



# NOT SO SHY

by Noa Nimrodi



## Educator's Guide

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# Introduction

**NOT SO SHY** is a middle grade novel that tells the story of twelve-year-old Shai who moves from Israel to the US and has to adapt to a new culture while navigating challenges such as making new friends, being different in a group, and facing anti-Semitism.

This guide aims to provide discussion questions for educators to engage their students in thoughtful conversations and reflections related to these themes.  
(Includes focus on SEL competencies, and STEAM related subjects)



Noa Nimrodi is an Israeli-American author living near the ocean in Southern California. NOT SO SHY is her debut Middle-Grade novel and is inspired by her own life experiences of moving between Israel and the US, both as a child and later in life as a mom. For more about Noa visit her website at [noanimrodi.com](http://noanimrodi.com)

# Belonging

## How does Shai feel when she first moves to a new country?

What challenges does Shai face when trying to adapt to a new culture? How do you think you would feel if you had to move to a new country and adapt to a new culture? What would be some of your challenges, and how would you try to overcome them?

## In what ways does Shai feel she's different from her classmates?

Have you ever felt different than your classmates? How did you handle it? What approach did you use to fit in or to embrace your differences?

**What makes you feel at home?** Does your sense of belonging come from the place you live in or from the people you live with? Or both? Which is more important to you?

**Shai and her grandmother both moved from their country of origin around the same age.** What are the similarities between their immigration stories? In what way are Shai's experiences different from Safta's? What does Shai learn from Safta?

## Why did Aviva (Shai's safta) feel like an outsider growing up in Iraq?

Why did she feel like an outsider after moving to Israel? Did you or someone you know ever experience similar feelings? What do you think is the best way to reconcile with belonging to two cultures?

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## Activity

Using pencil and paper draw the outline of a house, inside of it draw or write all the things that you love about your home (consider what makes it special to you, what instils your sense of belonging).



# Family

**What are Shai's feelings towards her dad when they first move to America?** How do her feelings change as the story progresses?

How would you feel if you needed to move from the place you live in for the sake of your parent's career?

**What are the different emotions Shai has towards her younger sister Gili?**

Do you think it is easier or harder for Gili to adapt to the move than it is for Shai?

In what ways are Gili and Shai's struggles different? In what ways are they the same?

Have you ever been jealous of a sibling or close friend for being able to do something you're struggling with?

**In what ways is Shai's family different from Kay-Lee's?** In what ways are they the same?

**Why doesn't Kay-Lee read the letters from her mom?** Why do you think she keeps them? Why do you think she makes paper cranes out of them?

What does she learn when she finally does read them? How does this change the way she feels?

**What is unique about the necklace that Shai wears?**

In what way does it make her feel connected to her heritage?

Is there an item of special value in your family that is passed down from one generation to the next? If there is, what is it and what is the story behind it?

If not, what is something special that you or your parents (or grandparents) own, that you think could become such a family heirloom? What makes it special to you?

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## Activity

Write a letter to a family member describing your feelings towards them and maybe fold it into a paper crane. (You may choose to give the letter to the person you wrote to, or keep it to yourself).

You can follow this step-by-step tutorial:

<https://youtu.be/1XSomIZ-fPg>

(or any other of the many options available on YouTube).



# Bullying/Hate/Anti-Semitism

(incorporate the safety in speaking to adults when in need)

**What is antisemitism?** How does it affect Shai?  
What advice would you give Shai as she faces antisemitism?

**Shai doesn't tell her parents about the antisemitic incident she experienced at first. Why do you think she doesn't want to talk about it?** Do you think she does the right thing by telling her parents eventually? Why or why not?  
What made Shai change her mind? What would you do in a similar situation?

**Why doesn't Saba (grandpa) approve of Shai wearing the Star-of-David necklace?**  
Why does Shai take off the necklace? What makes Shai decide to put it back on towards the end of the story?

**What can we do as individuals and as a community to combat antisemitism and other forms of discrimination?**

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## Activity

Write a newspaper article about an incident of discrimination (or bullying) you experienced or witnessed.

In your article, explain the severity of the event and conclude with a call to action (what can be done to prevent such events in the future).



# Stigmas, Facts and Misconceptions

**What are some of the reactions Shai faces when her classmates first learn she's Jewish and from Israel? Why do you think they react this way? In what way is Jenny's reaction (page 46) different from Chris's reaction (page 63)?**

**Why do you think Hakim isn't nice to Shai at first?**

On page 138 Hakim says to Shai "I've never met anyone from Israel before. And I've heard . . ." then he stops mid sentence. Why do you think he stops? What do you think he was going to say?

