THE WORLD OF ARAB AND MUSLIM CHILDREN IN CHILDREN’S BOOKS

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Relatively few books exist in English that give children a vision of the Arab world or of Islam, but there are some picture and chapter books that are told from Arab and Muslim perspectives or sympathetically portray these cultures, and avoid stereotypes. In the last few years, since 2001, there has been some increase in books about the Arab world as well as about Islam. In this update of my earlier annotated bibliography, I have included newer books. There are other good sources of bibliographies, including Children’s Literature’s Themed Reviews: Middle East, at http://www.childrenslit.com/home.htm.

I have included both fiction and non-fiction. For non-fiction I have limited my search to books published since 1990, except for some books about Islam, which include titles from the early 1980s. It is evident that some publishers have made an effort since 2001 to be more inclusive of books by and about people from the Middle East or from Muslim countries. I have read most of the books of fiction and all of the picture books, but have seen only a few of the non-fiction works. The publishers, however, are reliable, many specializing in series books about a wide range of countries and the books have been positively reviewed in School Library Journal or appeared in Best Books for Children Preschool Through Grade Six, 1998, and Best Books for Young Teen Readers, Grades 7 to 10 , 2000, Bowker and Children’s Catalog 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 Supplements. Even in the best reviewed books, however, there can be inaccuracies, especially in the illustrations of picture story books which include details that the text omits.

However thorough in their research, illustrators from outside the culture often miss nuances and cultural details, and reviewers, who are usually also from outside the culture, also miss these errors. For this reason, no single book should be relied on as the sole source of information about any country or culture. Fiction and non-fiction, contemporary pictures obtained from other sources, and interviews with people from the culture should also be used when introducing a culture or a country. In an attempt to focus on contemporary culture, I have included only a limited number of folktales. For the same reason, I have omitted books about ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. Books on these topics, however, are readily available. Reliable sources for more books on this or other international topics are listed at the end of the bibliography.

PICTURE BOOKS AND BOOKS FOR YOUNGER READERS

IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

Addasi, Maha. The White Nights of Ramadan. Illustrated by Ned Gannon. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2008. 32p. Noor and her brothers, Sam and Dan are getting ready for the mid-Ramadan month festival, Girigan, when the children go from door to door with festive, decorated bags, collecting candies. The children get ready all day and by evening they are ready to walk through the full-moon and lanterns lit streets. The story conveys the children’s excitement and joy and closes with the calm of Noor and her grandfather walking to the Mosque to deliver a basket of food for the poor. KUWAIT, ISLAM


Matthews, Mary. *Magid Fasts for Ramadan.* Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. New York: Clarion Books, c1996. 48 p. Ages 7-10. Magid, an eight-year-old Muslim boy in Cairo, is determined to celebrate Ramadan by fasting, despite the opposition of family members who feel that he is not yet old enough to fast. **FICTION. EGYPT/ISLAM**

Matze, Claire Sidhom. *The Stars in My Geddoh’s Sky.* Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 2000. 32p. Ages 3-7. Alex’s grandfather comes to visit. 4The objects he pulls from his trunk help Alex learn about his Geddoh’s homeland in Egypt. Figures in the illustrations and dialogue in the text are often stiff and unnatural, but the oil on linen paintings luminously depict scenes in both countries. (HB 09/99) **EGYPT**
Mobin-Uddin. The Best Eid Ever. Illustrated by Laura Jacobsen. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. 2007. 32p. Ages 6-8. Because her parents have gone to Mecca on a Hajj, Aneesa thinks this year’s Eid celebration will not be very happy for her. But it turns out to be the best Eid ever when she shares the wonderful clothes and food her grandmother made with two newly arrived refugee children. An afterword explains the meaning of Eid ISLAM. UNITED STATES.

