

SUMANAH

PIPELINES2 Persona Series

Author: Tabassum Ali



Five-year-old Sumanah is a joyful and vibrant young girl with a diverse cultural background. Her family emigrated from Bangladesh 23 years ago, and she has an older sister, Shameela, who is four years her senior. Sumanah enjoys a close-knit family life, with her parents frequently traveling and providing her the opportunity to meet her extended family and cousins twice a year.

Linguistically, Sumanah is fluent in both English and Bangla and can read Arabic, having learned the Arabic alphabet. She has a variety of interests that include singing, dancing, reading books, drawing, and playing with dolls. She has a cheerful and carefree personality and expresses a deep connection to her Bangladeshi heritage, particularly enjoying Bangladeshi songs and being able to write her name in Bengali. She also read many Bengali books when she was younger. She strongly dislikes guns.

Recently, Sumanah has experienced a challenging period of social exclusion at school due to her skin color. Most girls have refused to play with her and have told her, using derogatory words, that it is because she is brown. Their behavior has impacted her sense of belonging. She has expressed that she feels different from her peers, noticing that "all my friends are white." Sumanah has responded by using more sunscreen and seeking shade.



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What Really Happened Next

Sumanah's family shared with her teachers that she was feeling isolated and did not want to go to school because she had no friends. The teachers tried to work with all the children as a group and explained to them that not being a friend could hurt somebody's feelings. They also said if you don't want to play with someone, instead of using derogatory words, you could say I need space and will play with you later on. They gently said that you should treat somebody the way you want to be treated. They asked the other children to imagine what it would be like to be told that you are not a friend and not someone to play with.

At home, Sumanah's family explained to her that skin color does not matter at all. She is beautiful the way she is and should be proud of her skin color. They also explained that people pay a lot of money or stay in the sun so they can get a tan, to get the color of her brown skin. They reminded her that she is strong and that all her family members, her extended family, all her cultural friends in San Diego from the same origin, and everyone in our home country is also brown.

Sumanah's family also explained that sometimes people might not want to play with her for reasons that are independent of being discriminatory. For example, they may not be in the mood at that time, a response that was not intended to be personal.

Sumanah was only 5 years old when this happened, but with her family's help and the influence of some strongly positive teachers, she was able to overcome the situation and feel confident about herself.

