Teaching the Middle East Through Language Arts

Arabic

Elementary

Ali, a young boy who lives in contemporary Baghdad, loves playing soccer and listening to loud music, but more than that, he loves writing calligraphy. This celebration of writing and art invokes the story of the master calligrapher, Yakut, who lived in Baghdad eight hundred years ago, also during a time of war.

Middle and High

Where the Streets Had a Name by Randa Abdel-Fattah (Scholastic Press, 2010). (MEOC Winner, 2011)
An intriguing story set in today’s Palestine, where political realities press in on daily life. The narrative is real, sensitive, and often very funny. The young main characters (Muslim and Christian) are well-developed and easy to relate to, and their adventures on the way to Jerusalem will appeal to young readers. One teacher reviewer commented, “I appreciated the fact that the author’s telling showed multiple perspectives on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, but did so without sounding preachy from any one perspective.”

Israeli

Elementary

One City, Two Brothers by Chris Smith, illustrated by Aurélia Fronty (Barefoot Books, 2007). (MEOC Winner 2007)
Written by a former worker with UNICEF and Oxfam in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, this re-telling of a traditional story from the time of King Solomon serves as a metaphor for the “wish for the people of Israel and Palestine to find peace.” The story describes the founding of the city of Jerusalem as related by King Solomon, as he seeks to settle an inheritance dispute between two brothers. A brief footnote at the end describes the importance of Jerusalem in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths.

Middle and High

Freefall, Anna Levine (Greenwillow, 2008)
Freefall is the story of eighteen-year-old Aggie, who has just graduated from high school and is in that limbo period before being drafted into the Israeli army. Aggie's concern with boy friends, girl friends, parents, and her confrontation of her own fears will be easily recognizable to any reader. The vivid descriptions of life in Israel and Aggie's inner drive to join a combat unit provide unique insight into life in Israel today.
**Persian**

*Elementary*

*Count Your Way through Iran* by Jim Haskins and Kathleen Benson, illustrated by Farida Zaman (Millbrook Press, 2007). (MEOC Honorable Mention 2007)
Using simple text, authors Jim Haskins and Kathleen Benson introduce elementary age readers to Iranian culture by choosing words that fit the numbers one (yek) through ten (dah) in Farsi. The book travels the length and breadth of the country, from Omar Khayyam’s famous four-line poems to the seven countries that border Iran. This book makes an excellent non-political introduction to the rich culture of Iran for younger readers.

*Middle and High*

The heartbreaking yet frequently witty story of a childhood and adolescence under totalitarianism in Iran and in exile. A great introduction to the memoir form for high school students, and how the political and the personal are intertwined.

**Turkish**

*Elementary*


*Middle and High*

A classic folk-adventure tale, and, after fifty years, still the most popular young people’s novel in Turkey. The young boy, Memed, begins by defying a cruel local landlord and grows to be a courageous fighter for justice in 1920s Anatolia.

For more suggestions, go to the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies

[http://mideast.unc.edu/outreach/](http://mideast.unc.edu/outreach/)

the Middle East Outreach Council Book Awards site


and Eve Tal’s site for books on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies

http://mideast.unc.edu/outreach/

Professional Development and Resources for Teaching the Middle East

Online resources
  Culture kit
  Books
  Films
  Curriculum Development

Join our listserv for updates on workshops, new resources, and grant opportunities.

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Re-Orienting the Veil Workshop
  February 22-23, 2013
  UNC-Chapel Hill

Free workshop, CEUs available