Mobin-Uddin. My Name is Bilal. Illustrated by Barbara Kiwak. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2005. 32 p. Ages 7-9. Bilal and his sister Ayesha are new at their small-town school and seem to be the only Muslim children. When a bully and his friends start teasing Ayesha about her headscarf Bilal pretends that he is not with her, and when later his teacher asks his name, he says it’s Bill. The teacher, who is an old friend of Bilal’s father and a Muslim as well, does not scold Bill, but instead gives him a book about Bilal ibn Rabah, the first man to give the call to prayer during the Prophet’s time. As Bilal reads about the courage of this man as he had to defend his faith against his tormentors, he too gains courage and the next time he does stand up to the bully. In the end he makes friends with the boy. At the end of the book the author gives the English translation of the call to prayer, the adhan. FICTION MUSLIMS UNITED STATES.

Mobin-Uddin, Asma. A Party in Ramadan. Illustrated by Laura Jacobsen. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mill Press, 2009. 32 p. Ages 7-9. Anyone who has been caught between two cultures, wanting to have fun with friends from the mainstream culture while also remaining faithful to one’s own culture, and especially religion, can identify with Leena, who has been invited to her best friend’s birthday party which will include a pony ride, on the first Friday of Ramadan. Even though she is not yet old enough to have to fast every day of Ramadan, Leena wants to fast this day, because this is the day her Aunt Sana will be coming for a big family dinner after sundown. But she is also desperate to go to the party. Exercising her will-power, Leena manages to do both: she has fun at the party but resists the temptation to eat or drink. At the end of the day she feels thankful for God’s many blessings, and not only has a wonderful family dinner, but also gets to eat the birthday cake that her friend brings over to her house. An author’s note provides information about Ramadan and the larger meaning of fasting.

Nagda, Ann W. Dear Whiskers. Illustrated by Stephanie Roth. New York: Holiday House, c2000. 75 p. Ages 7-9. Jenny is discouraged when her second grade pen pal turns out to be a new student from Saudi Arabia who does not speak English very well, but as she works with her they slowly become friends. FICTION. SAUDI ARABIA.


Sales, Francesc d’A. Ibrahim. Illustrated by Eulààlia Sariola; translated by Marc Simont. New York : Lippincott, c1989. 30 p. 1st American ed. Ibrahim is tempted to exchange his job in the old market place in Marrakesh for a freer life as a desert nomad, until a dream shows him that freedom is something carried in the heart. FICTION. MOROCCO.

Shah, Indries. The Farmer’s Wife/La esposa del granjero. Translated by Angelica
This is a retelling, by a classic writer and folklore collector, of a Sufi story about a farmer’s wife who while trying to retrieve an apple from a hole in the ground receives help from an increasing number of animals. Humorous illustrations with traditional setting. **FICTION.**

**AFGHANISTAN**

**NON-FICTION**


Marchant, Kerma. *Id-ul-Fitr.* Hove: Wayland, 1998. 32 p. Describes the end-of-Ramadan celebration as it is practiced around the world. **ISLAM**


his journey to give life to his era for young readers, while the illustrations showing his route and the more specific information in the back would interest people of any age. ISLAMIC WORLD


At the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003 librarian Aliah Muhammad realizing that the library was in danger of bombing, saved 30,000 books, with the help of neighbors, by moving them to a safer place. Lovely pictures depict the heroic librarian and her shopkeeper neighbor, the library and the neighborhood. IRAQ

BOOKS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE

Carlsson, Janne. *Camel Bells*. Translated by Angela Barnett-Lindberg from the Swedish. Groundwood Books/Douglas McIntyre, 2002 (original 1985). The setting is the late 1970s, when the hope was that a new government would help eradicate poverty and corruption. Hajdar, an 11 year old village boy dreams of life beyond his little village, whenever he hears the nomads’ camel bells. He finally gains his mother’s permission to take the long trip over the mountain by bus to Kabul with his older friend, who has an uncle in the city, in order to sell his mother’s produce. Life in the big city is exciting and different indeed, from village life, but Hajdar is caught in the civil war that is beginning between the Marxist, Soviet backed rebels and the supporters of the old, corrupt regime. FICTION. AFGHANISTAN

