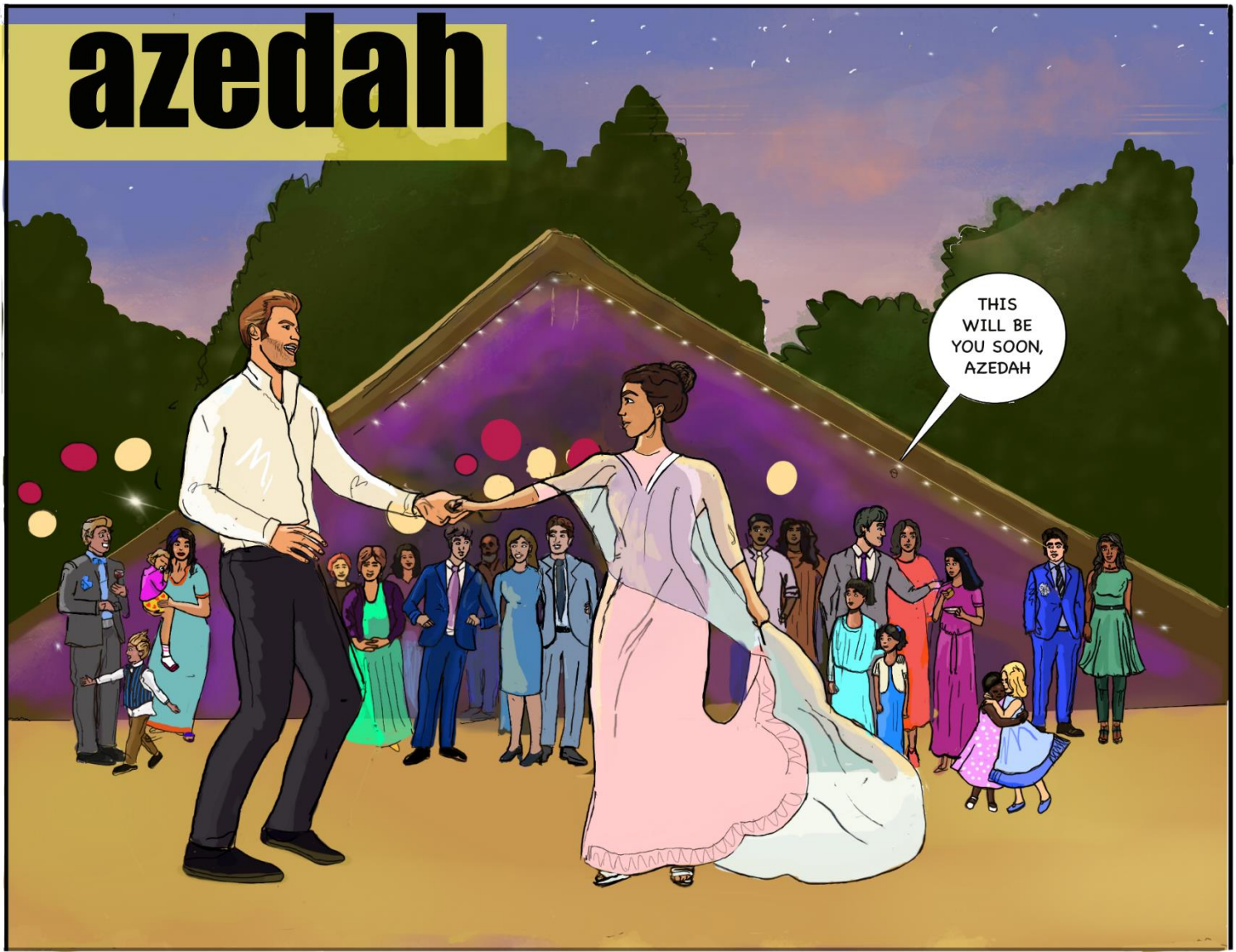
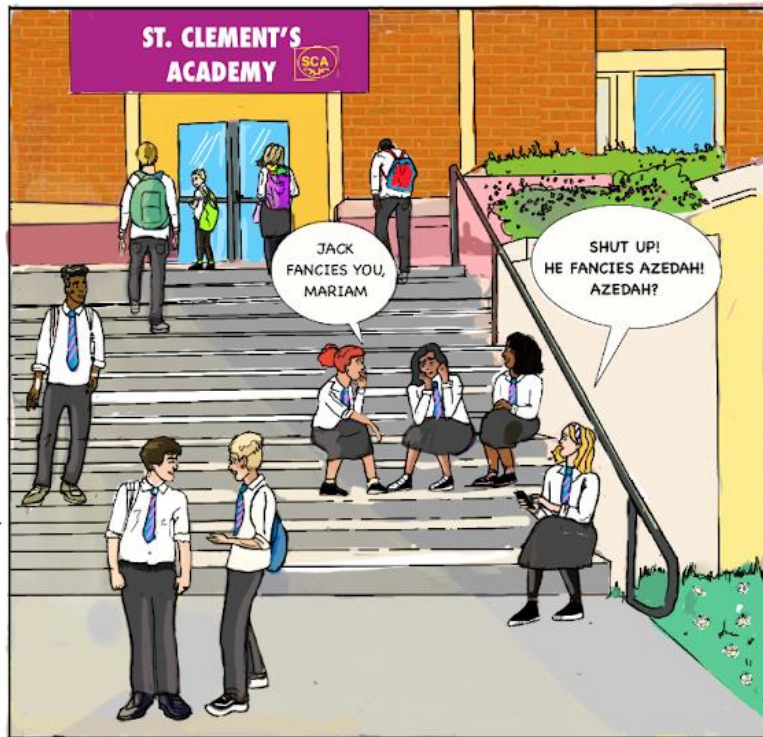
