**INSPIRATIONBASE**

*A collection of ethical leadership speeches*

Onjali Q.

Raúf



Onjali Q. Raúf is a bestselling author of children’s books and a human rights activist. which focuses on ending the abuse and trafficking of women and children, and *O’s Refugee Aid Team*, which provides support to refugee families. Her books focus on refugees and domestic violence. Her debut novel, *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, which is the story of a refugee boy finding peace in the U.K., received critical acclaim and won the 2019 Blue Peter Book Award and Waterstones Children’s Book Prize. In 2019, BBC named Raúf one of the *100 inspiring and influential women from around the world*. (<https://petersfraserdunlop.com/clients/onjali-q-rauf/>; <https://beingthestory.org.uk/spokesperson-network/speaker/onjali-q-rauf>; <https://onjaliqrauf.com/>)

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| **OQR 1*.*** Why children are the most powerful hope for change / Onjali Rauf / TEDxLondonWomen | | | |  |
| Now, if I get really lucky, maybe, just maybe, a publisher might pick up the book [*The Boy at the Back of the Class*] within the next year or two, especially as the news channels at the time were still showing what was going on in Syria, and were still covering the results of the cruelty of hard borders. But it didn’t take a year, it didn’t take six months, it didn’t take one month. By some miracle, a publisher had picked up the book within just two weeks of me submitting it. Right, I thought. Now, if I could just get even more, just a little bit more luckier, then maybe there might be some children out there who want to pick up a book about a refugee boy who has made the journey from war to peace, has come to the U.K. with nothing but a red backpack to remind him of everything that he had lost and everything that he might never see again. What happened next, and what is still happening, has gone beyond the boundaries of anything that I could have wished for. The few kids that I’d hoped might pick up book suddenly turned into a thousand kids, and then ten thousand, and then fifty thousand and then a hundred thousand. And the children picking up the book weren’t just reading it. They were using it to self-mobilize, and along with them, their grandparents and parents and teachers and librarians and friends were mobilizing too. First came the emails. Emails from parents and grandparents, telling me that for the first time ever, their children were asking questions about the refugees in their own family history, about their grandfather who survived the Holocaust and had made it to the U.K. and forged a life for himself. About their parents who had fled Somalia or Poland or Russia or Kosovo to make a life for themselves in Birmingham or Glasgow or Manchester. Then came the letters. Beautiful letters from children and entire classrooms asking and telling me that they wanted to help, and how they could help. And then came the tweets and the DMs and the newspaper articles about how children weren’t just asking the grown-ups of their world to help them raise money for refugee charities but also help get the book into other schools so that they could be mobilized too. And then came the most unprecedented of all actions, of all reactions. Letters written by children to the Prime Minister. Beautiful, brave, courageous letters wanting to know why it was that their government was failing to act humanely. And these letters didn’t just go out to the Prime Minister. There were letters also being sent to the Home Office, even to Buckingham Palace, wanting to know, pleading, asking, putting a business case forward for why it is, the powers that be, should keep borders open, should help refugees and stop the wars and the climate change disasters that were taking place around the world. Every email, every tweet, every message, every reaction, every question, every conversation that I see being triggered by the book is a signified to me of something I’d forgotten as an adult and which I really want to remind you all about today. And that is that when it comes to understanding and righting the wrongs of this world is our children who get it first. Our intrinsic sense of right and wrong and of justice, real justice with no excuses, is never so powerful, never so unshakeable as it is when we were children. All of us sitting here know this. We all know that the eight-year-old version of ourselves would never tolerate or accept the things that we might accept and tolerate as adults. Would never look away and shove aside and ourselves to things that we know to be wrong. Not unless we were deeply frightened.  […] A few weeks ago I gave a school talk at a beautiful school in the middle of nowhere, and after I’d finished, a little girl came running up to me to ask if she could ask me a question. I said, “Yes, of course,” thinking that she wanted to talk about the book or maybe some of my work in the refugee camps. But her question was about none of those things. It was simply, “Miss, do you really think we can all help, even me?” The beauty of that question absolutely floored me and I needed a moment to gather myself. The answer that I could give her of course was, “Definitely, yes, you!” to what she smiled, nodded, ran off back out to the playground, just as children do when they’ve stabbed you in the heart with their words. She was seven years old. Her name was Tammy, and she - just like every child asking questions, reading books, and staying up to imagine a better world long after the lights have gone out - is a reminder to me that no one is too small to make a change or to want to make a change, and that it is our children who are the most powerful, most profound, and most beautiful vehicles of the change that we need right now. All they need is a story worth staying up for. | | | | |
| **Date** | 6/1/20  Accessed on 17 Apr. 2021 | **Source** | TEDx Talks on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3wgHkfMorM>), min. 5:19 - 9:15, 9:59 - 11:16; close captioning available | |

