



Film review: My Name is Khan

Anti-racist religious education



RE TODAY AND NATRE WORKING WITH THE FREE CHURCHES GROUP
AND METHODIST SCHOOLS





My Name is Khan

Review by: Rebecca Hughes

What is this film about?

A Muslim man called Rizwan Khan who has Autism grows up during the Hindu / Muslim unrest, then moves to the USA to live with his cousin when his mum dies. He falls in love with a Hindu woman called Mandira who had an arranged abusive marriage which produced a child called Sameer before her husband abandoned her. They marry, and then 9/11 happens and their lives turn upside down.

Their son is bullied and then killed on the school football field. Mandira blames Khan because he's Muslim and tells him to tell the whole world that his name is Khan and he's not a terrorist, which he takes literally. Mandira stays and tries to find out who killed her son.

Khan goes on an epic journey across the USA meeting Christians who are inclusive and exclusive, uncovers a terrorist plot and reports it, gets arrested as a terrorist and tortured, then released, helps out a community decimated by floods, and one of the children who witnessed his son's death comes forward so the children who did it are arrested. Khan and Mandira are finally reunited and meet the President to tell him that he's not a terrorist.

What age group and RE topic does it link to?

As it is a Bollywood produced film it is very long, and entirely in Hindi with English subtitles which sounds very off-putting but I have had children of all ages (11-16) really engage (including those who had no chance of reading along) because it is so compelling and easy to understand.

It teaches about the realities of autism, why 9/11 was such a shock to most Muslims (and Asians) in the USA and how it affected their lives. It talks about the unity of faith and the reality of lived Islam. It shows how Islam can be twisted to suit someone recruiting terrorists. It talks about death and grief. It shows practicing and non-practicing Muslims. It shows Christians who only want to deal with other Christians, and those who welcome anyone with open arms.

What did you love about it?

That it shows a range of different religions and doesn't box people within their religion, there are a range of different Christians and Muslims, as well as Hindu.

That there are people of all skin colours represented well.

If you could only show a clip, which clip would you use?

It would very much depend on what theme you were going for.

If explaining how people can get sucked into terrorist, the clip in the Mosque.



If talking about grief, the scene in the Church where they all say goodbye to their loved ones.

If your lesson is about the goodness of humanity, the scene where Khan starts a movement of people helping the victims of the floods.

If about inter-faith marriage, the part where Khan and Mandira marry, and then the brief part where they both perform rituals with Sameer who doesn't care about either.

Why does this film have great potential for anti-racist RE?

Every student I've had has said that it opened their eyes to 'what Muslims are really like' (paraphrased!). I have taught in predominantly white English schools. Many of them were surprised at how much they enjoyed it and how much they learned from it. Many of them also commented that it was the black Christians who accepted him, and it was Asian Muslims who then went into the poor communities to help during the floods (and that it inspired people from all races to join in).

Are there any warnings or issues for particular age groups?

It is a PG-12, and it is Bollywood produced, so there is nothing major.

Sameer is bullied and killed – you see the doctors trying to revive him and failing, and you see Mandir washing his body.

All the way through you know Khan doesn't like physical touch, and when he marries Mandir there is a brief scene where they are sitting next to each other on the bed and she says that they need to touch to have sex, and Khan giggles and shows her he has bought 'sex for dummies' book so he knows. Later he walks past her in the kitchen and says 'sex please, now' and she giggles and runs after him (which the students always laugh at).

In the scene with the floods there appears to be a dead man washed up next to a log, but it is very difficult to see.

Two or three RE activities to set when pupils have seen the film/clip:

1. I set questions throughout, partly because it is so long, which is more of a note-taking exercise.
2. At the end I ask more open-ended questions, like: who had the most impact on Khan's life; how is Islam / Christianity represented; how did peoples' lives change after 9/11; etc.
3. I ask them to write to any character except Khan, Mandir or Sameer asking them a question and telling them how their actions made them feel.