How do Shai and Hakim end up being friends? What do they have in common?

**Have you ever assumed something about someone judging them only by their looks or their association with a certain group?**

Have you ever been judged that way yourself? If so, how did you deal with it?

**The school counselor says to Shai and her mom, "So happy to have you here with us. So dangerous in Israel." (page 29). How does Ema (Mom) react to this statement? How does Shai feel about this?**

Do you think living in Israel is more dangerous than living where you live? Why or why not?

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## Activity

Write a fictional journal entry from the point of view of a character who is misjudged because of a certain characteristic (you may focus on anything about your character that makes them stand out in a group).



# Friendships and New beginnings

**How does Shai feel about making new friends? Why is it important to her?**  
How do Shai's friendships change over the course of the story? Why do you think they change?

**Have you ever had to make new friends?** What were some of your strategies? Were they effective? Why or why not?

**What causes a shift in the friendship between Jenny and Shai?**  
What ignites Shai's friendship with Kay-Lee?

**What helps friendships to last?** What might cause a friendship to end? Do you have examples from your own life of friendships that lasted and friendships that didn't? What are some ways to help a friendship thrive? How do you cope with a friendship that ended?

**Why do you suppose Shai finds more in common with Kay-Lee, who shares no similar background with her, than she does with Yael (the daughter of Avi & Lily Levi) who is Israeli and speaks Hebrew like Shai?**  
What is the most important thread in friendship? What do you have in common with your friends?

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## Activity

Discuss the notion that we have more in common than we think.

Divide the classroom into groups of 4-5. Give the group a few minutes to discuss amongst themselves and try to find three things that all group members have in common.  
(Could be related to hobbies, favorite foods, music, books, family, etc.)

Have each group present their commonalities to the rest of the class.

Imagine a 'Friend Finder' app that could help you find a friend in a new place.

What qualities would you enter in a search for a friend? What do you have to offer in a friendship? What traits would you list as having yourself that could encourage someone else to befriend you?

# Emotional Regulation

(discuss finding hobbies and ways to deal with emotions in a healthy way)

On page 5, Shai draws her dad’s boss being hit by disasters. What emotions do you think she’s expressing through her art? Do you think this form of expression might be useful in dealing with emotions?

How does Shai feel when she draws the mural on her bedroom wall (chapter 5)? Do you think it was a good idea? What do you do when you are overwhelmed with emotions? Are you able to recognize the emotions you feel when you are feeling them? (for example, being happy, sad, angry, upset). What helps you cope with negative feelings?

On page 83 Shai says “music is my favorite language now.” Why do you think she feels this way?

What is special about music as a language? How do different types of music make you feel?

On page 132 Shai says “Drawing clears my mind of bad thoughts.” Do you have a hobby or a special creative outlet which helps you deal with emotions in a constructive way?

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## Activity

Draw your own entry to the fictional drawing competition Shai enters.

Create an image depicting a peaceful world for the ‘Children for Peace’ organization. (you may use any art medium).





# Holidays and Traditions

**What holidays are mentioned in the book?** (Hint: you'll find Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Korean celebrations throughout the story).

**Which holidays were new to Shai?** Which were new to Kay-Lee?

**Which holidays mentioned in the book do you celebrate?** Did you learn about new holidays that are not celebrated in your own family?

What are some holidays and traditions unique to your family?

**What are some of the traditional foods and dishes that are mentioned in the book?** Do you have any favorite family recipes?

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## Activity

Write a list of your favorite family traditions.

In groups of 4-5 students discuss your lists and find which traditions you have in common and which traditions/holidays are new to you. Have a representative from each group share what you learned as a group.

Make your own cheese Bourekas.  
Author's recipe at the end of this guide.

# Language

**Shai's name means timid (shy) in English, but means gift in Hebrew.**

What other Hebrew words mentioned in the story sound the same as a word in English but have a totally different meaning? (Hint: one appears on pages 6-7, the other on page 16).

**Do you (or someone in your family) speak a second language?** If so, what language? Are there words that sound the same in both languages you speak? Is there a language you wish you could speak? What is it? How would it be helpful in your life?

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## Activity

Find the English meaning of the following words/expressions which appear in the book:

Extra challenge— Writing it in Hebrew! (same words).  
Try to copy these words. Note that Hebrew is written from right to left.