Carmi, Daniella. *Samir and Yonathan*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2000. 183 p. Ages 9-11. A Palestinian and an Israeli boy become friends. Told from Samir’s point of view, we see daily life in a Palestinian town with its dangers and hardships. Samir, who is wounded in an Israeli police raid ends up in a hospital in Israel. His interaction with the Israeli children in his hospital room include some hostile or scary episodes but his friendship with Yonathan ends on a hopeful note for understanding between Palestinians and Israelis. FICTION. PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELI


Ellis, Deborah. *The Breadwinner*. Age 12+ Toronto: Groundwood, 2001. 170p. Parvana, age 11, must take on the role of breadwinner after her father is arrested during the Taliban era. Since as a girl she can not work in public, she disguises herself as a boy and earns her living in the streets of Kabul. FICTION. AFGHANISTAN

Ellis, Deborah. *Mud City*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2003. 164 p. Age 12+ In this sequel to *Parvana’s Journey*, Parvana’s friend Shauzia, who has fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan is
trying to survive on her own living in the streets. She prefers this existence to living in a refugee camp. Shauzia’s efforts to take control of her own life against insuperable odds created by poverty and the world’s indifference to the sufferings of refugees and children living in poverty, make this a powerful story. As with the previous book, Ellis provides information on how readers can help rebuild Afghanistan or can help street children through an organization to which Ellis donates her royalties. **FICTION. AFGHANISTAN / PAKISTAN**

Ellis, Deborah. *Parvana’s Journey.* Toronto: Groundwood, 2002. 199p. Ages 12+ Graphically describes the suffering and courage of four Afghani children who are left homeless and parentless during the Afghan civil war. Hunger, fear of soldiers, and the ever-present danger of bombing or land-mines, one of which eventually takes young Leila’s seemingly charmed life, are their constant companion as they make their way to the refugee camp where Parvana believes her mother to be. This is a strong anti-war book with a plea for helping refugees. **FICTION. AFGHANISTAN**


Nye, Naomi Shehab. *Habibi.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. 259 p. When fourteen-year-old Liyanne Abboud, her younger brother, and her parents move from St. Louis to a new home between Jerusalem and the Palestinian village where her father was born, they face many changes and must deal with the tensions between Jews and Palestinians. **FICTION. PALESTINIANS**


Schami, Rafik. *Hand Full of Stars.* New York: Dutton, 1990. 195 p. Ages 12-15. A fourteen year old boy’s daily life is changed as he becomes involved with a journalist he admires who opposes the government and runs an underground newspaper. Set in Syria, the story is loosely based on the author’s childhood. Well developed and rounded characters show daily life
in Damascus from the recent past. **FICTION. SYRIA**


Staples, Suzanne F. *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind*. New York: Knopf, 1989. 240 p. 1990 Newbery Honor book. When eleven-year old Shabanu, the daughter of a nomad in the Cholistan Desert of present-day Pakistan, is pledged in marriage to an older man whose money will bring prestige to the family, she must either accept the decision, as is the custom, or risk the consequences of defying her father's wishes. Vivid depiction of desert life and a loving family make this an engaging story. **FICTION PAKISTAN**

Staples, Suzanne F. *Haveli*. New York: Knopf, 1993. 259 p. Having relented to the ways of her people in Pakistan and married the rich older man to whom she was pledged against her will, Shabanu is now the victim of his family's blood feud and the malice of his other wives. A courageous and kind older relative guides Shabanu. Sequel to *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind*. **FICTION PAKISTAN**

Stölzle, Joelle. *The Shadows of Ghadames*. New York: Delacorte, 2004. 119p. Translated from the French by Catherine Tamerson. Mildred L. Batchelder Award winner. Malinka, at 12, is not yet ready to relinquish her freedom to move around the city streets and go to school the way his brother Jassim does, but little by little she discovers and accepts the private world of the women who spend their days on the interconnected roof-tops of Ghadames. While her beloved father is away on a business trip, Malinka her mother and her mother’s co-wife help a wounded stranger recover and the stranger in turn changes the lives of all three women as he teaches Malinka to read so that she may read the Koran herself. When her father returns, he supports Malinka in her dreams of seeing beyond the rooftops through reading and through a telescope that he gives her. The author, a French journalist researched life in late 19th early 20th century Ghadames, Lybia, where people today lead very different lives. **FICTION LYBIA**

