

Guide to Classroom and  
Community Conversations

# THE BLUE POOL OF QUESTIONS

## ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

**The Blue Pool of Questions** (Penny Candy Books) is an award-winning illustrated book for all ages. In the tale, a man asks so many big questions that his questions form a pool that grows to the size of an ocean. That pool strands the people who like “everyday answers” and have forgotten “what questions look like.” The man, however, cannot look away from his questions and chooses to dive into the pool and live deep in his own curiosity. The book encourages readers to:

*Ask more questions.  
Throw them into the blue pool.  
Be brave  
Dive in.*

—**The Blue Pool of Questions**



A companion activity could be used in:

- Elementary, middle school, or high school classroom
- School library as a read aloud and activity
- Public library as an event and/or ongoing display
- Community group to explore the “big questions” of a project or community change

The activity should inspire your readers (students, patrons, and/or community) to ask the big questions. Whether their questions are personal, philosophical, political, or seemingly impossible, the activity invites them simply **to ask**.

There are blue slips of paper provided in this kit (pages 12 & 13). If your readers’ questions are written on these blue slips and collected in a clear container, the “pool of questions” grows deeper and deeper with every question asked. This visual pays tribute to the story, but also demonstrates the power of a community coming together to exhibit curiosity. Explore more on page 7.

Penny Candy Books is also building a “blue pool of questions” at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com). There, questions can be asked in an online form and then appear in the pool. Questions are being asked by readers of all ages from all over the world. The questions your community asks can be added into that larger pool at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com), shared on social media with the hashtag #BluePoolofQuestions, or simply can accumulate locally. Explore more on page 7.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### The Blue Pool of Questions

By Maya Abu-Alhayyat

Illustrated by Hassan Manasrah

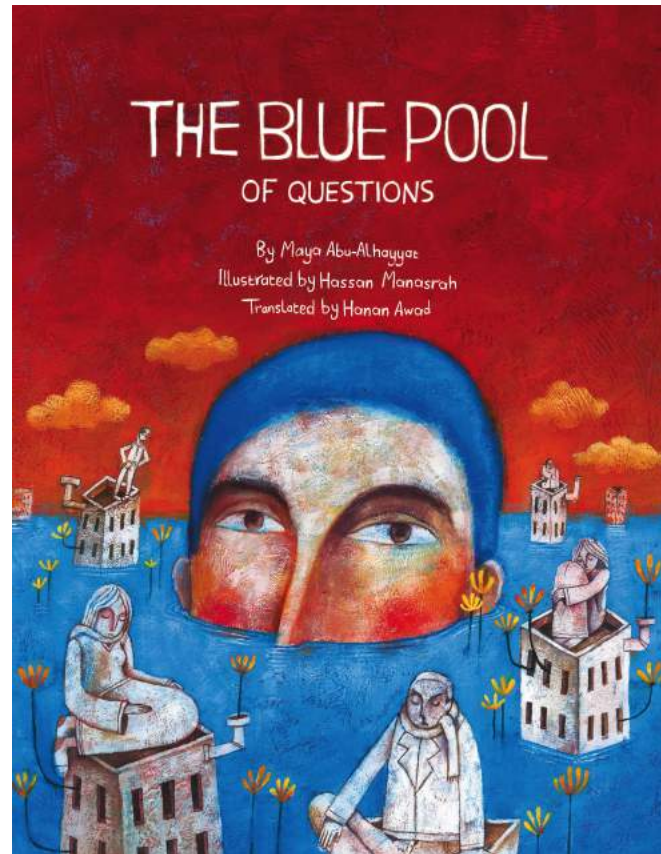
Translated by Hanan Awad

Published by Penny Candy Books

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A man who doesn't quite fit in arrives in a city full of busy people who don't have much time for his weird songs, flower arrangements, and especially...his questions! One day, he asks so many questions that they form a giant pool in the middle of the city that stops everyone in their tracks. The man gathers up the courage to dive into the pool looking for answers, but what will he find under all that water? Through award-winning illustrations and poetic language, this tale underscores the importance of curiosity, the necessity of asking questions, and the courage required to break free from the status quo.



## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

Winner of a 2016 Etisalat Award for Arabic Children's Literature

"Maya Abu-Alhayyat's haunting, evocative text and Hassan Manasrah's exquisitely gorgeous art combine to make a book worth holding very close. Give it to all your friends, big and little. We meet a man who lives his whole life with questions, then simply dives into them. He reminds us of the people we love most. He is the sea and the sky. He is Palestine and the United States and anywhere else you ever loved that did not quite live up to Best Dreams of Justice and Fairness. Children, who carry the most wonderful questions of all, will not be confounded that this book actually does not ask a single one. It respects that you will have your own. Thank you, Debwania, for your gracious translation. I love this book with all my heart."  
—Naomi Shihab Nye, acclaimed poet & author of Jane Addams Children's Book Award winner, **Habibi** and **The Turtle of Oman**

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK (cont.)

“From Palestinian writer Abu-Alhayyat comes a lyrical tale of a strange man who is rejected by the people of the city but finds comfort in his curiosity. With dried flowers, strange songs, and stacks of books that turn everything into questions, the odd man wanders through town. When the questions become a pool in the city streets, and then a lake, and then an ocean, the people are furious, confused and frightened. The cool blues, vibrant greens, warm reds, and haunting whites of the remarkable, angularly surreal illustrations make up a palette of deep, almost tangible emotion suitable to the story's journey. Something inside the pool invites the man to come in, and the people of the city urge him to go. Inside the pool, the man finds the Answer, personified in the text but not corporeal in the illustrations. Everything is different, and he is no longer strange. The man and the Answer become friends, and they only know kindness and questions. Readers are encouraged “to ask more questions, throw them into the blue pool, be brave, and dive in.” The overt moral on the final page takes the tale in the direction of a legend, a tidy ending for this otherwise unusual story. Deliciously confounding and deeply moving, this book is a work of art in pictures and words for adults and children alike.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Originally published by the Palestine Writing Workshop, this 2016 winner (for illustration) of the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature tells an elliptical, allegorical story of a lonely man whose many questions set him apart from a busy world with no time for them. “He sang strange tunes. Dried flowers fell from his sleeves. Books slept inside his coat like shoes in a closet,” writes Abu-Alhayyat of the man, whom Manasrah paints with a streak of bright blue hair and a green scarf that’s forever swirling around his neck. The questions in the man’s books gather into an enormous pool that disrupts city life; eventually, the man works up the courage to dive in, egged on by an entity within the pool’s depths called the Answer...Manasrah’s richly multilayered illustrations mesh gracefully with Abu-Alhayyat abstract writing in a haunting meditation on one man’s search for belonging and meaning.” —*Publishers Weekly*



## ABOUT THE CREATORS

**Maya Abu-Alhayyat** is an award-winning Palestinian novelist, poet, and children's book writer. She has published three collections of poetry, three novels, and several children's books. Her writing has been featured in international journals and magazines and has been translated into English, French, German, Swedish, and Korean. Since 2013 Maya has worked as the director of the Palestinian Writing Workshop in Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband and children. Maya is the author of **The Blue Pool of Questions**.



**Hassan Manasrah** is a visual artist, illustrator, and comic creator. From 2008 to 2010, he worked as assistant art director for the animated cartoon series *Pink Panther & Pals*. Since 2010, he has illustrated 25 children books. In 2016, he won an Etisalat Award for best illustration for the Palestinian edition of this book. Hassan is the illustrator of **The Blue Pool of Questions**.

**Hanan Awad**, known to most as *Debwania*, is a Palestinian-American living in Edmond, Oklahoma. *Debwania* is an established street photographer. She received her undergraduate degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Rutgers University, a filmmaking certificate from New York Film Academy, where she also studied photography, and is completing her Masters in History at University of Central Oklahoma with a focus on Latin America and the Middle East. Hanan is the translator of **The Blue Pool of Questions**.

