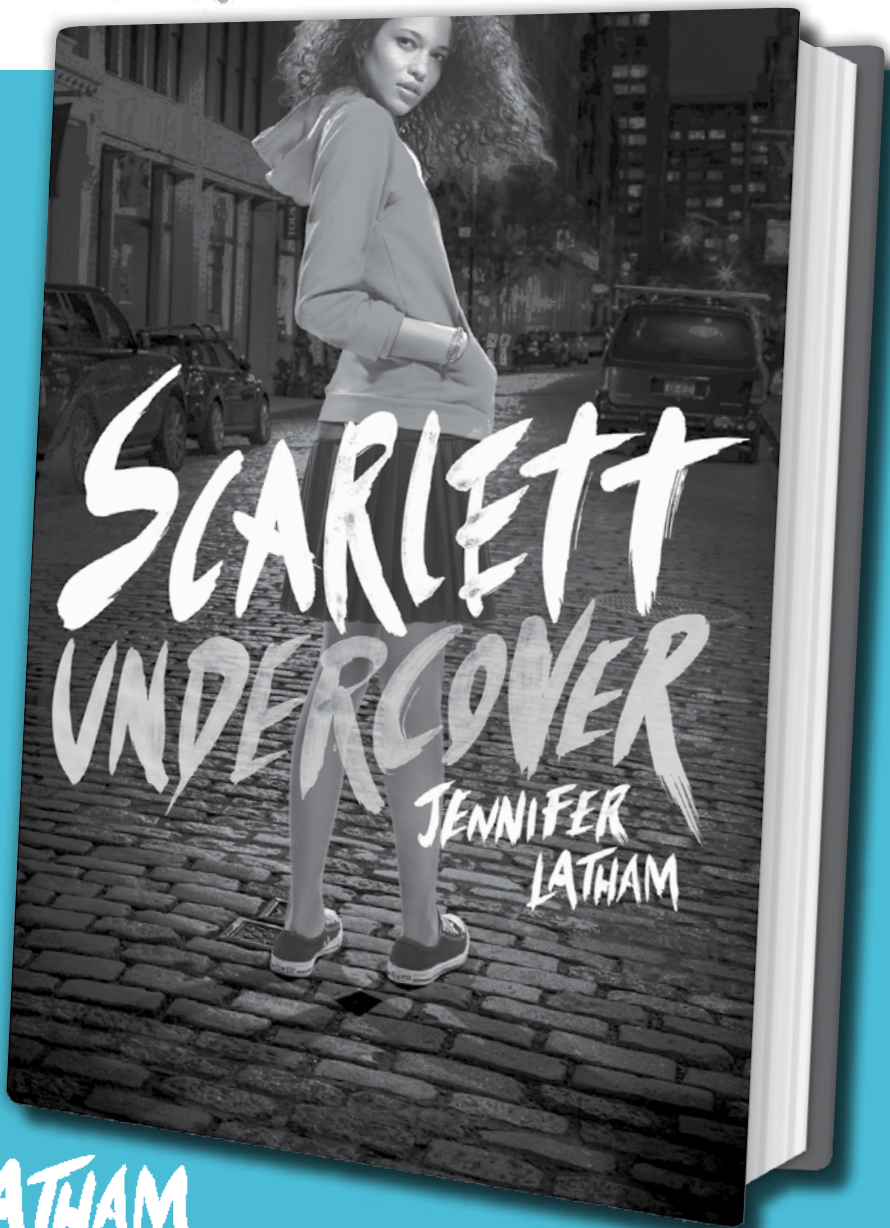


SCARLETT UNDERCOVER

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Social Studies
- ❖ Creative Writing
- ❖ Religion & Mythology

Ages 12 and up



By **JENNIFER LATHAM**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Detective fiction is a well-established literary genre. Can you name some other teen female detectives from books, movies or television? In what ways do Scarlett's personality and detecting style differ from these examples? How does her style and distinctive voice make her unique?

2. Can you suggest other literary genres or sub-genres that this novel represents? If a story fits more than one (for example, both mystery and fantasy), do you think that means it's a better story? Is it more enjoyable? If the combining of genres makes the plot more complex, is this a good thing?

3. Scarlett is Muslim-American, and the plot concerns a mystery involving her family and religion. The author of the book is not Muslim. Do you think it's okay to write about a religion or a culture that's not your own? Can an author give a more balanced viewpoint if he or she is "looking in" from outside or can a story suffer if an author doesn't have the "inside scoop"?

4. What have you learned about Islam and Muslims from reading, television or the Internet? Do you believe these portrayals to be true? How can you be sure they are accurate? Do you think that these sources have a bias for or against Islam? Can you think of other faiths or cultures that are commonly misunderstood and/or misrepresented in the news and/or popular culture media?

