

Moon Watchers: Shirin's Ramadan Miracle

Reza Jalali

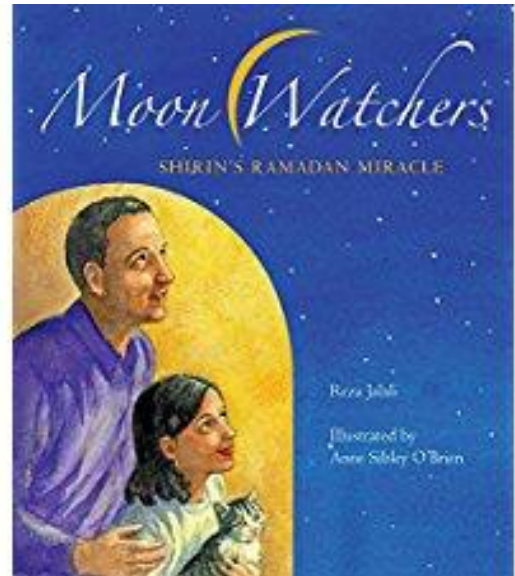
Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien

Paperback \$8.95, ISBN 978-0-88448-587-2

9 x 10, 36 pages, color illustrations Children / Multicultural; Grades 2-6

Moon Watchers offers an inside view of daily life in a modern Muslim family during Ramadan. Shirin and her older brother Ali have a history of not getting along, so when she discovers him sneaking food one afternoon during his Ramadan fast, she is tempted to tease him about his weakness. Instead of tattling, Shirin decides to mind her own business. She is determined to prove to her parents that she is ready to participate in this important rite of passage. Ultimately the little sister is surprised by a gift from her brother.

Readers from all faiths will appreciate this universal story with its thought-provoking focus on family life.



For Muslim people around the world, Ramadan is a month-long time for prayer, fasting, and charity. This "month of blessing" is not viewed as a time of hardship but instead as a time to develop self-discipline and increase awareness of and compassion for the poor and the hungry. It is a time to deepen connection with Allah through prayer and community. For this much-anticipated month, Muslim people gather together in homes, shops, and restaurants to break their fasts and pray.

Islam uses a lunar calendar, so the timing of Ramadan depends on the cycles of the moon. Ramadan lasts a lunar month: from new moon to full moon and back to new moon. Ramadan always begins on the first night of the new moon of the ninth month of the year. Because the lunar calendar's months are shorter than the solar calendar's months, Ramadan appears to "move" from year to year. As a result, fasting (no food or water) during the winter months is not quite so much a challenge as fasting during long, hot summer days.

It is the custom to start the day with a pre-dawn meal called suhoor, then not eat or drink again until after the sun has set. That post-daylight meal is called iftar. Sharing these pre-dawn and post-sunset meals is an important part of community and family bonding, which is part of why Shirin feels a bit left out.

Ramadan is as important to many Muslims as Christmas and Easter are to many Christians, and Passover, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashanah are to many Jewish people. Ramadan ends with a gift-giving celebration called Eid ul- Fitr, which means "festival of breaking the fast."

Moon Watchers could promote conversations about:

- Sibling rivalry
- Making ethical decisions
- Food, culture, and religious holidays
- Lessons that can be learned from the experience of fasting
- The role of the lunar calendar in Islam and other religions
- Diverse family traditions and practices for holidays

Additional Tilbury Picture Books

Lailah's Lunchbox by Reem Faruqi and Lea Lyon illustrator (2015)

Activity: Make Persian Rice

Here's a recipe with the crusty rice at the bottom that Shirin likes so much:

www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/Persian-Rice-with-Golden-Crust-100915

Activity: Moon Watch!

Plan to visit a planetarium or help students learn about how the observed phase of the moon is determined by the moon's position relative to the Earth and Sun through this lesson:

www.windows.ucar.edu/tour/link%3D/teacher_resources/lunar_edu.html

Activity: Research Local Religious Organizations in Your Town or City

- How many mosques, synagogues, churches, and other houses of worship are in your community?
- Discuss the similarities and differences between the Muslim religion and other major world religions.
- Identify other religions that use a lunar calendar.
- Identify other religions that have fasting as part of observing the faith.

Activity: Ethics—Right? Wrong?

How would you decide? Act out the story of *Moon Watchers* or have a discussion with students in small groups or as a whole class:

- Do you think that Shirin was correct in deciding not to tell her parents that Ali had eaten during the day? How would you handle a similar circumstance?
- Can you think of a circumstance when you absolutely would know that it was important to tell your parents about something your sibling was doing?
- How do you think fasting might help someone to feel compassion for the poor or less privileged?
- If you were to fast for one day, what do you think would be the most difficult part? What would you miss the most?
- Act out this story with different outcomes.

Activity: Discuss the Importance of Giving to Charity

- Create a class penny/coin jar to collect money to give to a charity.
- Students can research and offer suggestions of which local, national, or global charity should receive the money.
- Students also could write letters that accompany the donation check about why giving to charity is important.

Activity: Picture This!

Ask students to illustrate (using watercolors, colored pencils, or other medium) their favorite part of the book.