**Penny Candy Books** publishes children's literature that reflects the diverse realities of the world we live in, both at home and abroad. This means seeking out books by and about people and subjects that speak to a broad range of human experience. Penny Candy Books, founded by poets Alexis Orgera and Chad Reynolds, is the U.S. publisher of **The Blue Pool of Questions**.

**Curious City** creates tools that invite readers to engage more deeply with the books they read through play, conversation, and social action. Those tools are available free to literacy professionals at [CuriousCityDPW.com](http://CuriousCityDPW.com). Curious City envisioned this guide and other materials for **The Blue Pool of Questions**.

## CREATING AN EVENT OR CLASSROOM PROJECT

Penny Candy Books is happy to help you share this book with your community.

**Need a way to capture readers' attention?** There is a short video that tells the story and invites readers to ask questions and throw them into the Blue Pool. You can find and share that video at <https://youtu.be/Wdruy8DcWnE>.

**Need to create a poster for the event?** There is a poster template on page 11. You can also download a .jpeg of the template by searching "blue pool" at [CuriousCityDPW.com](http://CuriousCityDPW.com). The fonts on the poster are Avenir and Mackan.

**Sharing this event with the public?** Here is some copy that may help in your description of the event:

*Ask more questions.*

*Throw them into the blue pool.*

*Be brave*

*Dive in.* —**The Blue Pool of Questions**

Do you have a big question? Do you have a question that might have too many answers or none at all? A question that is too scary or too obvious to ask? Whether that question is personal, philosophical, political, or seemingly impossible, it may be crucial simply **to ask**. We will be joining readers from across the world who are asking big questions and throwing them into the Blue Pool.

This questioning is inspired by **The Blue Pool of Questions**, an award-winning book for all ages by Maya Abu-Alhayyat and illustrated by Hassan Manasrah (Penny Candy Books). In this "deliciously confounding and deeply moving" (*Kirkus Reviews*) tale, a man asks so many big questions that his questions form a pool that grows to the size of an ocean. That pool strands the people who like "everyday answers" and have forgotten "what questions look like." The man, however, cannot look away from his questions and chooses to dive in to the pool and live deep in his own curiosity. **Are you curious? Join us!**

**Need a digital version of the book to project for an audience or classroom?** Contact Penny Candy at <https://www.pennycandybooks.com/contact/>.

**Need to order copies of the book for your event?** Libraries and retailers can contact Itasca Books at <http://publisher.itascabooks.com/booksellers/>. The book is also available through Ingram and Baker & Taylor.

## MAKING A BLUE POOL

There are two sheets in this kit that have blue slips ready for your readers' questions. One sheet (page 12) has the blue slips and instructions for the reader to add their question to the Blue Pool. Another sheet (page 13) provides a full sheet of blue slips for you to cut out in advance for engaging with a larger group.

To show your readers how asking questions can create a blue pool, try collecting the blue slips in a clear container. If you are setting up an ongoing display where readers will approach and add a question, the kit provides some signage (pages 14 and 15). The smaller sign was designed to fit into the lid of a particular plastic container that works well with this activity. That container is the "mDesign Kitchen Storage Container Box with Hinged Lid - 2-Quarts, Clear." When the lid of the 7.1" x 10.7" x 2.3" box is open and the smaller sign is affixed to the inside cover, it makes a wonderful display unit. The box can be bought at online retailers for about \$10.



## CONNECTING TO THE LARGER POOL

Penny Candy Books is collecting questions from across the country and around the world. Consider having the questions in your Blue Pool join the growing international pool of questions at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com). Your community's privacy will be protected there. The form asks only for a first name, email, age (optional), and general location. All the questions can be linked to your email address and all that will be displayed to the public is the question, age (optional), and the questioner's general location.

If you share your community's questions on your social networks, consider sharing with the hashtag #BluePoolofQuestions.

## BLUE POOL IN THE CLASSROOM

“Children, who carry the most wonderful questions of all, will not be confounded that this book actually does not ask a single one. It respects that you will have your own.”