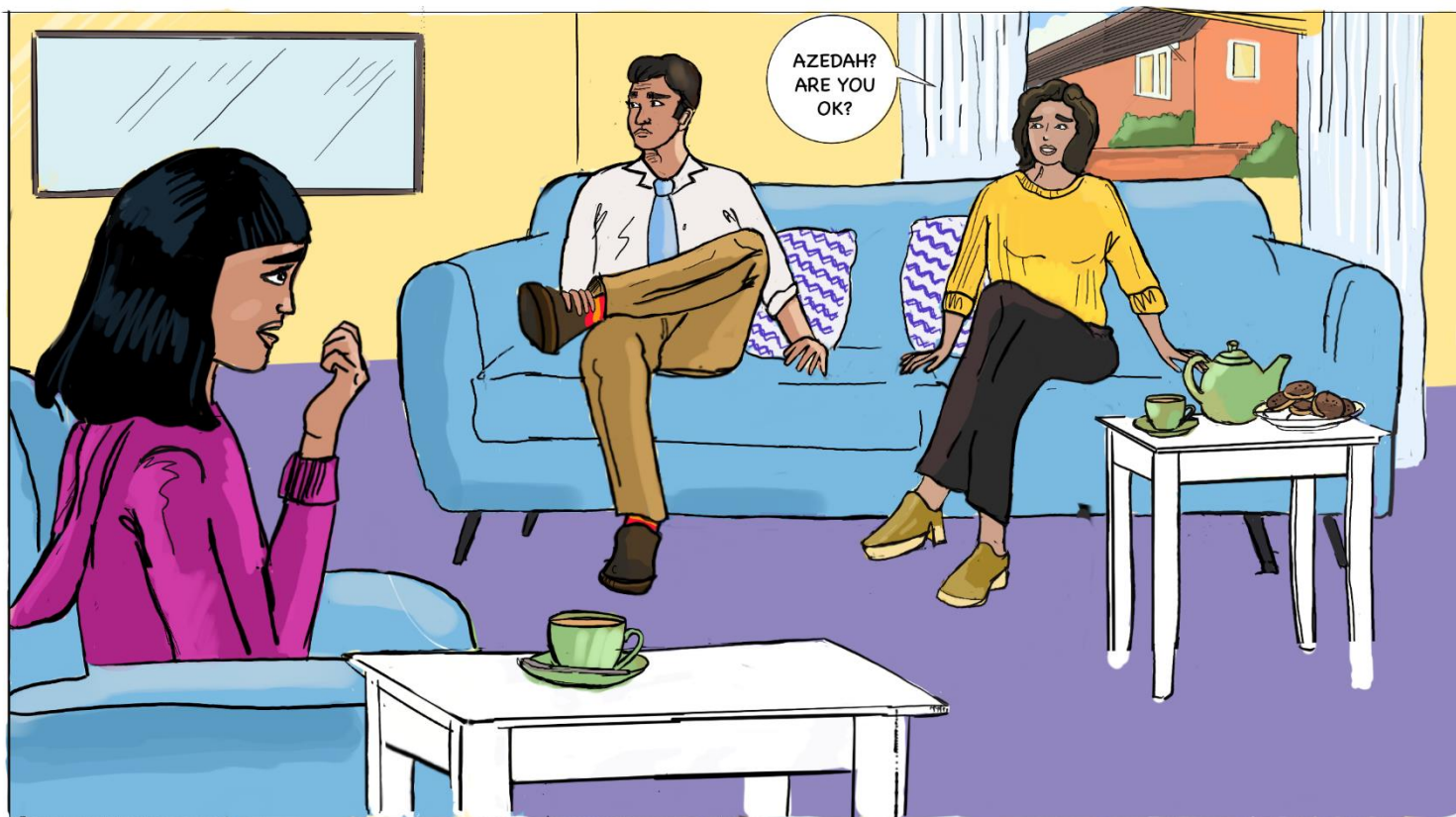