5. The novel takes place in the city of Las Almas. Do you think that Las Almas is a real place? If so, where is it? Does the author do a good job of making you visualize the city? Name four or five places where Scarlett spends her time. Has the author made you feel as if you know these places well?

6. At one point, Scarlett says, "Trust is hard when you're used to taking care of yourself." In what other ways does the author show that Scarlett is an independent person? Would her detective work and her choices have been different if she had parents to answer to? How do her parents and their choices influence her, and the story, even though they have died? Did you find it surprising that she would be taking care of herself at her age? Would you be able to be that independent?

7. Scarlett's mother took Reem and Scarlett to "all kinds of temples and churches, telling us we needed to understand other faiths to appreciate our own." Islam is a rich cultural and religious tradition. How does the author portray examples of Islamic traditions and mythologies in the story? What parallels can you see between Islam and other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity?

8. Decker tells Scarlett, "When both of your parents believe in something, when it's what they expect you to believe, it's kind of hard not to at least give it a good think." Do you agree or would you rather believe the opposite of what your parents do? Why?

9. Discuss the concept of Qadar, or fate, and how this theme runs throughout the book. Scarlett wonders whether coincidence or Qadar is running her life. Mook says, “Whether or not you wake tomorrow morning has already been determined.” Do you agree with him? What do you believe about fate? Where do these beliefs come from?

10. Manny tells Scarlett that she is the warrior and her sister, the healer. What about you—are there roles in your family and in your group of friends? What might your title be?

11. In chapter 14, Blondie says to Scarlett: “There is no death for us, little detective. Once the ring is ours, we’ll live forever.” The quest for immortality is an ongoing theme in literature and movies. Can you think of examples? Discuss the pros and cons of living forever.

12. Scarlett refers to the Children of Iblis as the zealots who killed her father: “Hating them came easy as breathing. Understanding them was a whole lot tougher.” Do you understand what she means? Do you agree? If so, why do you think it’s easier to hate the folks on the fringe, the ones who rely “on fear to weaken enemies and blind their followers?” Can you name examples of zealot groups?

13. Mook is Scarlett’s *mu’aqqibat*, her guardian angel. In what ways does he protect her? Would you expect a guardian angel to have more “special powers” than Mook seems to have? Do you believe he is a real guardian angel? Does Scarlett? Do their interactions show that she respects his role? Is she grateful to have him watching over her?

ACTIVITIES

Creative Writing

Scarlett’s parents kept secrets from her and her sister. “Abbi had kept the *Shubaak* secret, *Ummi* did the same with her cancer, and both had died for their trouble.” Write an opinion essay about secrets—keeping them, sharing them, how they can help or injure.

When Scarlett meets Lillian Fagin, she tells Scarlett, “Money used to mean a great deal to me . . . but now I understand that its real value lies in its power to help others.” Write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with this.

Conduct an imaginary investigative journalism interview with Scarlett.

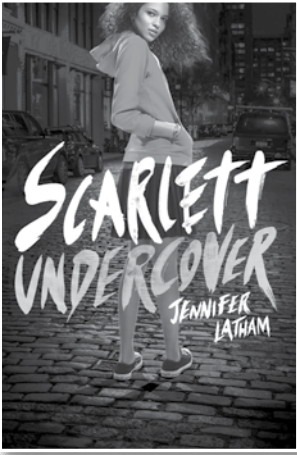
Research and Report

Explore Islamic mythology, especially the children of Iblis, the jinn and Solomon’s knot. Write a report comparing/contrasting this mythology with that of another world religion.

Looking at television, movies, cartoons, magazines, newspapers, blogs, social media, and books, find examples of how Islam and its followers are portrayed in popular culture. Summarize your findings in a report, and share some of the examples you found with the class.

Using print and online news sources, investigate and report on contemporary Muslim-American women in America. In what ways are they specifically discriminated against? How are they keeping, or not keeping, Islamic traditions within their modern U.S. communities?

about the book



SCARLETT UNDERCOVER

HC 978-0-316-28393-9

Also available in
downloadable
eBook format

Meet Scarlett, a smart, sarcastic fifteen-year-old, ready to take on crime in her hometown. When Scarlett agrees to investigate a local boy's suicide, she figures she's in for an easy case and a quick buck. But it doesn't take long for suicide to start looking a lot like murder.

As Scarlett finds herself deep in a world of cults, curses, and the seemingly supernatural, she discovers that her own family secrets may have more to do with the situation than she thinks . . . and that cracking the case could lead to solving her father's murder.

praise for the book

★ “This whip-smart determined black Muslim heroine brings a fresh hard-boiled tone to the field of teen mysteries”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

about the author



Jennifer Latham has had some really normal jobs and some really weird ones, including school psychologist, middle school teacher, yoga instructor, and autopsy assistant. She was born in New York City and currently lives with her husband and two daughters in Tulsa, Oklahoma. *Scarlett Undercover* is her debut novel. Visit her online at jenniferlatham.com



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