—Naomi Shihab Nye, poet and children’s book author of **Habibi** and **The Turtle of Oman**

Educators who have explored this book with students of all ages have found author and poet Naomi Shihab Nye to be correct. The “elliptical, allegorical story” (*Publishers Weekly*) respects the reader and invites readers to ask questions. Students are full of compelling questions. The classroom activity exhibits inquiry and shows that the big questions do not have a single answer.

You can prompt them to explore the “big questions” with some of your own such as:

*What questions do you fall asleep thinking about?*

*What questions do your family or your teachers never seem to have an answer for?*

*What questions would you ask the most powerful people in this country? The world?*

*If you could ask the Earth a question, what would it be?*

*If you could ask an animal a question, which animal would it be and what would you ask?*

*If you could ask a question of anyone from history, who would you ask and what would you ask them?*

*If you could ask a question of anyone from the future, what would it be?*

Alternatively, focus the questions on something your classroom is struggling with. For example, if there was a death in the school community, could you invite your students to throw their questions about the loss into the Blue Pool? If there is an incident of perceived injustice, could you ask your students to throw their questions about the injustice into the Blue Pool?

“He [the man in **The Blue Pool of Questions**] is Palestine and the United States and anywhere else you ever loved that did not quite live up to Best Dreams of Justice and Fairness.”

—Naomi Shihab Nye, poet and children’s book author of **Habibi** and **The Turtle of Oman**

Current affairs lessons could also include a reading of and engagement with the Blue Pool. For example, is it a coincidence that author Maya Abu-Alhayyat lives in the Palestine territories, one of the most politically entangled regions of the world?

When you accumulate the questions (see Making a Blue Pool above) in a clear container, it shows your students the power of their collective curiosity.



## BLUE POOL IN THE CLASSROOM (cont.)

Penny Candy Books is collecting questions from across the country and around the world. Consider having the questions in your Blue Pool join the growing international pool of questions at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com) (see Connecting to the Larger Pool).

## BLUE POOL IN THE LIBRARY

There is no better place to inspire and ask big questions than at the library.

“Deliciously confounding and deeply moving, this book is a work of art in pictures and words for adults and children alike.” —*Kirkus Reviews*



Imagine using this book as a read aloud with children and/or adults. Patrons could be invited to ask questions on blue slips of paper to add to them to the Blue Pool (see Making a Blue Pool above). This could be done as a stand-alone event or in conjunction with a current affairs or community conversation.

Libraries could also display a non-circulating copy of the book with blue slips of paper and signage to invite patrons to add questions into the Blue Pool. Those questions could be open-ended individual reactions to the book or you could pose a question about the library, the community, or the world for your patrons to respond to.

When you accumulate the questions (see Making a Blue Pool above) in a clear container, it shows your patrons the power of their collective curiosity.

Penny Candy Books is collecting questions from across the country and around the world. Consider having the questions in your Blue Pool join the growing international pool of questions at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com) (see Connecting to the Larger Pool).

## BLUE POOL IN YOUR COMMUNITY

While members of your community may want answers, the whole community could benefit by asking questions.

“He [the man in **The Blue Pool of Questions**] is Palestine and the United States and anywhere else you ever loved that did not quite live up to Best Dreams of Justice and Fairness.”

—Naomi Shihab Nye, poet and children’s book author of **Habibi** and **The Turtle of Oman**

Imagine using this book as a read aloud with all ages. Community members could be invited to ask questions on blue slips of paper and then add them to the Blue Pool (see Making a Blue Pool above). This could be done as a stand-alone event or in conjunction with a larger ongoing community conversation about injustices, growth, connections, or another more specific topic.

Imagine working with your library, bookstore, or community center to display a copy of the book for citizens to read at their leisure. Blue slips of paper and signage could invite community members to add questions into the Blue Pool. Those questions could be open-ended individual reactions to the book or you could pose a question about a community issue at hand.

When you accumulate the questions (see Making a Blue Pool above) in a clear container, you show the community the power of their collective curiosity.