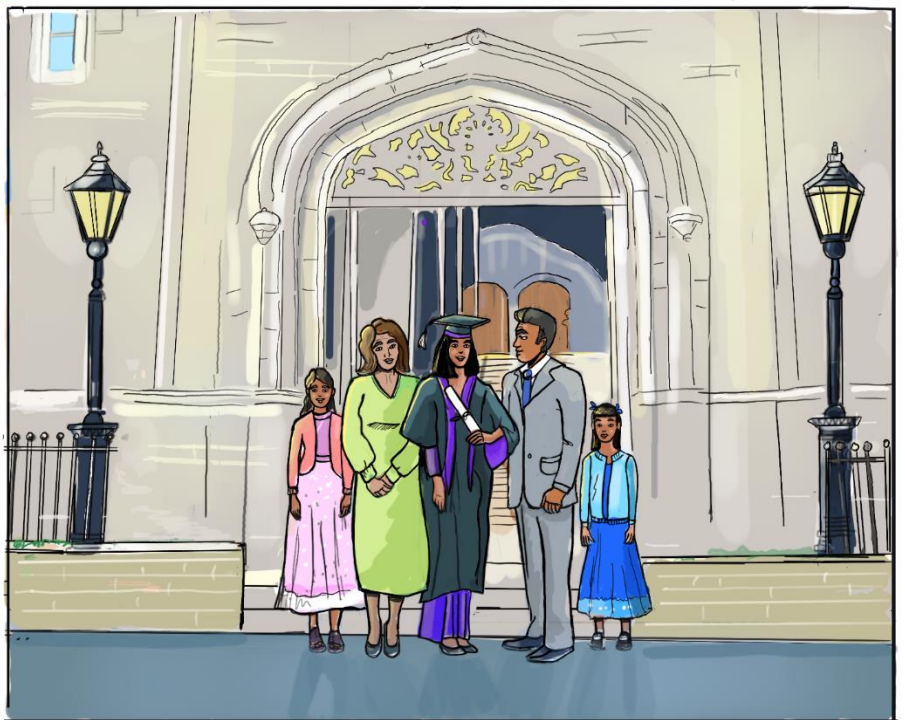
azedah

















Let's talk about Azedah: Discussion questions and key points

Azedah's story offers an opportunity to discuss the difference between an arranged and forced marriage as well as signs, causes, and consequences of forced marriage and opportunities for intervention. Azedah's parents have arranged her marriage to Jay without her knowledge and consent. She is introduced to her future husband at another wedding. Azedah can convince her parents to postpone the marriage until she has finished her education, possibly hoping to avoid it completely that way. However, at her graduation, Jay and his family reappear. Azedah considers her options, objecting to the marriage and possibly being excluded from her family and community or acquiescing to the match and fulfilling her obligations to her parents. She decides to follow the latter path and for her, it ends well. She builds a positive relationship with Jay.

Was Azedah's marriage arranged or forced?

Generally, consent, or the lack thereof, is the key difference between an arranged and a forced marriage. A forced marriage is where people do not get to choose. It is when people are told to get married, or when they are pressured to marry a particular person, even though they do not want to and are not given a choice. If a person does not fully understand what a marriage is, for example because of a disability, then it would still count as a forced marriage. And if one of the people getting married is under the age of 18, then it is still a forced marriage, even if there is no pressure and the parents agree. That is also called child marriage. A forced marriage is different from an arranged marriage. In an arranged marriage, the people who are getting married agree to have their marriage arranged and they agree who they are going to marry and when. They also have the freedom and choice to end the arrangement at any point.

Azedah's story shows how difficult it can be to draw a line between an arranged and a forced marriage. In the story, Azedah's and Jay's family arranged the marriage without Azedah's knowledge. Therefore she did not have a chance to object and it actually is a forced rather than an arranged marriage. However, she convinces her parents to postpone the marriage until she finished her education. At graduation it becomes clear though that the marriage really is just postponed, not cancelled, which might be what Azedah was actually aiming for. Again, this indicates a forced marriage. Lying in her bed, she considers her options. Azedah might feel like she owes her parents because they supported, maybe funded, her education. She might feel like she cannot leave her elderly parents and disagreeing with their marriage plans for her would mean leaving them, and maybe leaving their community too. This indicates that she reluctantly acquiesces rather than freely consents to the marriage and therefore her marriage would be more like a forced marriage. She chooses the path that allows her to continue her generally positive relationship with her parents. She allows her father to arrange a meeting with Jay and her father acts on her initiative. This is more like an arranged marriage again.

