



OPEN BOOK
Read any good people lately?

MEET THE BOOKS

**CULTURE
ALL**

JJ SINGH KAPUR



JJ Kapur began his interfaith work in high school. He started a youth organization called “The Turbanators,” which focused on “turban-ating” the negative stigma surrounding Sikhism. In 2017, he became the first turbaned Sikh to win the most prestigious high school speech and debate competition in the U.S. JJ graduated from Stanford University with Honors and Distinction in Theater and Performance Studies and a minor in Psychology. He returned to his hometown of Des Moines as an AmeriCorps Lead for America Fellow, where he served with CultureALL to help Iowans build bridges with their diverse neighbors. JJ is pursuing a PhD in Counseling Psychology at the University of Iowa.

“The Bollywood movies JJ Kapur watched as a child were all about heroes and villains. The off-screen superhero in JJ’s life was his father, who carried with him a pocketful of pixie dust wherever he went. But when JJ returned home from college, he wondered whether his father’s pixie dust had disappeared.”

ABE GOLDSTIEN

Abe Goldstien was born and raised in an orthodox Jewish community in Rochester, New York. He moved to Des Moines in 1969 to pursue an education and career in advertising. During college at Drake University, Abe had very little to do with Des Moines’ Jewish community or the religious customs of his youth. It wasn’t until he started to perform Yiddish music on his accordion that he reconnected with his heritage. Today, Abe is the leader of the Java Jews, Iowa’s only klezmer music band, and a CultureALL Ambassador. “I grew up in an orthodox Jewish home, but I pretty much abandoned the religious customs of my upbringing once I moved to Des Moines for college. Many years later, I became friends with a local chassidic rabbi. He connected me with my roots by describing me as a ‘Goldstien Jew’ – a title I am proud to carry.”



ABENA SANKOFA IMHOTEP



Abena Sankofa Imhotep is an award-winning author, transformative thought leader, and the Executive Director of Sankofa Literary & Empowerment Group which creates spaces for lifelong learning that center the literature and scholarship of Black authors. Leading conversations around racial equity and organizational awareness around the country, Abena is an active advocate for education, justice, and humanitarianism. Abena founded Sankofa Literary Academy in 2021 to expand children’s access to diverse books across the United States. Additionally, Abena serves on several boards of directors, is an International Relations major at Drake University, a TEDx speaker, and author of the beloved children’s book, *Omari’s Big Tree* and the *Mighty Djembe*.

"As the old song goes, 'time is filled with swift transitions.' Abena Sankofa Imhotep chronicles how, through loss and life, a family can reimagine who they are to each other in the aftermath of transitions."