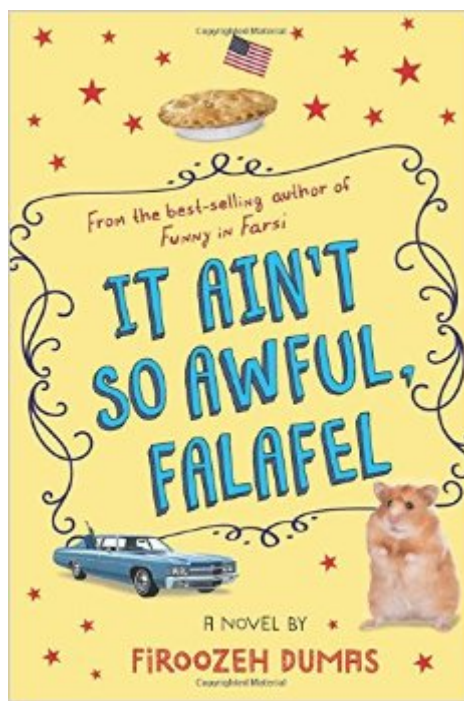


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# It Ain't So Awful, Falafel



## 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 mood rings and puka shell necklaces 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

Lexile Measure: 730 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 384 pages

Publisher: Clarion Books (May 3, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0544612310

ISBN-13: 978-0544612310

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.4 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (37 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #22,374 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Middle East](#) #34 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism](#) #39 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1900s](#)

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Q&A with Firoozeh Dumas The bestselling author *Funny in Farsi* and *Laughing Without an Accent*, talks about her first book for middle grade readers: *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel*.

You are a bestselling author of adult books. What inspired you to start writing for younger readers? When I was thirteen and living in California, the Iranian revolution happened and a group of Americans were taken hostage in Iran. As a result, my father lost his job, and my mother became depressed. All my hopes and dreams disappeared. I survived this period thanks to friends and a

caring community. When I grew up, I realized that without the kindness that I had experienced during those difficult times, I would not be the person I am today. I wanted to write this book specifically for a younger audience so they would realize how much power there is in kindness. You were born in Iran and moved to California as a girl. How did this experience shape you? Being the only Iranian in my school made me an instant outsider, but this became a huge advantage in my life. I learned early on to find commonalities with people who come from entirely different backgrounds. I learned as a child that the human experience is entirely universal. We may speak different languages or eat different foods, but at the end of day, we are looking for a safe place to live and the opportunity to become the best versions of ourselves. To this day, put me in a room full of strangers and I start making friends right away. My husband says that I could find meaningful conversation with a tree. This is true! Now I just need to find a talking tree.

What parts of the book most closely resemble your own life? The book is mostly true. I chose to write it as a fictional novel in order to make the story flow better. For example, in real life, I have two brothers. In the book, Zomorod (Cindy) is an only child. I love my brothers, I truly do, but it was easier to tell this story without them. All the characters in the book are based on real people, although some are composite characters. Cindy's friends Carolyn and Howie are based on my real friends, Carolyn and Howie, whom I met in sixth grade and who are still my dear friends. (You can see their pictures on my website.) Cindy's struggles were my own. Even though this book is fiction, it is the most personal book I have ever written. Humor plays a huge role in the book, and in your writing in general. What does humor mean to you? Simply put, I could not live without humor. As a writer and public speaker, humor allows me to put the audience at ease even when talking about uncomfortable topics. It connects groups of people who think they have nothing in common. When my first book, *Funny in Farsi*, was published, it got a lot of press for being laugh-out-loud funny. Iranians would often ask me, "Why do Americans think the stories are funny? Your humor is so Iranian." Americans would often ask me, "How is it that Iranians find you funny? Your humor is so American." I have had Indians, Mexicans, Australians, you name it, ask me the same thing. I was even told by a well-known British humorist that my humor is entirely British. People don't often realize how universal humor can be. Humor is like music or food; it's something that we can all enjoy. It's a bridge that connects us.

BookRiot said Cindy is one of 50 of the Best Heroines from Middle Gr. Books. What makes her

special? Cindy is a rock star, at least in her own mind. Here is a kid who, at a young age, is faced with some serious problems. There's no one she can talk to who understands, so she has to figure out what to do on her own. She manages to do the right thing most of the time, while still dreaming of being cool. Cindy is open to new experiences and keeps trying to become a better version of herself. She's also very, very funny, which is probably the single most endearing quality about her. Both boys and girls can relate to her. There is a huge push for more diversity in children's literature. Why is this important to you? Reading books is like traveling. Why travel to the same place every time? Reading about people with different backgrounds widens our worldview; it opens our minds and hearts. Children who grow up reading books with all kinds of characters become global citizens. There is no downside to that.

Why was it important for you to share this piece of history with young readers? We live in a democracy, and in order for a democracy to thrive, each citizen must make informed choices. Iran-U.S. relations are very important today, and yet very few Americans know the history of the two countries. I want my readers to be smart and to understand that you cannot judge a country by the evening news. There is so much more to every country, including the U.S. What do you hope readers take away from *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel*? I hope that readers say, "I can't put this book down!" As a humorist, I hope readers laugh and feel the need to read their favorite parts out loud to their friends and parents. I also hope that readers want to learn more about history. I used to think history was boring until I took a class in college that sparked my interest. Now I think, How can anyone have an opinion of current events without knowing what happened earlier? And last, I hope that readers feel that sadness I feel when I finish a really good book. But what happens next? I want to know. That is both the best and the worst feeling. Thankfully, there are so many great books out there to read!

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