- Shai	שׁי -
- Abba	אבא -
- Ema	אמא -
- Saba	סבא -
- Safta	סבתא -
- Die	דײ -
- Seuss	סוס -
- L'chaim	לחיים -
- Shabbat Shalom	שבת שלום -
- Bruchim Ha'baem	ברוכים הבאים -
- Heefhida otach	הפחידה אותך -
- Shoko besakit	שוקו בשקית -

# Discussing the Use of Literary Devices

## Symbolism:

At the beginning of the book, Shai breaks the ceramic heart her mom hangs on the wall. In what way does this incident reflect Shai's feelings? Towards the end, Shai herself makes three clay hearts. How does this scene symbolize the change Shai went through in the story?

## Idioms:

When Hakim tells Shai to "break a leg" (page 190) what does he mean? Why is Shai confused?

Find another example in the book of an idiom that is new to Shai (hint: it appears on page 102).

Can you think of other examples of idioms that might be confusing to someone who isn't fluent in English?

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## Activity

Write a paragraph telling a story in which a character uses an idiom (of your choice) and another character takes it literally.

(Examples for idioms that could be fun for this prompt: on cloud nine, hit the sack, beat around the bush, take a rain check, tied up at the office, it's raining cats and dogs).



# Social and Life Sciences Topics for Discussion

(May align with 6th grade common core science)

**What are some of the pros and cons mentioned in the book for genetically modifying organisms?** (Depending on the age of the students, class can be divided into two groups for a debate— pro-GMO vs. anti-GMO based on examples from the book).

**What is the difference between genetic modification and cross-breeding?** (comes up on page 129). What examples can you find in the book?

**In your own words, explain the mere exposure effect (mentioned in pages 181-183).** Can you think of an example of a thing or a person that you developed a preference to based on this psychological phenomenon?

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## Activity

Build your own DNA helix out of candy like Shai does with her science group (in chapter 24).

<https://youtu.be/dC9uuHolgXk>

(Great example. More examples can be found on YouTube)



# Journal Prompts

## (Text-to-Self Connections)

Through journaling, students will explore and reflect on their own feelings of self-identity, beliefs, relationships, overcoming challenges, and acceptance of others using themes from the book as a guide.

Students will be encouraged to identify their own strengths and challenges, recognize their own feelings and emotions, and develop a sense of empathy and acceptance of others.

1. **Confronting prejudice:** Describe a time when you witnessed someone being treated unfairly because of their race, religion, or culture. How did it make you feel, and what did you do about it? How can you stand up against prejudice and discrimination?
2. **Being new in a group:** Have you ever been the new kid in school or joined a new club or team? How did you feel, and what did you do to make new friends and feel included? How can you make others feel welcome and included in a new group?
3. **Adapting to a new culture:** Have you ever visited a place or lived in a community that was very different from your own? How did you adapt to the new culture, and what did you learn from the experience? How can you appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity?
4. **Being resilient:** Describe a time when you faced a difficult challenge or setback. How did you cope with it, and what did you learn about yourself? How can you build resilience and overcome obstacles in the future?
5. **Self-identity:** What makes you unique, and what do you like most about yourself? How can you embrace your individuality and be proud of who you are, even when others might not understand or accept you?
6. **Family dynamics:** Have you ever felt neglected by a family member, friend, or caregiver? How did it make you feel, and what did you do to cope with those feelings? How can you find support and build healthy relationships with others who care about you?

# Bourekas Recipe

To get a visual idea of what the different stages look like, check out:

<https://youtube.com/shorts/cXqLgzqalVY?feature=share>

For about 30 bourekas you'll need:

- 2-3 sheets of puff pastry (or squares)
- A blend of grated mozzarella, crumbled feta and cottage cheese (or any other preferred blend of cheeses. Ricotta also works well). Use about 1/3-1/2 cup of each type of cheese. You can choose to make with any other filling of your choice. Potato bourekas (mashed) are also common in Israel.
- 1 egg
- Sesame seeds for topping



1. Mix the cheeses well. Add a bit of the egg to it (leave the rest for later). Don't add too much salt if using feta cheese.
2. On a clean surface, cut the puff pastry sheets into squares of about 4x4 inches (depending on the size of sheets you use. Mine turn out a bit smaller as I get 15 squares out of 10x15 inch sheets).
3. Place a tablespoon full of the cheese filling in the center of each square.
4. Create triangles by folding one corner over to the opposite corner. Pinch along the edges to seal. (You can also press around the edges with the tines of a fork).
5. Lay the bourekas on a baking sheet.
6. Whisk egg with a bit of water. Brush each triangle with the egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds.
7. Bake for 20-30 minutes in a pre-heated oven (350°F) until golden brown.
8. Serve warm.

## **BETEAVON!**

(Which is the equivalent of the French Bon-apétit)

And if you still want just one more activity, try to come up with an English word meaning Enjoy Your Meal



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