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| **OQR 2*.*** Interview with Onjali Q. Raúf | | | |  |
| If you would like to help refugees, there is a world of things that you can do. So whether it’s getting your school involved; your school could become a school of sanctuary, which means that it can be an acknowledged place which takes in children who have been through a lot and need extra help. You can do a fundraiser with your family and friends. You can find out local refugee charities and maybe help them with their drives. But I think one of the most important things that you can do is talk about it. I think we need to change the conversation around refugees. We need to make sure that they are seen as human beings, not as people who are trying to grab anything they can; they’re trying to run away from really horrendous things, they need a lot of help. So we need to understand and talk about the situation and try and do what we can to help. The other thing you can do is also get involved politically, which is to write to your MP, find out what they’re doing to help refugees in the local area. Maybe lobby to try and help the larger government taking more refugees. But there’s a lot of things you can do. It depends on what you have time and capacity to do. But whatever it is, I think it begins with conversations. So don’t be afraid to ask questions and go out there and try to find the answers for yourselves. | | | | |
| **Date** | 15/6/2020  Accessed on 17 Apr. 2021 | **Source** | National Library Trust on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXUZDIGxWSI>), min. 3:33 - 4:47; close captioning available | |

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| **OQR 3*.*** Author Masterclass Onjali Q. Raúf Empathy Day | | | |  |
| […] I think just on a very general basis we’re all hearing about refugees, we’re all hearing that word being confounded around, but we don’t really know what it means, it doesn’t have a human face, and often it does have a human face as a hostile, as someone who’s dangerous, who’s attacking us and has come to take everything away from us.  […] [T]aking the familiar and the unfamiliar and bringing it back to a space where you can completely understand, and in the language that you’ll be able to understand is absolutely crucial.  […] [I]t’s absolutely fantastical to use words to convey what it is I’m seeing in these characters and for you then to read those words and feel them. That’s absolutely fantastic. […] And most of my favorite books are books that made me cry or books that made me laugh out loud. So those are moments that I will take away from every book that I close. Those are moments that will make you remember because you’ve emphasized and you’ve gone deeper than you maybe would have expected to.  […] I have to say the very first book that I read that made me completely, you know, just floored me, was *Black Beauty*. So I’ve read *Black Beauty*. I had never ever thought about animals. I think I’ve read *Charlotte’s Web* straight after *Black Beauty*, but *Black Beauty* is my first real animal book. And the moment I finished reading it, I ran downstairs and said, “Mom, we have to go and help a horse.” […] [I] had to go and help a horse, I wanted to go an help a horse. I remember that feeling very strong. It was one of the reasons why I joined Greenpeace as a teenager as well. I wanted to go out and find out about animal rights and things like that. So really, that was my first kind of impetus, just how amazing a book could be, and how amazing a book could be in regards to transporting me to a world that I would never have thought of otherwise. We didn’t have horses around, so I didn’t think about horses. But it made me care about horses and the way people treated animals.  […] My message for children on Empathy Day would be, “Don’t be afraid of empathy.” I think there is a fear of feeling, and I think there’s a fear of putting yourself out there. You need to put yourself out there in order to make a friend, or you won’t understand what somebody is going through. So don’t be afraid to explore. And treat it as a mystery. Treat it as a way of making yourself better as well. Because it is about you. It is also about your relationships with the world. And, you know, something really magical can happen, so let it happen. … Don’t be afraid of that curiosity. Don’t be afraid of questions. | | | | |
| **Date** | 7/6/19  Accessed on 26. Apr. 2021 | **Source** | Empathy Lab on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz-3pFGxtxk>), min. 3:51 - 4:06, 4:35 - 4:44, 5:35 - 6:05, 6:18 - 7:21, 8:45 - 9:25 | |

Collected by Daniela Ribitsch