

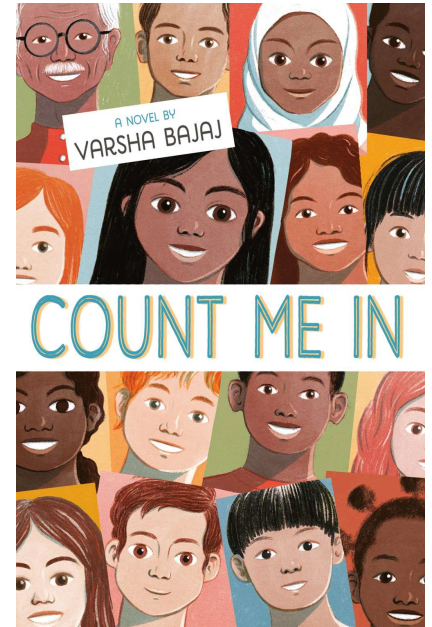


Selecting a book for your reading program is an important decision. To help you select the right book for your young readers and your community, we are providing the following context related to potentially sensitive content to help make a well-informed decision. As always, we encourage and recommend that book selections come after a full read of the book by multiple decision-makers or stakeholders.

Count Me In
by Varsha Bajaj

Read This Book to Discover...

The inspiring story of a 7th grade girl of Indian heritage who forms an unexpected friendship with the boy next door. They bond over basketball and math, and end up exploring questions about acceptance, hate, and what it means to belong. When her grandfather is attacked by a stranger, Karina embarks on an expansive social media project, using both her own photography and reader submissions to explore, document, and share what it means to belong, and what belonging looks like. As she says at one point, “This is all of us.” She titles her project: #CountMeIn.



What to Watch Out For...

The attack on her grandfather, which occurs randomly on the street 50 pages into the novel, is unexpected and frightening. The stranger yells anti-Arab and anti-Muslim epithets (though Mr. Chopra is of Indian heritage) and wields a knife. He knocks Mr. Chopra to the ground and kicks him. Mr. Chopra suffers a fractured femur and fully recovers in the hospital.

The identity of Mr. Chopra’s attacker is never known, but the police do inform Karina on the harsh resolution of the case. They tell her that the attacker, pursued by police, wound up in a high-speed car chase where he crashed and died as his car exploded. This dramatic news does end up providing some relief for Karina and her grandfather as well as remove any lingering anxiety (for the reader) about subsequent attacks.

Most folks on the internet who respond to Karina’s project are encouraging and

supportive, helping the project grow. However, there are a few spiteful posts that further fuel Karina's curiosity about where hatred and fear come from. Neither the author nor the book dwell on these responses, but they, too, necessarily fuel her project.

Some schools will elect to use *Count Me In* to explore questions about assimilation and citizenship. Others will want to steer clear if their community is sensitive to these subjects or unlikely to engage with the subject matter constructively.

