

Picture Books that Bring Arab Voices and Middle East and North African Culture to K-6 Classrooms

Ilham Nasser

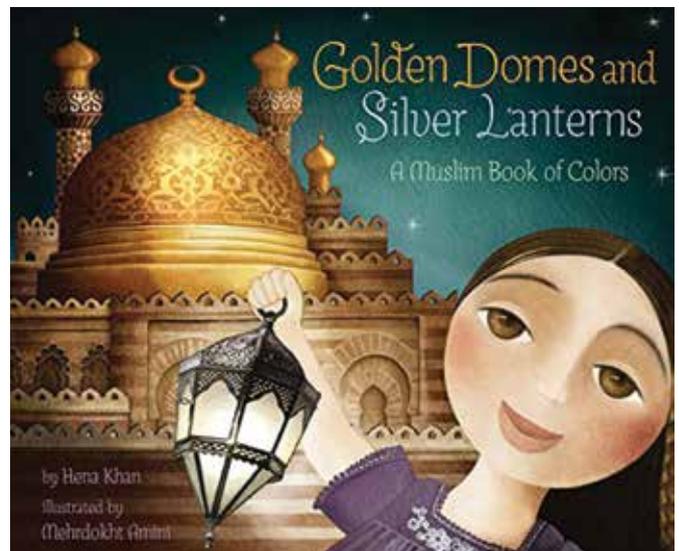
To contribute to social studies' and history teachers' bank of resources, this book list was compiled by the Education Outreach Program (EOP) of the National Arab American Women Association (NAAWA). These books provide an alternative voice and a more colorful picture of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with the narratives ranging from simple stories to more complex ones. This list of books is not comprehensive, but it provides a good collection of high quality, unbiased, and non-stereotypical portrayals of Arabs. It is also a collection that brings the native voices of the MENA region to elementary readers. In an environment where the voices of indigenous populations are too-often silenced, this collection adds to the messages of justice, peace, and equity towards Arabs, Muslims, and other marginalized groups in the United States and beyond.

In addition to suggesting books, the NAAWA website also offers lesson plans and videos for K-12 teachers to consider.¹ These resources were compiled with input from parents, teachers, education specialists, and members of the community. Please contact NAAWA directly if you have additional resources you would like us to consider, or if you have any questions or feedback. We value the interaction between our educators and social studies classrooms around the country. Please email us at general@naawa.org if you would like to arrange for a speaker to elaborate more on any of the resources we offer, or the work of NAAWA and the Arab American community.

Picture Books for Pre-K through Grade 2

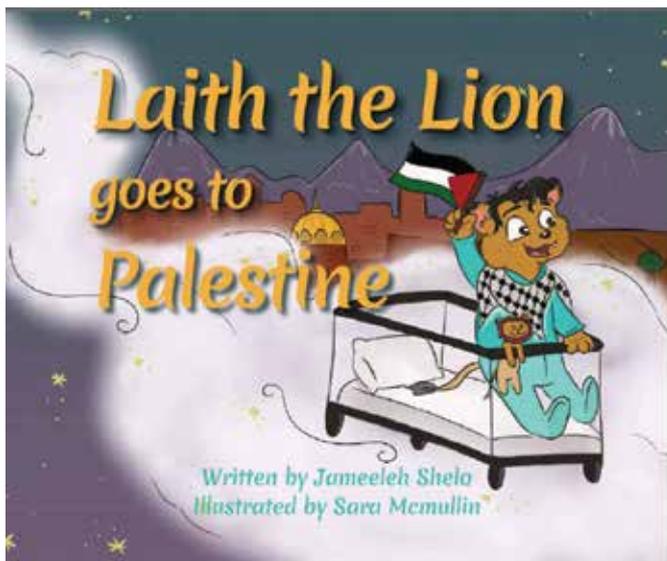
Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns by Hena Khan, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini. New York: Chronicle Books, 2015.

