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THEMATIC ESSAY (FINAL)

       Confidence is the key; if you don’t believe in yourself, then nobody will. In the book, Does My Head Look Big In This? , by Randa Abdel-Fattah, the protagonist Amal makes a life-changing decision by deciding to wear the hijab in public. Amal knows that taking this step requires every ounce of courage and determination she has to face the world as a “towel-head.” People will taunt her with racist comments, and will give her awkward stares, but Amal just wakes up one day knowing this will happen, but still moves on with her choice. As Amal travels on this path full of twists and turns, she realizes that she needs to be more confident in herself; too many days are wasted comparing herself to others, and wishing she was something she isn’t. Everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses, and it is only when you accept everything you are---and aren’t---that you will truly succeed.
       Life is a roller-coaster for Amal, as she experiences what true confidence is for the first time. For example, Amal states how hard it is to walk around a non-Muslim country with a scarf on. “Because it's pretty hard to walk around with people staring at your "towel-head" and not feel kind of pleased with yourself if you manage to get through the stares and comments with your head held high.”(pg.7) Amal needs to gather the strength to wear the hijab in public. It may seem like an easy decision to most people, but it’s not. You have to deal with what the people in the outside world will say when they see this piece of cloth on your head, covering your hair. Not everyone will be very accepting of Amal wearing the scarf, and that creates the situation where Amal is required to shine, and go through with such a tough decision. Also, Amal began to gain more confidence in her choices as well. For example, she states, “So what? I can deal with all the crap...I want to try...and I want that identity. I want to know what it means to be strong enough to walk around with it on and stick up for my right to wear it.” (pg.24) Most people would have regretted a decision that would change their life completely, but Amal stuck with this decision. As much as she wanted to back down, she never did. She handled all the stares and glances from all her classmates, and people in the real world. Amal holds her head up high and if anyone dares taunt her, she taunts them right back. She proves to everyone that she is better than they think she is, and shakes off all the drama the popular, pretty girls try to cause. Amal realizes that the people that mind don’t matter. She knew she had to do whatever she needed to for herself, and she had to have the willpower to ignore the words that people uttered about her. That’s what made her wake-up one day, and decide that she wanted to do this. Amal also shows her powerful confidence, when Ms.Walsh refuses to allow Amal to wear the hijab in school. Ms.Walsh thought that Amal would ruin the flourishing history of the institution when she says to Amal, “But you must understand that I have an educational institution to run, and there are certain guidelines.”(pg.41) Amal sprung a new ounce of confidence, by standing up for what she believed in, even if it meant standing alone. Amal didn’t allow her voice to be replaced by anbody else’s voice. She knew that there would be consequences for her decision, but if she never got this experience, that confidence hidden in her would never have the chance to come out. Amal’s confidence will allow her to reach success, and be the person she always wished she could be. Amal only gained her confidence from this experience in which she stopped to look fear in the face. Amal believed she could, and she did. Amal learned to do something that made her understand what it feels like to love yourself, but she also had to prove that she was true to her faith, by doing the acts that made her afraid to be who she was.
     Confidence also springs up in Amal when she is forced to show to the world what her religion really is. For example, as Amal was washing her feet for her prayer, the two rude girls of the grade, Tia and Claire walked in on her. They asked her in a taunting tone what she was doing, and as much as Amal wanted to hide, she spoke the truth without feeling ashamed. “That’s right. I wash my feet five times a day. So that means that at any given time of the day, my feet are cleaner than your face.”(pg.118) Amal didn’t let what others thought of her or her religion get in her way of what she wanted to achieve. She wanted to be a good person, and prove that Muslims are not as bad as people think they are, and most of all, she did not want to let God down. Amal grew confidence, because she knew that God believed in her the most out of everyone, and if she let God down, what would she say to Him? Also, when Amal was going to go to the room for prayer, her friend Adam, stopped her and began questioning her about her religion, and Amal felt extremely uncomfortable. Yet, Amal breathed, believed, and got through her friend’s furious questioning. “That’s how prayer is for me. It sounds corny, I know. Except it’s...kind of like that.”(p.146) Most people would be ashamed of performing religious acts in front of other people, but Amal threw herself a challenge that required the courage to be somebody in a world where people want you to be like everyone else. Amal believed in herself, and achieved everything that she had wanted so far in life. The confidence Amal gained allowed her to plunge into new chances. She learned that she should take chances, because she might never know if a perfect moment was waiting just around the corner. Amal learned that if the struggle hurt, it hurt because it mattered to her. Amal achieved her true happiness, because she had something to hope for. Sometimes, the smallest decision can have a big impact on your life; just as the hijab changed Amal’s life. The confidence Amal gained allowed her to find herself in a world that tried to change her.
     When Amal felt the need to be a better person, she did the things that fulfilled that need, and allowed her to love and be herself. For example, Amal felt that she had to keep up with her religion, and prove to people that Muslims are not the terrorists that other people think they are. She wanted people to be able to see her as the good Muslim she is, and accept her for her religion.For example, Amal states that, “But at the same time, I feel like my passion and conviction in Islam are bursting inside me, and I want to prove to myself that I’m strong enough to wear my badge of faith.”(pg.7) Amal wanted to be able to embrace her Muslim identity, because she wanted to love herself. If Amal’s dream of wearing the hijab and showing her Muslim identity to an Australian community didn’t scare her, she never would have been able to feel the determination that shows that you are succeeding. This sudden change of trying to be true to her faith allowed Amal to believe in her Islamic heritage, and spread her wings. Amal needed to believe that wonderful things would come out of her choice and her change. Just because things started to get hard for Amal, didn’t mean she was going to give up.If God brung Amal to it, he can get her through it. Also, as Amal practices her religion, and gains knowledge of her faith, she begins to gain faith in herself when she states, “It’s the immigrants’ stories and confrontations and pains and joys which have empowered me to know myself...”(pg.359) She was perfect the way she was, and she learned how to embrace her identity. The people who were completely different than Amal, made her realize that her confidence took her a long way in life. She believed in God, believed in the hijab, believed in the most important people in her life, and most of all, she believed in herself. Amal took that first step by trying something new, and plunging into the darkness. That darkness allowed Amal to find the light; the confidence that’s been hidden in her for so long. As she grew more fond of who she was as a person, she also changed as a person. That change brung strength in Amal that would allow her to face the even worse and hard challenges in life. Amal faced her present with confidence, and will face her future as a fearless woman.
     Believe in yourself and all that you are; know that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle. Amal, from Does My Head Look Big In This? goes on a path where she learns to find herself, believe in herself, and embrace herself. People will not accept Amal’s decisions, but Amal realized that if you do everything the world wants, you’ll never be determined and you’ll never be happy. People will try and break you in your life, but you just have to smile, shake it off, and keep your dream in mind. In life, people can do whatever they want. People should just believe, because that’s the first step in achieving what you truly want. But if people don’t believe, they’ll never get there. Forget all the reasons why it won’t work, and believe all the reasons that it will.