What is Azedah's relationship with her husband like?

Their relationship appears to be generally positive. After an awkward first date, the last two panels of the comic show an improvement in Azedah's and Jay's relationship. At their first date at Dr. Tasty's, Azedah looks bored, disinterested, and as if she does not really want to be there. She does not even look at Jay. On a later date in town, Azedah and Jay seem to get on much better and feel more comfortable around each other. They are smiling, holding hand, and they seem to be doing that sweet, swinging motion that couples do when they pull apart and then lean back together. They are also

smiling in their wedding photo. The polaroid strip next to the wedding photo shows that they have grown close and enjoy each other's company. The flowers reaching up from the last panel and into the penultimate one symbolise their blossoming relationship. This indicates a positive relationship. This demonstrates that not all forced marriages lead to an unhealthy or abusive relationship. Emphasise that the nature of the relationship, whether it is healthy, unhealthy or abusive, is irrelevant to the question of whether or not their marriage was a forced marriage. Add that, while Azedah's relationship appears to be generally positive, forced marriage can have a negative effect on people's physical and mental health and well-being, on their education and career, and on their social life. Where people are used, controlled, and treated like they belong to someone else (before or during the marriage), or where they are forced into marriages in exchange for money, forced marriages can be a form of modern slavery.

As a follow-up question, ask students if they think Azedah and Jay sometimes argue and how their conflicts could be resolved. Emphasise that arguments happen even in positive relationship. Disagreements are ok as long as they are not cruel, condescending, rude, or aggressive. It is important to resolve conflicts in a respectful manner. Students might say that conflict can be resolved through open, honest and respectful communication, and working together to find mutually acceptable solutions. Sometimes conflicts need time and space for emotions to settle and taking a temporary break from the conflict can allow for reflection that puts the conflict into perspective. If the conflict is particularly complex or heated, people might consider involving a neutral third party to facilitate the resolution process. In certain situations, resolution may involve forgiveness and letting go. Setting clear boundaries and establishing agreements can help manage and prevent further conflicts.

