

A Very Large Expanse of Sea

Tahereh Mafi

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16 year old Shirin and her family are constantly moving from town to town. In 2002, the year following 9/11 Shirin who is Muslim is used to ignoring the racist comments and stares that she is met with in her day to day life. Although she tries to brush off people's ignorant comments; they still hurt her. As a way to protect herself from others she minimally engages with her peers and assumes the worst of people. So, when Shirin attends a new school she doesn't try to make any friends or get involved in any school activities to save herself from heartbreak when her family moves again.

Her days mainly consist of going to school, attending classes then walking home to spend time listening to music or upcycling clothing. Until, her brother Navid decides to take their favorite hobby breakdancing and start a new club at school. In Shirin's biology class, she is paired with Ocean James as her lab partner for a new lab project. When Ocean tries to genuinely get to know Shirin she's alarmed and part of her wants to get to know him but the other part of her doesn't know if it's worth the risk.

Beautifully written and extremely heartfelt where you can really empathize with the main character. Especially, seeing how people's remarks towards Shirin affect her and her relationships with others. And just how people make assumptions about her and how she makes assumptions about people. I loved that despite the attacks Shirin faced in her day to day life, she still remained her bold, cunning and unafraid self. I love how her Shirin remained proud of her culture and religion and wasn't afraid to show others. Additionally, it was interesting to see how her and Ocean navigated their new relationship and the challenges that arose with it. I enjoyed how supportive Shirin's brother was of her through all of the ups and downs. I loved the perspective the novel gave on societal pressures and public image.

I recommend that people ages 13 and up read *A Very Large Expanse of Sea*, throughout the book it delves through the layers of Islamophobia and Racism. The main character goes through several tough experiences and incidents. You should definitely buy this book as a gift, it's a meaningful, honest, and at times heart wrenching story yet, through it all you'll find yourself unable to put the book down.

Recommended Titles:

The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo

The Sun is Also a Star by Nicola Yoon

Holding Up the Universe by Jennifer Niven

The Hate You Give by Angie Thomas