Penny Candy Books is collecting questions from across the country and around the world. Consider having the questions in your Blue Pool join the growing international pool of questions at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com) (see Connecting to the Larger Pool).



Ask more  
questions.

Be brave.  
Dive in.

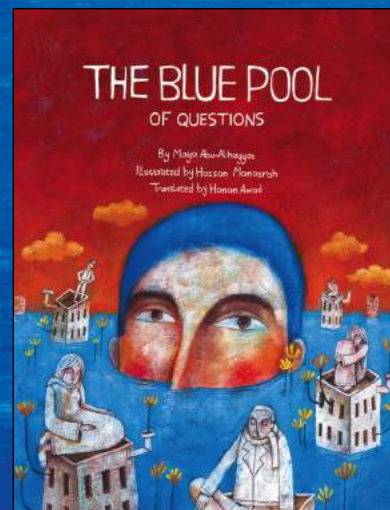


Images © Hassan Manasrah

Do you have questions?

Join us as we explore this  
award-winning book for all  
ages and ask the BIG  
QUESTIONS that it inspires.

Readers from all over the world are  
throwing their questions into the Blue  
Pool at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com).



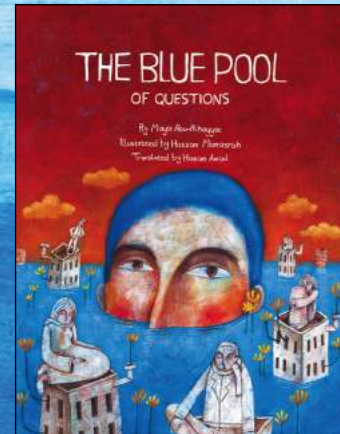
# THE BLUE POOL OF QUESTIONS

In this picture book for all ages, a man asks so many big questions that his questions form a large pool. That pool strands the people who like "everyday answers" and have forgotten "what questions look like."

Do you have big questions? Do you have a question that might have too many answers or none at all? A question that is too scary or too obvious to ask? Whether that question is personal, philosophical, political, or seemingly impossible, it may be crucial **simply to ask**.

**Join readers across the world who are asking big questions and throwing them into the Blue Pool.**

1. Cut out the blue slips of paper below and write your question(s) on the white side.
2. Add your first name, age, and state or country to the slip (optional).
3. Throw it in the Blue Pool (the provided container).
4. Consider sharing your question with the world at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com) or with [#BluePoolofQuestions](https://twitter.com/BluePoolofQuestions).



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# THE BLUE POOL OF QUESTIONS

Cut out the blue paper slips below in anticipation of soliciting  
BIG questions from your classroom or community.

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or at BluePoolofQuestions.com

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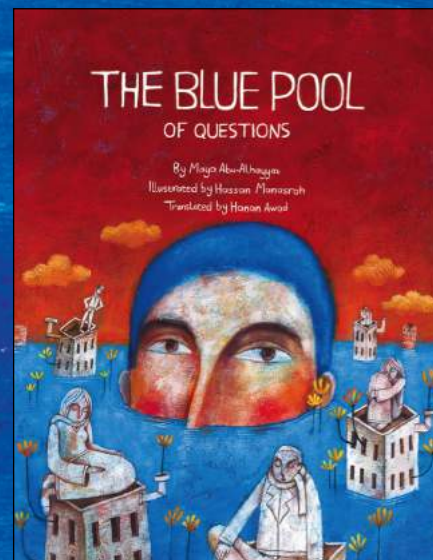
Ask more  
questions.

Be brave.  
Dive in.

Images © Hassan Manasrah

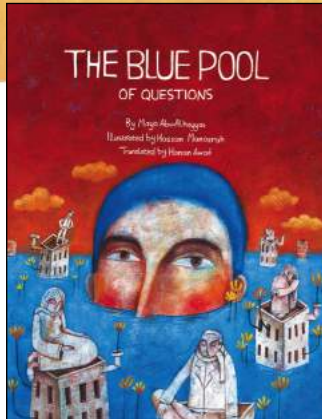
# What is your big, important question?

