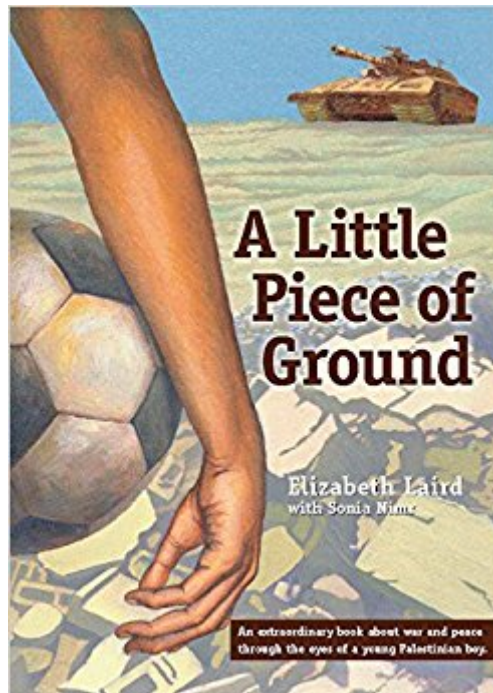




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A Little Piece Of Ground



Synopsis

A Little Piece Of Ground will help young readers understand more about one of the worst conflicts afflicting our world today. Written by Elizabeth Laird, one of Great Britain's best-known young adult authors, A Little Piece Of Ground explores the human cost of the occupation of Palestinian lands through the eyes of a young boy. Twelve-year-old Karim Aboudi and his family are trapped in their Ramallah home by a strict curfew. In response to a Palestinian suicide bombing, the Israeli military subjects the West Bank town to a virtual siege. Meanwhile, Karim, trapped at home with his teenage brother and fearful parents, longs to play football with his friends. When the curfew ends, he and his friend discover an unused patch of ground that's the perfect site for a football pitch. Nearby, an old car hidden intact under bulldozed building makes a brilliant den. But in this city there's constant danger, even for schoolboys. And when Israeli soldiers find Karim outside during the next curfew, it seems impossible that he will survive. This powerful book fills a substantial gap in existing young adult literature on the Middle East. With 23,000 copies already sold in the United Kingdom and Canada, this book is sure to find a wide audience among young adult readers in the United States.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 6

Customer Reviews

Grade 6-10 Karim, a 12-year-old Palestinian boy, works with two friends to transform an

abandoned lot in Ramallah – the little piece of ground – into a soccer field and a getaway from the trials of both family and life under occupation. Hopper, a new friend who had until recently lived in a refugee camp and whose older brother is in the custody of the Israelis, and Joni, a Christian boy whose family has always been close to Karim's, represent in some ways the opposite poles that Karim yo-yos between. Hopper is somewhat suspect, simply because he was a refugee. Furthermore, his actions are brash and defiant; he stands up to an Israeli tank, brandishing an eggplant like a grenade and swinging from its gun. The town is put under Israeli curfew, and first Hopper and later Karim are shot at by soldiers and wounded, Karim seriously enough to require hospitalization. Throughout this powerful narrative, the authors remain true to Karim's character and reactions. He is a typical self-centered adolescent who longs to hang out with his friends, go to school, and play sports. His parents and relatives provide some of the necessary background information and commentary about the occupation. At the book's end, Karim is allowed to spend time outside for the first time since his wound, and is reunited with Hopper. The boys attend a celebration and are chillingly greeted as heroes. As notable in its way as James D. Forman's historical novels of the late '60s and '70s, *A Little Piece of Ground* deserves serious attention and discussion. – Coop Renner, Hillside Elementary, El Paso, TX Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

What is it like to live under military occupation in Palestine? Laird explores the question through the viewpoint of Karim, 12, desperate to get out of his apartment in Ramallah, where yet another curfew has kept everyone locked up since a suicide bomber killed people in Israel. Even when the curfew is lifted, Karim remains bitter and angry; his grandfather's land has been confiscated, his father humiliated in a strip search, and his school has been trashed. Karim, his Christian friend, and a Muslim boy, whose brother is in a Jerusalem prison, band together and attempt to clear space for a soccer field. Then the tanks roll in again, and Karim barely escapes. Although this is largely a docu-novel, the heartbreaking personal drama visualizes the realistic challenges of wartime life at home, as well as the diversity of opinion about religion, class, and politics in the community. Recommend this with books from the Israeli viewpoint, such as Pnina Moed Kass' *Real Time* (2004). Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Amazing how one can find a toy or scrap of ground to play in a war zone...

