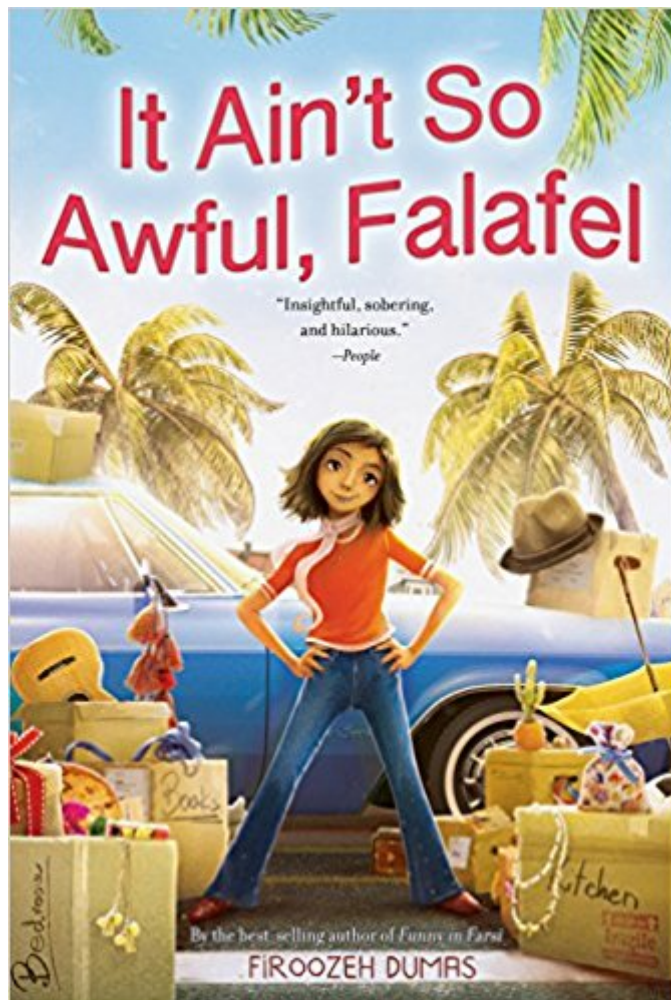


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# It Ain't So Awful, Falafel



## Synopsis

Zomorod (Cindy) Yousefzadeh is the new kid on the block . . . for the fourth time.

California's Newport Beach is her family's latest perch, and she's determined to shuck her brainy loner persona and start afresh with a new Brady Bunch name—Cindy. It's the late 1970s, and fitting in becomes more difficult as Iran makes U.S. headlines with protests, revolution, and finally the taking of American hostages. Even puka shell necklaces, pool parties, and flying fish can't distract Cindy from the anti-Iran sentiments that creep way too close to home. A poignant yet lighthearted middle grade debut from the author of the best-selling *Funny in Farsi*.

## Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 62 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #15,832 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Middle East](#) #31 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism](#) #32 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Fiction](#)

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4—In Dumas's first foray into middle grade fiction, readers follow Zomorod Yousefzadeh through middle school in Newport Beach, CA, during the Iran hostage crisis. Zomorod, who goes by Cindy (like in *The Brady Bunch*), and her family are from Iran, living in America while her father works to build an oil refinery in their home country with American engineers. While the Yousefzadehs are able to fly under the radar in their early days in America, mostly being mistaken for Mexican, their entire situation changes when Iranian students storm the U.S. Embassy and take American hostages. Facing hostile racism and the loss of their only source of income, Cindy's family

learns what it means to stick together, to create the best of an awful situation, and to embrace their heritage while incorporating new customs and friendships into their lives. This title reads more like a memoir than narrative fiction, which makes sense given Dumas's previous adult titles, *Funny in Farsi* (2003) and *Laughing Without an Accent* (2008, both Villard). Although the dialogue sometimes borders on textbooklike explanations of Iranian history, this tactic might be necessary for young readers to truly understand the underlying problems in later action. Dumas gives each short chapter a clever title, includes humorous asides throughout the narration, and keeps readers engaged with the very real and relatable difficulties of finding friends after moving, dealing with family issues both domestic and abroad, and discovering one's own identity in middle school. **VERDICT** For large middle grade collections looking to widen their diverse, upper middle grade offerings. Hand to fans of Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala* (Little, Brown, 2014) or Erin Entrada Kelly's *Blackbird Fly* (HarperCollins, 2015). —Brittany Staszak, St. Charles Public Library, IL --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Insightful, sobering, and hilarious." —People magazine "Filled with humorous touches and authentic cultural references, Dumas's story will resonate not just with young immigrants but with any readers trying to adapt to new situations." —Publishers Weekly \*

"Dumas's semi-autobiographical novel is both funny and affecting...Readers will be thoroughly invested in Cindy's story, whether holding their breath or laughing out loud, and always hoping that the Yousefzadehs will come out on top." —Booklist, STARRED review \*

"[A] fresh take on the immigrant experience — authentic, funny, and moving from beginning to end." —Kirkus Reviews, STARRED review "[It Ain't So Awful, Falafel] is funny, affecting, and nuanced...The novel doesn't sugarcoat the issues, but it balances these serious notes

with preteen antics and melodramas that Blume would be proud of; Cindy's voice will undoubtedly draw in readers from all backgrounds." —Horn Book "...keeps readers engaged with the very real and relatable difficulties of finding friends after moving, dealing with family issues both domestic and abroad, and discovering one's own identity in middle school." —School Library Journal —"Firoozeh Dumas's unique gift is her ability to use her wry, bold, but always gentle wit to tell serious stories about family, heritage, and loss. . . . In this era of suspicion and paranoia, [this book] offers a tender and compassionate glimpse into the immigrant experience." —Khaled Hosseini, bestselling author of *The Kite Runner* "This book is a sheer delight — rambunctious and rich. . . . Firoozeh Dumas writes with the perfect light touch that makes us wonder once again: Who is running the big world and why

not this person, please?"