Magnificently capturing the colorful world of Islam for the youngest readers, this breathtaking and informative picture book celebrates Islam's beauty and traditions. From a red prayer rug to a blue hijab, everyday colors are given special meaning as young readers learn about clothing, food, and other important elements of Islamic culture, with a young Muslim girl as a guide. Certain to inspire questions and observations about world religions and cultures, this book is equally at home in a classroom reading circle as it is being read to a child on a parent's lap.²



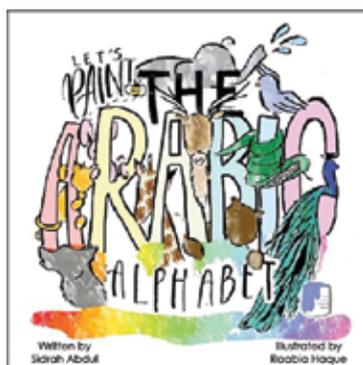
Laith the Lion Goes to Palestine by Jameelah Shelo, illustrated by Sara McMullin. New York: Laith the Lion Inc., 2018

Join Laith the Lion as he takes a magical journey to Palestine. Little lions of any age can join Laith in his flying crib and make new friends in sunny Palestine. Inspired by the author's son, Laith the Lion encapsulates the spirit and connection many Palestinians feel towards their culture, ancestry, and homeland.



It's a journey of discovery, pride, and warmth that your child will want to experience over and over again.

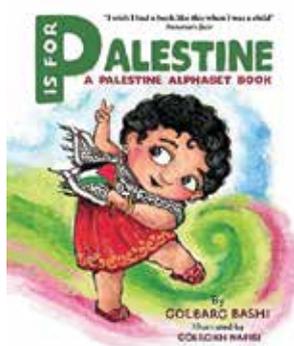
***Let's Paint the Arabic Alphabet!* by Sidrah Abdul, New York: Sidrah Abdul Publishing, 2018.**



This board book combines the art of storytelling with adventures of animals and children's creativity. Young readers can learn Arabic letters by tracing them in this book. Children will be excited to read the story over and over again. And while moving their hands, the flowing shapes

of the letters will be inscribed in their memory. Reading and writing, two sides of the same beautiful coin.

***P is for Palestine: A Palestine Alphabet Book* by Golbarg Bashi, illustrated by Golrokh Nafisi. New York: Dr. Bashi, 2018.**

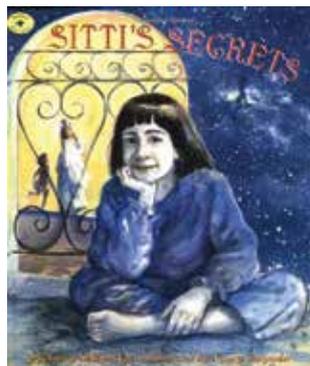


The best-selling *P is for Palestine*, is perhaps the first English-language ABC story book about Palestine. It uses simple rhythmic rhyme with stunning illustrations to act as an educational, colorful, empowering reference for children, showcasing the geography, beauty, and strength of Palestinian culture. Palestine is considered by people of many faiths to be the Holy Land. It's

home to the sweetest oranges, most intricate embroideries, great dance moves (*Dabkeh*), fertile olive groves, and sunniest people. Inspired by Palestinian people's own rich history in the

literary and visual arts, an academic and children's author and a socially conscious illustrator have teamed up to create this book for children of all ages.

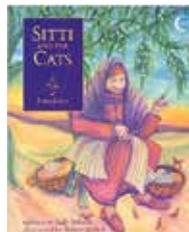
***Sitti's Secrets* by Naomi Shihab Nye, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. New York: Aladdin Picture Books, 1997.**



Mona's grandmother, her *Sitti*, lives in a small Palestinian village on the other side of the Earth. Once, Mona went to visit her. They couldn't speak each other's language, so they made up their own. They learned about each other's worlds, and they discovered each other's secrets. Then it was time for Mona to go back home. But even though there

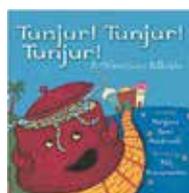
were millions of miles and millions of people between them, they remained true neighbors forever.

***Sitti and the Cats: A Tale of Friendship* by Sally Bahous, illustrated by Nancy Malick. New York: Roberts Rinehart, 1993.**



A poor old woman who lives alone in a small village has a magical encounter with elegantly dressed talking cats, whose generous gifts help her bring an understanding of the value of kindness to a selfish neighbor.

