

Amina Shahid

I was born and raised in Houston, Texas. Until middle school, I was one of two Southeast Asians in my grade. In the late 80s and early 90s, there was not much awareness of cultural diversity. I was the only student in my class that did not have blonde or brown hair, blue eyes, a mom that baked chocolate chip cookies, or threw really fabulous birthday parties at roller skating rinks. My parents are Pakistani and moved to America in the late 60s but still continued to hold on to their cultural practices like: wearing shalwar kameez, putting mehndi on our hands, drinking mango lassis, eating biryani, putting coconut oil in our hair, focusing on our academics, and putting family first. A lot of my school lunches and actions were reflective of my cultural practices like: goat meat for lunch, mehndi hands during celebrations, practicing math, and respecting my elders. In school, I remember having to point to Pakistan on the Spring Roller Map for my teachers and peers. They had never heard of the country. They also had never seen shalwar kameez or mehndi. Teachers always asked me if I had a burnt hand when I had my hands painted with mehndi after a weekend celebration. I would go out of my way to keep my hand in my pockets. My name was always mispronounced all the way through college.

When I started high school, I was one out of three girls at our school who wore the hijab. After I started the hijab, I was stereotyped as a foreigner, an oppressed woman, and someone who did not know how to speak English. Teachers and random strangers would ask me when I moved to America, how I knew how to use a cellphone, and didn't really know what to make of me. A lot of people at school started to treat me differently because I did not fit the social norms of how an American should look. I felt targeted and isolated because I chose to openly practice my religion.

In 2021, I feel so blessed because people are more educated, respectful, and culturally aware of peoples' overall differences. I feel that my experiences from my childhood really have shaped who I am today and can say that I feel proud to be an American Pakistani Muslim. I hope everyone feels comfortable being who they are and that they feel safe showing it to the world!

Mrs. Shahid in 4th Grade



Mrs. Shahid Now

