

## *New Kids at the Mosque* Character Outlines

### Sahar

Sahar is a 16-year-old Muslim and Indian-American girl. Physically, she has very dark brown/black hair, dark eyes, and a bigger nose that she is embarrassed of because it does not fit the typical white standard of beauty. Her physical body is something that she is constantly insecure about, even though she is average-leaning-pretty. Her deepest internal conflict is wrestling with her socialized desire to be as white as possible, so she wants white features. She grows her naturally-wavy hair really long and straightens it a lot. She wears extremely trendy Western clothes, even though her parents hate how much skin she shows (they really hate shorts).

Sahar listens to Top 40/pop music, pretends to like horror movies, and is up-to-date on celebrity culture, but she's not ditzy or stupid. The key to Sahar is that she is likeable because she is extremely intelligent - she is witty, can be caustic, and always knows what she's talking about. Her perfectionism in these aspects allows her to pull off her facade of whiteness, but a running theme of the show is that she's always questioning it. She knows she doesn't like Katy Perry, thought *The Ring* was a waste of her time, and is confused by Kylie Jenner's rise to fame. She still plays into all of these things, but she is constantly questioning them, and there are moments in the show when she has to confront her confusion. Priyanka Chopra's rise to American fame despite her unapologetic brown-ness could be a turning point for Sahar. Some funny things she does is change her Bollywood music to Top 40 when people enter her room,

or sneak into the Bollywood films at the movie theatre by buying two tickets to throw people off.

Sahar's turbulent relationship with culture and religion is a driving factor of the show and of her character. We see her struggle with it every episode. She will do the brown-girl-thing where she changes into shorts in the school bathroom, she dates boys, she decides she's not going to be a doctor. But the compelling thing about her is that she is a headstrong character - she argues for her right to do these things, and her parents are good people who will eventually see her point of view, but not without some conflict.

Expand more on her romantic interests in general, how she views sexuality/puberty, etc.

If there are other muslim people in the school they can frown upon her for going after the football boy instead of the nice muslim boy - are we not good enough?

Brush up on the typical ones - my big fat greek wedding, etc. that british soccer player one

Internal discrimination and external discrimination

Kamala harris - is she black enough? Is anyone ever ANYTHING enough?

Pay attention to the news, even trashy stuff, because you'll get an interesting take on culture

How dark are you? How whitepassing are you? Play into the zeitgeist in order to sell to producers

9 different character types - based on their fears - The Leader. Rebellious - subconscious fear is being controlled. Want to be self reliant. Can be controlling, obsessive, ruthless, vengeful. Responsible, fight challenges. Protective, energetic. - Tariq

## Azhar

Azhar serves as a lot of the comic relief for the show. She is six years old and is absolutely wild. Because she is six, she does not understand a lot of things, particularly about religion. And when she doesn't understand something, she refuses to blindly follow the rules. For example, Azhar learns in Saturday school (madressa) that dogs are not allowed to be kept as pets in Islam. However, she doesn't get that and doesn't like it, so when she finds a stray dog she decides to keep it anyways, convince her sisters to help her hide it, and chaos ensues. She is always inciting chaos in the house. Azhar is too young to deal with the same insecurities that Sahar and Laila have been groomed into, so she is carefree and fearless. Her antics drive her family up the wall, but in an endearing way. She is constantly getting lost, pulling pranks, wreaking havoc, etc.

Physically, Azhar is an unbelievably cute kid. A small running joke in the show is white people only like brown people when they're as little and as cute as Azhar is, so everyone loves her and the family uses her as a token to garner sympathy with others. Her dad brings her to board meetings and merger deals, her mom brings her to the saree shop's most important client meetings, the sisters make sure Azhar is around when they are getting in trouble. She is clearly an Indian kid, and has enormous brown eyes, dark hair (commonly in the iconic Indian kid fountain head hairdo), and is teeny tiny.

Azhar is compelling because she is adorable but also highly intelligent for her age. The antics she pulls are feigned with innocence but it is clear to the audience that she is a tiny criminal mastermind.

## Zaamena

Physically, Zaamena is in her late-40s and has brown eyes and is clearly Indian. She wears a hijab/headscarf. Her main personality trait is that she is extremely kind - she is always doing things for others. Opening the saree shop is a huge step because it is the first time she gets to do something truly for herself, and it shifts the family dynamic a lot. Zaamena is the most religious of her family in a lot of ways, and although she does not want to push religion down her family's throats, she does want to live in Islamic household. There are certain things she expects from her daughters because she believes it is good for them - prayer five times a day, attending Saturday school, etc.

Sahar and Laila get their quick thinking and wit from Zaamena. She does not take any BS from anyone, especially not her family. If Zaamena sees something wrong, she will call it out, most often in a funny way. But it is always from her root of kindness.

Zaamena is compelling because she is subtly trying to change the stereotype of the Brown Mom. There are things that she can't shake - her mild accent, her slightly dated values - but she is not a caricature. Her move into becoming a small business owner after being a stay-at-home mom for 16 years is enormous, and what follows is her confrontation of her beliefs and the revelation of her as a feminist. Because she only has daughters, she refuses to play into the patriarchy and insists that when speaking of their futures, marriage/arranged marriages/men are never brought up but instead the conversation revolves around their careers and goals. When aunties at mosque try and bring it up, she stands up for her daughters.