



Hopeful Activism ? because what we DO as well as what we say matters

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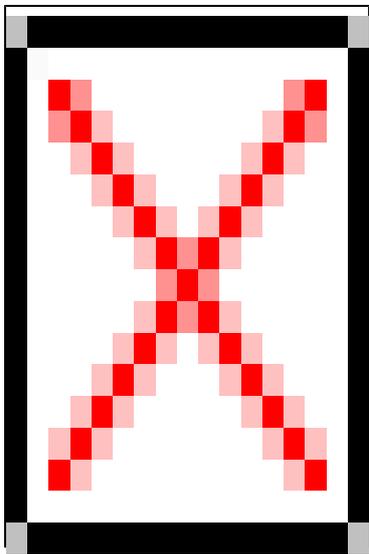
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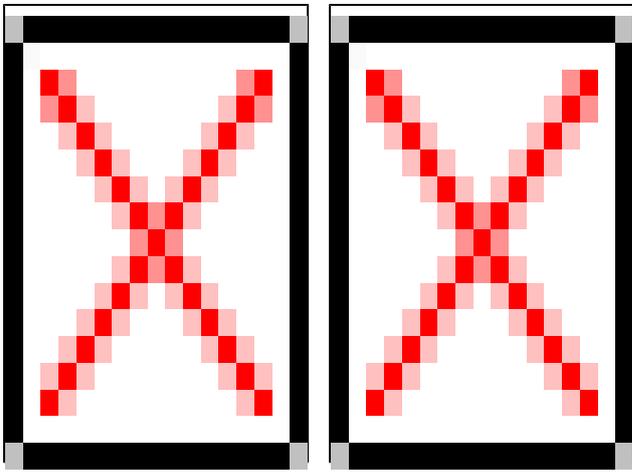
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A piece of passion from **Sita Brahmachari**



In my first novel, [Artichoke Hearts](#) [3], there is a moment where Nana Josie hands over a Book of Protest to her activist friend Simon telling him to give it back to the Levenson family when he's finished with it. This book charts all the marches, vigils and letters of Nana Josie's life.

In my latest novel **Tender Earth** (endorsed by Amnesty International) Laila Levenson ? the baby in **Artichoke Hearts** ? is now twelve years old. A letter arrives bringing news of the Book of Protest. Laila Levenson does not remember her grandmother, but the book sets her off on a journey into activism, making her question what she would be willing to stand up for. Laila sees and experiences some of the tragedies taking place in the world today and she wants to scream at her parents' generation to DO something, to shake them out of their complacency, their endless discussions and listening to the news.



There is a spirit, a passion and a fierce sense of fairness in young people that I love. It's a great untapped source and, if not silenced or cowed, I believe it can become our greatest hope for a better world. It's why my own action for change is writing stories for young people and why I have loved telling this story through Laila's impassioned eyes.

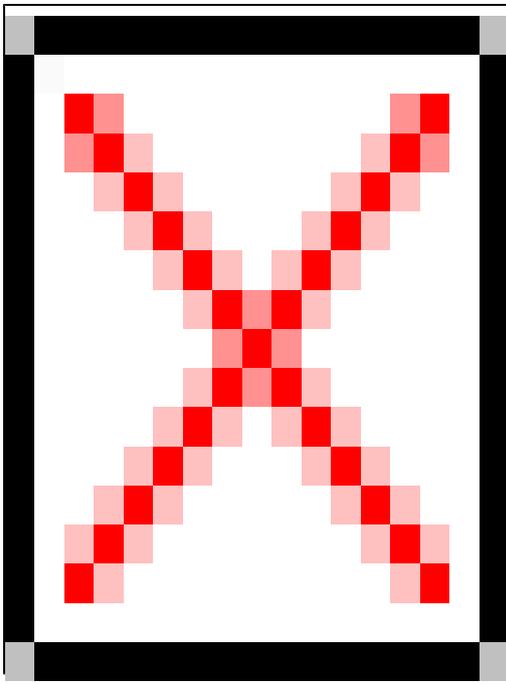
In **Tender Earth** Laila and her friends move from being bystanders of inequalities to becoming activists. In a way they take a journey from sympathy to empathy. I have often heard people confuse these words and similar though they sound, they are actually very different. I believe the first allows us to walk away, while the second demands that we stay and consider how we will act for change.

Laila questions the current world situation ? the refugee crisis, poverty, inequality, racism and religious intolerance. At one point in the story she is faced with a scene similar to that which many readers may have experienced, when a young girl on the London Underground selling tissues hands her a note:

WE ARE WAITING FOR HOUSING. WE DO NOT HAVE NOT ENOUGH MONEY TO FEED OURSELVES. WE RELY ON THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS. WE ARE ALONE

Laila hands over some change. Afterwards she begins to wonder if this girl goes to school, and every time she uses one of the tissues she thinks about her. She wishes she knew her name, she wishes the girl didn't have to beg, she wishes she could take the pain and shame from her eyes. These feelings are more than sympathy because Laila does not just feel sorry for the girl: the memory of their interaction plays on her mind, and inspires her to read different books, meet different people, recognise that poverty and inequality can separate people ? as it does with her and her new friend Pari. Her chance meeting with Pari is just one of the cumulative experiences that leads Laila to act for change.

A few weeks ago I sat with my family and watched the concert that Ariana Grande put on after the terrorist attack Manchester. In the deep sadness of the music was a refrain of resistance, courage, hope and activism. Some people were unsure of the wisdom of Ariana Grande's decision to hold the concert so soon after the tragedy, myself included, as the sadness and hurt was so raw. Watching the concert with my youngest daughter, however, I saw how powerful the act of resistance was in transforming the narrative of despair in the hearts and memories of young people. There were families who attended who had been caught up in the horror who returned precisely to write a new narrative and sing more hopeful songs.



I sign my copies of **Tender Earth** with a banner of **HOPE** because, 'Hope is a belief that what we DO might matter, an understanding that the future is not yet written' (Rebecca Solnit).

Sita Brahmachari is an [Amnesty Ambassador](#) [4] to uphold the right of young people.

Tender Earth and [Artichoke Hearts](#) [3] are published by Macmillan Children's Books, £6.99 pbk.

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