•Naomi Shihab Nye, novelist and poet "[A]n honest, witty, and moving portrayal of what it means to be an Iranian immigrant in the late 1970s, during the Iran hostage crisis."

•Scholastic Teacher Magazine

"Not everyone hates Iranians," she assures me, putting down the paper. "People who hate just happen to be the loudest."

I loved, loved, loved this book, and this author. Highly recommend this laugh-out-funny and moving story of Zomorod (Cindy) Yousefzadeh, a girl from Iran who has spent several years, here and there, in America due to her father's engineering job. The time period is the late 70s, when a lot of people in America were hearing about Iran for the first time due to political strife and the taking of American hostages. I was exactly the same age as Zomorod during the period of time the story takes place. In Catholic School, we would turn toward the window, say the Pledge of Allegiance, and then take turns on who would lead the prayer for the hostages. Zomorod, like any kid, seeks to fit in, and is embarrassed by her parents. She has the added pressure of good English, but not knowing all the idioms, as well as parents who are different culturally from the other adults. And schoolmates who think she comes from a land of an animal she'd only ever seen in a zoo -- a camel. I found myself chuckling at several opportunities at Zomorod's observations and wit, and at her mix of love and embarrassment in regard to her parents. Americans are written as essentially good people, albeit a bit ignorant on world events. The most villainous character is still portrayed with some sympathy. Because the story takes place over a couple years, the younger characters get an opportunity to mature. In fact, one of the details that impressed me most is how the Zomorod at the beginning of the story and at the end are clearly the same girl, but each version think and behave appropriate to her age. She has gained wisdom and confidence and lasting friendship. (I adored her circle of friends.) If there is one flaw, it's that the author imparts a lot of info on the Iran, which is both interesting and vital to the story, but the information is often imparted in a less-than-natural fashion. The best method is Zomorod's best friend asking questions out of interests, concern, and her plan to become a journalist. But then there is the neighbor who stops periodically to ask to have events explained to him. I hope that there will be more books in this series, because I would love to stay in touch.

I read this book with my fifth grade students and while it is categorized as "middle grades" I still think YA lovers will enjoy it as long as romance is not a requirement. This book is semi-autobiographical and set in the 1970s, California. Zomorod is an

Iranian girl trying to find her place in the US during a hostage crisis. The highlight of this book for me was that it showed very clearly that just because you're from somewhere doesn't mean that you share the same ideas and tactics that your government does. It shows that we can't judge people on anything other than their own actions and beliefs. My students and I both enjoyed this book thoroughly. 4.5 out of 5 stars, hands down.

This is the type of story that I would love to see it turn into a movie. I can't believe someone could fictionalize their own story and still makes it sound very natural and authentic. The historic information is very useful and is presented in a very pleasant way. I don't want to give out too much information about the story, but I really appreciate its language, very poetic in many instances. The author definitely has a very good sense of humor. I was almost moved to tears because the emotion delivered between the lines was so genuine, and I am still feeling very complicated about the fact that part of the story was fictional. I don't know if I want it to be 100% real or partially real, because I would feel sad that some of the characters did not actually exist, and I really liked them. Some part of me hates to know that some things did happen as described. The bottom line is that I love 100% of the story.

Dumas hits it out of the park again -- a fictionalized memoir of growing up in California. In "It Ain't So Awful, Felafel," young Iranian-American Zomorod learns she really can find friends in a brat-filled Orange County middle school.

This is the story of a girl from Iran trying to fit in in Southern California. This is the story of 1977-1980. For those alive then this is when the shah fell and the Iranian hostage crisis happened. I was in high school and college during this time and it was amazing to read this history which I remember as told from another point of view. We all feel alienated from time to time in our lives. Imagism bring an Iranian in America during this time. Great voice. Great story. Friendship and heartache. Now to go read her other books.

I liked how it's so true while most stories of places just lie. They say how people were leaping for joy -figuratively- but that's not how it happened. I would recommend it to Ruta Sepetys and Jewell F. Taylor. Two history loving people with a knack for telling truths that some just put aside for the sake of happiness and happy stories. The world needs to know that we are not in a world of happy endings and Prince Charming's. This story tells the true struggle of the world. We all need to know about

this.

I absolutely love this book and my children listened to it as well! The author has a great way of storytelling and a good voice for narration. Also, it was very informative about historical and cultural events.

I am the opposite of Firoozeh. I am an American who grew up Iran. As a result there is SO much I can relate to in this book. When I finally returned to the US in the 1970s I was at a loss with the American culture. This book reads very quickly, it is funny and completely charming. I would recommend it for middleschoolers all the way up to adults. You don't have to be familiar with Iran to enjoy it!

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