Imagine being a kid on the verge of teenagehood trapped in a small apartment for days on end with

an angry older brother, a depressed father worried about his business, a mother fearful for your safety and two younger sisters, one of them sick. You can't go out of your front door or else you'll get shot by the soldiers manning the tanks and jeeps that patrol the streets of your city. You get two hours once or twice a week to go see your friends, buy anything you need, run to school to turn in assignments and get new ones. Imagine the stifling anger, frustration and helplessness. That's where Elizabeth Laird's "A Little Piece of Ground" begins. From this claustrophobic opening, the story opens up a little bit with glimmers of hope and happiness, but each such glimmer is marred by the brutality and uncertainty of the occupation. A trip to the countryside village is marred by humiliation at a checkpoint along the way and the discovery that the family's olive groves have been confiscated by settlers. The discovery of "Hopper's ground" is shadowed by the destruction and rubble of the buildings which once stood on the site. Laird has created a fictionalized account of life in an occupied land, which in the story happens to be Palestine. Having little knowledge and no direct experience with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I have no idea how accurate her portrayal of life in Palestine really is (although my gut tells me "very accurate"). But in many ways, it doesn't matter what country we're talking about. The horrors of war and occupation are universal and the damage done - to both the occupied and the occupiers - is profound. The occupied people live in fear and rage at their occupiers and they react aggressively, instinctively trying to assert their need for freedom. The occupiers (who know, in their heart of hearts what they are doing) react by fearing the occupied people - projecting onto them their own aggression. 'Round and 'round it goes, where it stops, who knows? Elizabeth Laird does an excellent job of depicting the crucible of escalating tensions - fear and anger on both sides - which leads to the deadlocked confrontation of the occupation. At the same time, she deftly portrays both sides as humans caught up in an overarching struggle that neither side understands. They share commonalities (one soldier looks like Karim's brother, for instance), but they are worlds away. Karim and his friends come of age amidst this complex backdrop, guided, wearily and warily, by the generation which has gone before them and learned how to navigate this fearful landscape with dignity intact. The soccer field Karim and his friends create at Hopper's ground, destroyed by Israeli tanks, and hopefully to be redeveloped in the future, symbolizes the strength and persistent endurance of the Palestinian peoples in the face of the adversity of the unending Israeli occupation. With one exception, Laird has created believable characters with whom the reader can identify and understand. The one exception is the youngest daughter Sireen who is supposed to be four-years-old, but the way she is depicted seems much closer to two. For instance, a four-year-old who has grown up in an occupied land would know better than to open her door and get out at a checkpoint. Sireen is a very minor character, so this

flaw doesn't unduly mar the book, but I did find it annoying every time she appeared. But otherwise, Laird does an good job of presenting her characters' motivations and emotions, actions and re-actions, whether simply in "ordinary" family life (as ordinary as life can be in such a tense situation) or in the extraordinary confrontation with the occupying force that the family must deal with. The combination of rich and realistic characters and a well-paced plot make this book an engaging read for kids and adults alike. Most Americans, young and old (myself included), have little conception of what life is like outside the confines of our safe homes and neighborhoods. War has not touched our soil in so long that few have any conception what it is like to live day after day in a war zone. This book will open many eyes.

What I like most about this very simply written book is that it really makes the suffering of Palestinians real to young and old readers alike. I never really thought what it's like for a 14-year old to be cooped up all day in an apartment because there's a day and night curfew imposed by the Israeli army. And then the joy of having just a few minutes out of doors in the sun. Elizabeth Laird has an uncanny ability to capture the feelings of the children affected by the Israeli occupation of Palestine. She keeps the book free of polemics. Very readable and very honest. I've recommended to several people already.

If you like literary works about how children cope and survive while living under occupation or in dire circumstances, this is the book for you. Written under the sole name of Elizabeth Laird but in fact co-authored with Sonia Nimr, Palestinian oral historian, child literature author, and professor at Birzeit University, the story of the inner conflicts within Palestinian towns between Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian town folk is reveal against the backdrop of the larger contemporary Israeli military, political and economic occupation of historic Palestine. Set in the city of Ramallah and in the Jalazone Refugee Camp, the main character is an elementary school Palestine town boy wishing just to have some open land on which to play soccer. He finally discovers such a rarity as the Ramallah area is congested with old Ramallah, its twin city of al-Bireh and new land developments by returning ex-pat Palestinians. In his discovery of an ideal spot for soccer games, a rare level and open space next to the refugee camp, he meets a very talented and street-smart Palestinian his own age. The story is woven around the initial hostile but in time warm friendship between the two boys based on their mutual passion for soccer that leads to new revelations by both of their shared but separate worlds in the Ramallah urban space. Well illustrated and written, some new truths about contemporary Palestine emerges. An excellent read.

This is an extraordinary book about war and peace as seen through the eyes of a young Palestinian boy. It is beautifully written and is certain to hold the attention of any reader, though it is intended for our upper elementary and middle school students. Elizabeth Laird is the award-winning author of *Kiss the Dust* and *The Garbage King*. She received the 2004 Hampshire Award in the UK for *A Little Piece of Ground*, but we had to wait for a US publisher with the courage to pick it up. It has since received the MEOC Award here in the US for the category "Youth Literature". Teachers/Librarians: 5th-9th grade - social studies/language arts. SPECIAL ONLINE - FREE TEACHER'S GUIDE - just go to [...] to download a detailed, 57 page teacher's guide to *A Little Piece of Ground*

A wonderful book. The author has empathy for the sufferings of Palestinian kids and so has the feelings of the readers.

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