Ural, Serpil. *Candles at Dawn*. Translated by Betty Toker. Ankara, Turkey: Güldiken Yayinlari, 2000. 152 p. Through the eyes of two fictional contemporary girls, one from Turkey and one from Australia, readers are introduced to the World War I Galipoli campaign in Turkey which was fought on the Allies’ side largely by Australian troops. Presents the subject in through a tone of peace reconciliation. Includes several black and white photographs from WWI. Publisher’s address: Bayindir Sok. No: 14//17 Yensisehir / Ankara – Turkey **FICTION TURKEY**


Nonfiction
Abodaher, David J. *Youth in the Middle East: Voices of Despair.* New York: F. Watts, 1990. 111 p. Conversations with young people in the Middle East depict the political strife there and how it has affected their lives. Teenagers interviewed are from EGYPT, ISRAEL, LEBANON, PALESTINIANS.


Ashabranner, Brent. *Gavriel and Jemal: Two Boys of Jerusalem*. Photographs by Paul Conklin. New York: Dodd, Mead, c1984. 94 p. Though somewhat dated, this book is likely to be well researched and sympathetically written by an author who typically writes clearly and fairly about a wide range of cultures. PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELI


Beshore, George. *Science in Early Islamic Culture*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1998. 64p. Starting with the 600s, scientific discoveries are described. Lively writing and illustrations make this a good introduction to the culture from which these scientific discoveries sprang. There was a 1988 edition for older children. This one is appropriate for grades 4-8. ISLAM AND SCIENCE


Boudalika, Litsa. *If you could be my friend: letters of Mervet Akram Sha'ban and Galit*
Fink, presented by Litsa Boudalika; translated by Ariane Elbaz and Beatrice Khadige; historical overview and glossary by Ariel Cohen. New York: Orchard Books, 1998. 118 p. Contains the correspondence between two girls, one an Israeli and the other a Palestinian, from August 1988 until their meeting in October 1991. Includes a brief history of their two peoples.

PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELI


Diamond, Arthur. Egypt, Gift of the Nile. New York: Dillon, 1992. 127 p. Describes the land and people of Egypt, discussing both ancient and modern history, the geography, social life and customs, and folklore. EGYPT


Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Celebrating Ramadan*. Illustrated by Lawrence Migdale. New York: Holiday House, 2001. Ages 8-11. Celebrating Ramadan provides a respectful, if superficial, introduction to Islam and Ramadan's importance in that religious practice. It can't help but be useful to librarians and teachers because of the rapidly increasing numbers of Muslims in the US and the scarcity of books for children on the subject (Kirkus Review). Provides an account through the eyes of a young Arab-American boy. Photographs focus on Ibrahim, the narrator, his family and the ways they celebrate Ramadan. **ARAB-AMERICANS; ISLAM**


King, John. *Bedouin: Threatened Cultures.* Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1993. 48 p. Ages 9+. Describes the Bedouin way of life as it has survived for centuries in the Arab world and discusses threats to the continued existence of this nomadic people's culture. **BEDOUINS**

Kuklin, Susan. *Iqbal Masih and the Crusaders Against Child Slavery.* New York: H. Holt and Co., c1998. 133 p. An account of the former Pakistani child labor activist whose life and unexplained murder has brought to the attention of the world the evil of child bondage. **PAKISTAN**


Marston, Elsa. *Muhammad of Mecca: Prophet of Islam*. Series: Book Report Biography. New York: Watts, 2001. 128 p. Ages: 10 14. This biography is readable, straightforward, and quite satisfactory. In addition to the expected life story, Marston also presents basic information on Muslim beliefs and practices, and gives a brief history of Islam after Muhammad's death. There are many black-and-white photographs and reproductions (though some are too small or too dark) (SLJ 9/01). ISLAM