***Tunjur! Tunjur! Tunjur! A Palestinian Tale* by Margaret Read MacDonald, illustrated by Alik Arzoumanian. New York: Two Lions, 2012,**



There was once a woman who had a little pot for a child. "Tunjur! Tunjur! Tunjur!" That was the sound the pot made as it rolled everywhere. Unfortunately, the pot wasn't old enough to know the difference between right and wrong. That naughty pot ran off with things that did not belong to her until she learned her lesson--the hard way! In this retelling of a Palestinian folktale, brought to life in dazzling, jewel-like illustrations, children will discover that there are consequences for taking things that don't belong to them.

Two Books and a Video for Grades 3–5
***Farah Rocks Fifth Grade* by Susan Muaddi Darraj, illustrated by Ruaida Manna. New York: Capstone, 2020.**

This is one of three books by this author-illustrator team, which includes *Farah Rocks Summer Break* and *Farah Rocks New Beginnings*. In *Farah Rocks Fifth Grade*, the main



character and her best friend, Allie Liu, are getting excited to turn in their applications to the Magnet Academy, where they both hope to attend sixth grade. But when new girl Dana Denver shows up, Farah's world is turned upside down. As Dana starts bullying Farah's little brother, Samir, Farah begins to

second-guess her choice to leave him behind at Harbortown Elementary/Middle School. Determined to handle it on her own, Farah comes up with a plan—a plan that involves lying to those closest to her. Will her lies catch up with her, or can Farah find a way to defeat the bully and rock fifth grade?

***Ibn Al-Haytham: The Man Who Discovered How We See (Readers Bios)*, by Libby Romero. Washington, DC: National Geographic Children's Books, 2012.**

Meet the scientist known as the “Father of Optics,” Ibn al-Haytham. During the golden age of science, knowledge, and invention in Muslim civilization—concurrent with the “Dark Ages” in Western Europe—this incredible scholar discovered how we see. He set the stage for the methods we now know as the scientific process. Packed with beautiful and engaging photos, kids will learn all about this fascinating scientist. The level 3 text provides accessible, yet wide-ranging, information for independent readers. This book is a companion to the international educational campaign, “1001 Inventions and the World of Ibn al-Haytham,” that includes interactive exhibits, workshops, and a 12-minute video (2018), free and online, starring Omar Sharif.³ 🌐

Page from the booklet “Ibn Al-Haytham: The Man Who Discovered How We See,” (Ibn Al-Haytham Educational Workshops, 2015), free online at www.ibnalhaytham.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/iah-workshops.pdf

Ibn al-Haytham was a pioneering scientific thinker who made important contributions to the understanding of vision, optics and light. His methodology of investigation, in particular using experiment to verify theory, shows certain similarities to what later became known as the modern scientific method.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn to build your own I-dicara which is a giant version of a camera obscura
- Test the theory that the smaller the hole, the clearer the picture
- Understand how light rays travel in straight lines
- Use light rays to create a photographic image

Links to Ibn Al-Haytham Discoveries:

- Ibn al-Haytham is credited with explaining the nature of light and vision, he carried out experiments using a dark room he called “*al-bait al-mushur*,” or “camera obscura”, the device that forms the basis of photography
- Ibn al-Haytham proved experimentally that light travels in straight lines.
- Ibn al-Haytham was the first to prove that we see because light reflects off objects and enters our eyes.

Notes

1. This article is based on K-12 resources—including book suggestion, lesson plans, and more—available at <https://naawa.org/teacher-resources>.
2. Book summaries are based on reviews at Amazon.com, unless stated otherwise.
3. National Geographic Kids, “1001 Inventions and the World of Ibn al-Haytham,” a 12-minute film (2018), free at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmPTTFff44k. In addition, visit “1001 Inventions: Uncovering the Enduring Legacy of Muslim Civilization” at www.1001inventions.com/news/national_geographic.

ILHAM NASSER is a member of the Education and Outreach Program and a board member of the National Arab American Women's Association (NAAWA). She is a Senior Researcher in Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) at the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Herndon, Virginia. She was a presenter at the 2020 NCSS Virtual Conference.

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