Why was Azedah forced to get married?

Explain that people can be forced into a marriage for many reasons. People force their children or family members to get married because they are worried about the family's reputation and honour. Many people also still try to justify forced marriage as part of their traditions and beliefs and think that it is their obligation to comply. And forced marriages can happen because people want to ensure what they consider to be a better and safe future for their children; pay off a family debt; because they do not want their children to have relationships or sex; or because they do not approve of their child being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Azedah's parents do not seem to be bad people who want to harm their daughter. Their conversation over tea and biscuits indicates that Azedah's parents are attuned to their daughter's mood and concerned about her. They reassure her that they love her and ask her whether she is ok. It seems like they are approaching Azedah's marriage in the way it is always done. They might genuinely think they are doing the right thing. At their first date in Dr. Tasty's, Jay asks Azedah if she knew that their fathers met at university. This indicates a longstanding relationship between their families that the parents might want to strengthen through the marriage of their children.

Where could Azedah find help? How could we help her?

Discuss possible interventions. Azedah exercised her agency by telling her parents that she did not want to get married yet. This indicates that there might be a possibility for family dialogue. However, openly or outrightly rejecting the marriage could have negative consequences for Azedah. For example, she might face violence, coercion, isolation, and/ or disownment. Rejecting the marriage might also have an impact on her mental health. In addition to speaking to her parents, Azedah could

have spoken to another person she trusts, like her teacher, friends, neighbour, the Forced Marriage Unit or another organisations that works to end forced marriage, like Karma Nirvana and Savera UK. In the comic, there are multiple opportunities for Azedah to ask for help which we hope students will pick up on. For example, when Azedah arrives home from school, readers can see that one of her neighbours is a uniformed police officer. Azedah could have spoken to the police because forced marriage is illegal in the UK. Her bus stop displays a poster for the charity Karma Nirvana that explains the differences between arranged and forced marriage. We could help her by offering a listening ear and compassionate support. If Azedah agrees or asks us to, we could speak to a trusted person, the Forced Marriage Unit, Karma Nirvana or Savera UK on her behalf. In an emergency, we should call the police. Speaking to her family or a member of her community might not be the best course of action though because it might put her at risk.

Could the same happen to her younger sisters?

Yes. It is considered to be a risk factor for younger siblings when older siblings have been forced into a marriage. This is indicated at Azedah's graduation party. When her father reintroduces Azedah to Jay, her middle sister is standing directly behind her, indicating that she is next in line. Other signs of forced marriage include domestic abuse; a person having to stay at home and not being allowed to speak to other people; members of their family or community monitoring and/or surveilling them; lack of (financial) independence; absence from school; decline in grade and behaviour; low mood; and going missing from social media and in real life. However, these could also be indicators for other difficulties a person might be experiencing.

Close reading Azedah

In terms of close reading the imagery of the comic, students' attention can be drawn to how joyful Azedah is when she tosses her graduation cap into the air. The sky is blue behind her, representing optimism and hope for the future. Conversely, when Azedah is introduced to Jay for the second time during her graduation celebrations, her cap has been removed, which can be read as symbolising the impact marriage could have on her future career. The mirroring of the first wedding scene with the graduation ceremony shows that Azedah's family are more interested in her marital status than in her degree. Finally, readers are never shown Azedah's own wedding day, but rather photographs of her relationship with Jay are displayed on a home mantel piece. This is to intimate that a marriage has ramifications beyond a single day or ceremony, but that it is most felt in the day-to-day life of the home. Though Azedah's marriage is ultimately a happy one, it is worthwhile to ask students what they think her experience of domestic life might be if she was apathetic towards her husband, or actively disliked him or felt disliked by him.