

## **PS 39 Diversity and Inclusion Book of the Month: March**

### **Theme: Women's History**

**Book Title:** Nasreen's Secret School: A True Story from Afghanistan  
By Jeanette Winter

**Grade Level:** 2nd / 3rd

#### **Book Summary:**

Young Nasreen has not spoken a word to anyone since her parents disappeared.

In despair, her grandmother risks everything to enroll Nasreen in a secret school for girls. Will a devoted teacher, a new friend, and the worlds she discovers in books be enough to draw Nasreen out of her shell of sadness?

Based on a true story from Afghanistan, this inspiring book will touch readers deeply as it affirms both the life-changing power of education and the healing power of love.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- When the soldiers came to Herat, the city in Afghanistan where Nasreen lived, everything changed. What was life like for Nasreen and her family before the soldiers came? What was it like after they arrived?
- Nasreen went to a secret school. What happened at the secret school that does not happen at your school?
- Going to the secret school changed Nasreen. Before going to the school, she was silent and never smiled. After attending the school she was different. What changes did Grandmother notice in Nasreen? How do you think Nasreen felt going to the secret school?
- Grandmother also changed. At the beginning of the story she was troubled. At the end of the story she tells us, "As for me, my mind is at ease." What happened to make Nasreen's grandmother calmer and more at ease?
- Imagine that you could ask Nasreen some questions. What would they be?
- Resisting something means fighting against it. What actions did people in this story take to resist the changes made by the soldiers? Were their actions important? Why?
- What evidence is there that Nasreen and her grandmother successfully resisted the unfair changes made by the soldiers?
- In the Author's Note, Jeannette Winter gives readers information that helps them understand the book. Why do you think the author put this note in the front of the book? Did these notes help you to understand the story more than you would have without this background information?
- To completely understand this story, look carefully at both the words and illustrations. You will see that they work together to create meaning.
  - What information is only given in the written text? It mentions the city of Herat, Grandmother, and Nasreen. It mentions that art, music, and learning once flourished in Herat.
  - What information is only given in the illustration? It shows Nasreen enclosed in darkness. A dark cloud hangs over the whole city.

- How do the written text and the illustration work together? The text and the illustrations together show that darkness is enclosing the city and how this darkness affects Nasreen.
- A courageous person is someone who has the mental or moral strength to persevere and withstand danger or fear. This person can do difficult and even dangerous things. Sometimes a courageous person defies authority. Imagine that you have been selected to present an award to Nasreen's grandmother for her courageous behavior. Explain why she deserves this award.
- As her grandmother said, "...the soldiers can never close the windows that have opened for my granddaughter." What does this statement mean to you? How did both Nasreen and her grandmother act courageously against unfair practices? How are you brave and courageous in your life?