



**MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF  
THE 2018 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Antonio, TX  
November 17, 2018

**Contact:** Susan Douglass, Ph.D., and Emma Harver, Co-chairs of the 2018 Middle East Book Awards committee, [BookAwards@meoc.us](mailto:BookAwards@meoc.us).

A fanciful tale about a grandmother’s heirloom, stories of refugees from Syria, a book on contemporary Afghanistan, interviews with Palestinian young people and essays offering multiple perspectives on Middle East peace prospects are among the titles recognized by the 2018 Middle East Book Awards. The winner were announced on Saturday, November 17, 2018 at a public awards ceremony held in San Antonio, TX.

Established in 1999, the Middle East Book Award recognizes quality books for children and young adults that contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the Middle East and its component societies and cultures. Books are judged on the authenticity of their portrayal of a Middle Eastern subject, as well as on characterization, plot, and appeal for the intended audience.

For the purposes of this award, the Middle East is defined as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

A committee of MEOC members, including teachers, librarians, outreach coordinators, and other educators select award winners (and, if deemed appropriate, honorable mention titles) in three categories:

- **Picture Book** (simple text accompanied by large images on most pages, intended for elementary school readers).
- **Youth Literature** (plot-driven books appropriate for readers in middle and high school).
- **Youth Non-Fiction** (reference or other non-fiction—e.g., memoir—intended for K-12 audiences or their teachers).

In order to be eligible for the 2018 Middle East Book Award, titles must have been published between January 2017 and June 2018.

This year's recognized titles are:

### PICTURE BOOK AWARD

**Winner:**

**[Tata's Earrings](#), by Desirée Calderón de Falaz (Yogi Impressions, 2017)**

When Maya discovers that her grandma, Tata (the most unusual granny around town), is concealing a pair of magical earrings under her headscarf, she immediately wants to find out how she got them and what makes them so special. This story and its illustrations allow readers to embark on a colorful trip around the world with Tata as she retells the story of how these magical earrings were created due to grandpa's acts of compassion and his constant quest for social justice for all people, across all faiths and cultures.

**Honorable Mention:**

**[Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets: a Muslim Book of Shapes](#), by Hena Khan, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini (Chronicle Books, 2018)**

From a crescent moon, to a square garden, to an octagonal fountain, this breathtaking picture book celebrates the shapes and traditions stemming from Islam and predominantly Muslim contexts. *Crescent Moons and Pointed Minarets* is a beautiful picture book that simultaneously explores shapes, Islam, and the cultures of Muslim people. It would equally be at home in a classroom reading circle and on a parent's lap being read to a child and will inspire questions and observations about world religions and cultures.

**Sub-committee Chair: Angela Williams, Associate Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois; Reviewers:** Cheryl Wiens, adjunct instructor, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ; Jennifer Metzler, 4th grade teacher, CE Rose PreK-8, Tucson, AZ; Danielle Garran, 7th grade social studies teacher, Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, Orleans, MA.

### YOUTH LITERATURE AWARD

**Winner:**

**[The Map of Salt and Stars](#), by Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar (Touchstone, 2018)**

*The Map of Salt and Stars* is part cartography, part poetry, and part call to action. The gripping narrative interweaves the journeys of two strong and intelligent female protagonists: Nour, a Syrian-American girl escaping the violence of the civil war, and Rawiya, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century girl who dresses as a boy to become apprentice to the famous mapmaker al-Idrisi. Beautifully written descriptions of Nour's synesthesia help us understand her experiences in new ways.

**Honorable Mentions:**

**[Escape from Aleppo](#), by N. H. Senzai (Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books, 2018)**

Nadia celebrates her twelfth birthday with a pink cake as the Arab uprisings begin, and over the next two years we watch as she and her family suffer through terrible loss and fear. Finally, her family must leave their home in Aleppo, but a bomb blast separates Nadia from the rest, and she must decide who to trust as she makes her way through the devastated country toward the Turkish border to find them. *Escape from Aleppo* will inspire readers to learn more about the conflict and engender empathy with refugees around the world.

