanding and well-being among diverse populations for the benefit of building stronger, inclusive communities.

The fellowship aims to further that bridge-building mission by creating space for more diverse, authentic Muslim narratives for children and young adults, and by addressing common misperceptions of those narratives in the children's publishing industry.

"There's no doubt that the publishing industry lacks Muslim voices and that our communities have struggled with misrepresentations for far too long. An opportunity, through this grant, to provide a welcoming space for Muslim writers to develop the stamina, skills, and networks to be successful, allows this state to be reversed and for our communities to develop and thrive creatively," said S. K. Ali, a critically acclaimed author and member of the fellowship's programming committee.

The Highlights Foundation is striving to work in coordination with organizations and individual storytellers who, together, have spent decades calling for greater representation of Muslim storytellers and stories for children.

The fellowship programming committee includes several Muslim authors at various points in their journey of creating for children and teens, including Ali, Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, M.O. Yuksel, Neda Hashmi, Narmeen Lakhani, Rukhsana Khan, and Zaynah Qutubuddin. They hope that the diversity and plurality of the Muslim community and Muslim narratives shines through in this program, and that it creates a lasting community of Muslim children's authors and illustrators across backgrounds.

They also hope that the community can build upon itself to bring about sustained positive change: that more Muslim children will be able to see themselves in their own books, and that all children can see more Muslims in the stories they read.

“While there are several emerging kidlit Muslim authors and an ever-growing number of Muslim writers on Twitter, there is no foundational group,” said Qutubuddin, who is currently working on her first young adult fantasy novel. “Muslims are not a monolith. We have many experiences to share and many stories to weave in a way that the world has not allowed us to express. There is more to us than 9/11 trauma, hijabs, and being called the T word. We want our children and children’s children to grow up in a world where they see themselves in the pages of not just the “Annual Muslim Day” book, but shelves upon shelves of every genre for every age featuring Muslim characters of every background.”

Aspiring, debut, and established Muslim authors and illustrators living in the US or Canada are invited to apply if their work speaks to children and teens. The hope is that everyone sees space for themselves in this program, including Muslim authors and illustrators with one or more published titles, and Muslim creatives considering telling stories for children and teens.

Sixteen fellows will be chosen from the applicants, and offered direct support over the course of two years in craft, mentorship, community, mental health, and bridge building with the publishing industry.

Lakhani was one of The Highlights Foundation inaugural Diversity Fellows in 2019 before serving on this fellowship’s programming committee. She is excited about the opportunities for the Muslim Storytellers who will participate in this program, and hopes that they will receive the same kind of support that she has through the Highlights Foundation community.

“The sense of community with others who share my vision for children's literature as an integral opportunity to shape a better world through more narrative representation has given me the courage to pursue an otherwise intimidating creative endeavor. Prior to the fellowship, I would not have had the financial nor industry access to be able to receive such rigorous training and mentorship in my writing craft. The Highlights Foundation has and continues to demonstrate both its confidence in and its unyielding commitment to my success as a Muslim storyteller,” she says.

Those interested in applying for the fellowship are invited to attend a webinar session on June 29, 2021 at 6pm Eastern. It will include a discussion between members of the program committee, with an overview of the program and call for applications. We also invite those offering support to the Muslim community to join the session as well. It is open to everyone.

Applications will be accepted through July 15. The fellowship is slated to begin in late August.

The Highlights Foundation is also currently working with the program committee to build out the sessions and opportunities for the fellowship. If you or your organization can offer support to Muslim Storytellers and are interested in participating, please contact us [via this form](#).

Registration for the webinar, a full program description, and fellowship application materials can be accessed at <https://www.highlightsfoundation.org/muslimstorytellers>.

CONTACTS:

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