1. Write your question on the white side of one of the blue papers.
2. Add your first name, age, and state to that paper (optional).
3. Throw it in the Blue Pool.
4. Consider sharing your question with the world at [BluePoolofQuestions.com](http://BluePoolofQuestions.com) or with [#BluePoolofQuestions](https://twitter.com/BluePoolofQuestions).



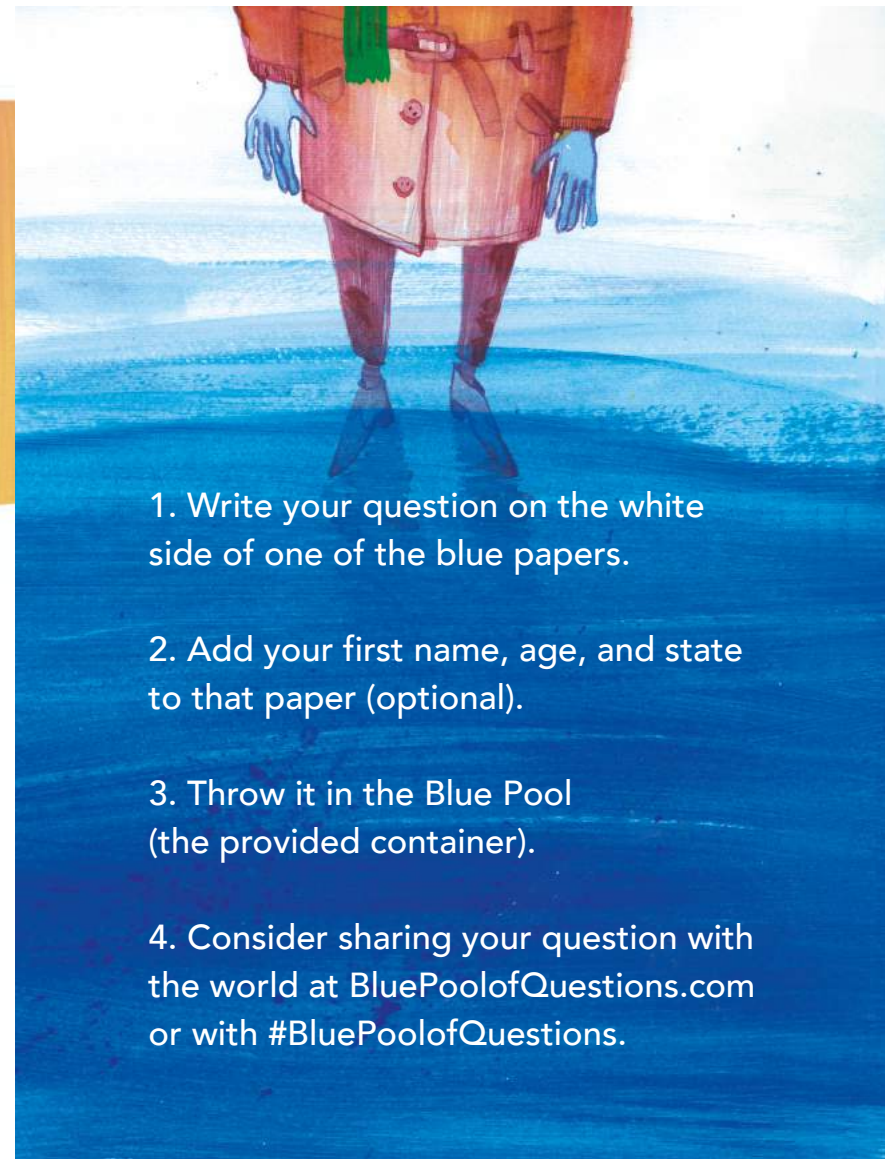
*And read the book that started it all...*

# What is your big, important question?



The question that might have too many answers or none at all? The one that is too scary or too obvious to ask?

**Ask more questions.**



1. Write your question on the white side of one of the blue papers.
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