**[The Girl from Aleppo: Nujeen's Escape from War to Freedom](#), by Nujeen Mustafa & Christina Lamb (Harper Wave, 2017)**

Nujeen's charming and authentic voice shines from page one of this story about a sixteen-year-old girl with cerebral palsy forced to flee Aleppo during the civil war. There are many books that chronicle the experience of Syrian refugees, but Nujeen faces special challenges as her sister pushes her wheelchair from Turkey to Germany, crossing the Mediterranean and finding both help and horror along the way. Nujeen is smart, funny, and relatable, and readers will enjoy her fresh perspective.

**Sub-committee Chair: Barbara Petzen, Director of Training Initiatives, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Reviewers:** Betsey Coleman, retired English teacher, Colorado Academy, active creator of learning resources on Middle Eastern and Muslim communities, Denver, CO; Mark Gudel, English and world religions teacher, Omaha North High Magnet School, and Adjunct Professor of Education, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE; Julie Wakefield, geography teacher, Robert McQueen High School, Reno, NV.

**YOUTH NON-FICTION AWARD**

**Winner:**

**[Peace in the Middle East \(Viewpoints on Modern World History\)](#) by Martin Gitlin (Greenhaven Publishing, 2018)**

This book, a collection of 23 short essays representing a variety of viewpoints about contemporary Middle Eastern issues, is very useful to high school educators working with students on critical thinking and the ability to analyze a variety of perspectives. Teachers need to be sure that students understand that the articles in the book are opinion essays and that they do not represent all perspectives on a given issue. Nonetheless, the presentation of a variety of views on different Middle Eastern issues is an invaluable resource.

**Honorable Mentions:**

**[Afghanistan \(Enchantment of the World, Second Series\)](#) by Ruth Bjorklund (Scholastic, 2018)**

This introduction to Afghanistan contains colorful photos and well-organized, well-written content updated to reflect the most recent events and changes in the country. Further, the book stands out from other youth books about the Middle East because of its balance and avoidance of stereotypes. For example, women/girls are shown in a variety of roles – political, educational, athletic – and the book includes stories of children's lives that highlight the

commonalities, as well as differences, with the lives of children in the U.S. The book should be a useful resource for both teachers and students.

***Young Palestinians Speak: Living under Occupation* by Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young (Interlink Books, 2017)**

A collection of interviews with Palestinian children/youth, this book will help U.S. young people hear the stories of their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza. Reviewers particularly liked that the interviewed children were from many different parts of the Palestinian territories. One caveat: Teachers will need to provide context in order to use the book, and the book's introductory section is not adequate to provide that context. Nonetheless, the book is valuable in that it provides a variety of voices and insights that U.S. young people rarely have the opportunity to encounter.

**Sub-committee Chair: Lisa Adeli, Director of Educational Outreach, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Arizona; Reviewers: Jay LeBlanc, 7th and 8th grade social studies teacher, Littleton Academy Charter School, Littleton, CO; Marjorie Hunter, AP World History teacher, Academies of West Memphis, West Memphis, AR; Roberta Robinson, Literacy Specialist, Saltzman Reading/Writing Clinic, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY.**

\*\*

**ABOUT MEOC**

Established in 1981, the Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) is a national nonprofit organization working to increase public knowledge about the peoples, places, and cultures of the Middle East, including the Arab world, Israel, Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan. MEOC's members comprise a national network of educators dedicated to disseminating apolitical and nonpartisan information, resources and activities representing multiple voices and viewpoints that further understanding about the Middle East.

MEOC's target audience is non-specialists at the K-12 and college levels, although its services are also relevant to broader community needs. MEOC has members around the country and its services include a member forum, annual book award, and several national outreach projects including the Global Reads webinar series.

This press release, a list of all previous Middle East Book Award winners, and submission guidelines for the 2019 award may be accessed at: <http://www.meoc.us/book-awards.html>.

**Media advisory:** Vector images of the MEOC and Middle East Book Award logos may be acquired by emailing [BookAwards@meoc.us](mailto:BookAwards@meoc.us).

\* \* \*