Moskovitch, Arlene. *Egypt, the Culture. Egypt, the Land. Egypt, the People*. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 1999. 32 p. each. Ages 9-11. Each of these books touches on both ancient and modern life, but to different degrees determined by the subject matter. For example, Culture is dominated by ancient times and religious beliefs. A briefer section mentions modern religious practices, art, music, dance, and other forms of popular culture. By contrast, Land concentrates primarily on how the land is used today. (SLJ 70/00)


Sanders, Renfield. *Libya*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000. 100 p. Surveys the geography, history, economy, culture, and people of Libya, the fourth largest country in Africa whose terrain is more than ninety-seven percent desert. **LIBYA**


primarily to reflect the current political situation in the Middle East and to update the biographical sketches of prominent Arab Americans. The clearly written text includes a historical sketch of the Arabs' culture and history of immigration. (SLJ 01/99) ARAB AMERICANS

Suhaib, Hamid Ghazi. Ramadan Illus. by Omar Rayyan. New York: Holiday House, 1996. 32p. After explaining the meaning of Ramadan the author takes us through one full day during Ramadan through the experiences of Hakeem, a little boy in a multiethnic community, possibly in the United States, starting with the predawn meal, showing how hard it is for Hakeem to see other children eat their lunches and take drinks of water, showing the closeness of the family, the evening meal after sunset and prayers at the mosque. The book ends with Eid ul-Fitr, the end of Ramadan celebration. ISLAM


Folklore

Bushnaq, Inea. *Arab Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 386p. This collection reflects values important to diverse Arab cultures and would be a good resource for adults. Bushnaq identifies values portrayed in the stories such as generosity, hospitality, the importance of family as a social unit; pride; independence; self-sufficiency; sacrifice, and wisdom. Understanding the values that the stories often exemplify, will help in understanding the children's versions of Arab folktales. Stories include fairy tales, animal tales, and stories of the beloved stock character, Djuha.

The following are contemporary illustrated versions of folk and fairy tales:


- Cohen, Barbara. *Seven Daughters and Seven Sons*. By Barbara Cohen & Bahija Lovejoy. New York: Atheneum, 1982 A retelling of a traditional Arabic tale in which a young woman disguises herself as a man and opens up a shop in a distant city in order to help her impoverished family. Based on the folktale that has been part of the oral tradition of Iraq. (C) **IRAQ**

- Hickox, Rebecca. *The Golden Sandal: A Middle Eastern Cinderella Story.* ; Illustrated by Will Hildebrand. New York: Holiday House, 1999. Instead of a fairy grandmother, Maha, the Cinderella figure, is helped by a fish and her slipper is a pair of clogs. **IRAQ**


illustrations have an Asian flavor that suits the stories nicely. (SLJ 8/00)


Video: *Children of Heaven*. Majidi, director. This 1998 Academy Award Best Foreign Film nominee from Iran presents the positive values of Islam in people’s daily lives. Ali, 10 and Zhara, his first grader sister, share the only pair of sneakers between them in order for both of them to be able to attend school, after older brother loses little sister’s just repaired shoes at the market. Kindness, loyalty, desire to do the right thing without bragging, honesty, and perseverance are highlighted in this moving and beautifully photographed film. Ages 9+

http://www.freep.com/jobspage/arabs.htm
This is an information all web site by the *Detroit Free Press*. The site is organized around 100
commonly asked questions about Arabs, Arab Americans, customs, religion, language, and family.

http://www.hoopoekids.com
This is a link to Hoopoe Books a site for children’s books by Indries Shah, a classic Afghani writer.

RESOURCES FOR BOOKS ABOUT ARAB AND MUSLIM CULTURES


Khorana, Meena. Africa in Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography of English Language Books. Greenwood Pr., 1995


