



**MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF
THE 2019 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

An intergenerational story of empathy, a series of folkloric tales, a heartfelt story of a Iranian-American teenager, a narrative of friendship between a young Syrian refugee and an American, and a graphic novel about Syrian refugees are among the titles recognized by the 2019 Middle East Book Awards. The awards announcement was made at two large gatherings of educators in November; the National Council for the Social Studies Conference in Austin, Texas, and the National Council for Teachers of English Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

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 2019 Middle East Book Award, titles must have been published between January 2018 and June 2019. As always, MEOC encourages teachers, librarians and all who share stories and books with children to communicate with children's parents and caregivers about the stories shared.

This year's recognized titles are:

PICTURE BOOK AWARDS

Winner: *A DROP OF THE SEA* by Ingrid Chabbert, illustrated by Guridi (Kids Can Press, 2018).

Set in North Africa, Ali and his great-grandmother live happily together in a tiny clay house at the edge of the desert. Ali, noticing that his great-grandmother is getting older, embarks on a journey to make her life-long dream come true. Accessible for early readers (K-2nd grade), this beautiful story shows the concern and empathy of a child and how the dreams of one generation can be fulfilled in the next.

Winner: *RIDING A DONKEY BACKWARDS: WISE AND FOOLISH TALES OF MULLA NASRUDDIN* retold by Sean Taylor & the Khayaal Theatre, illustrated by Shirin Adl (Candlewick, 2019).

The trickster Mulla Nasruddin has many names: In Turkey, he is Hodja; in Central Asia, Afandi; in Egypt, he is Goha. This book is filled with twenty-one tales all creatively illustrated that are sure to make the reader laugh and think. This book of folklore is accessible for later elementary school readers (3rd-4th grades or early middle school).

Honorable Mention: *TOMORROW* by Nadine Kaadan (Lantana Publishing, 2018).

Many things have changed about Yazen's life in his hometown of Damascus. He can't go outside and play anymore. What can he do to fill his time? When will he be able to go out and play again? This is an uplifting story about a courageous little boy growing up in a time of conflict, and the strength of family love.

Honorable Mention: *MY GRANDMA AND ME* by Mina Javaherbin, illustrated by Lindsey Yankey (Candlewick, 2019).

While Mina is growing up in Iran, the center of her world is her grandmother. Whether visiting friends next door, going to the mosque for midnight prayers during Ramadan, or taking an imaginary trip around the planets, Mina and her grandma are never far apart. At once deeply personal and utterly universal, Mina Javaherbin's words make up a love letter of the rarest sort: the kind that shares a bit of its warmth with every reader. Soft, colorful, and full of intricate patterns, Lindsey Yankey's illustrations feel like a personal invitation into the coziest home, and the adoration between Mina and her grandma is evident on every page.

Sub-committee Chair: Angela Williams, Associate Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois; Reviewers: Hadil Ghoneim, children's book author, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Jennifer Metzler, 4th grade teacher, CE Rose PreK-8, Tucson, AZ; Andi Webb, math coach, Alderman Road Elementary School, Fayetteville, NC; Cheryl Wiens, adjunct instructor, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State, Tempe, AZ.

YOUTH LITERATURE AWARD

Winner: *DARIUS THE GREAT IS NOT OKAY* by Adib Khorram (Dial Books, 2018).

Darius Kellner knows a lot about tea, Tolkien, and *taroffing*, one of many Iranian customs Adib Khorram shares with the reader of this revelatory middle school-level novel. When a family trip brings socially awkward Darius to Iran for the first time from Portland, Oregon, he discovers his first true friend and a place that begins to feel like home. The Iran of this novel is as multidimensional as the diverse characters who inhabit it.

Winner: *NOWHERE BOY* by Katherine Marsh (Roaring Brook Press, 2018).

In this world too full of refugees escaping violence and poverty, a novel that paints such a multi-faceted picture is of critical importance. Two boys land in Brussels in the fall of 2015. Max is an ornery 13-year-old American who resents pretty much everything. Ahmed, a 14-year-old refugee from Syria who has experienced a terrifying roller coaster of loss and narrow escapes, hides out in the basement of Max's rented house. Their ensuing adventures shine a light not just on the devastation of war and the consequences of fear and racism, but on the redemptive power of friendship. 6th grade and older.

Honorable Mention: *THE LAST WATCHMAN OF OLD CAIRO* by Michael David Lukas (Spiegel & Grau, 2018).

Three interwoven stories unfold in Cairo, Egypt: First, 15-year-old Ali, a devout Muslim, becomes the first watchman for a synagogue that faces religious violence. A thousand years later, American Joseph al-Raqb pursues the provenance of a mysterious gift left by his Egyptian father, another in the long line of the synagogue's watchmen. Wedged chronologically between Ali and Joseph, British twin sisters and scholars Margaret Gibson and Agnes Lewis arrive in Cairo to research Jewish manuscripts. This exquisitely rendered work of historical fiction will delight and educate.

Sub-committee Chair: Barbara Petzen, Director of Training Initiatives, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Reviewers: Maile Black, English and social studies teacher, Brookwood School, Salem, MA; Mark Gudgel, English and world religions teacher, Omaha North High Magnet School, and Adjunct Professor of Education, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE; Lori Stubben, elementary school teacher, River Oak Charter School, Ukiah, CA; Julie Wakefield, geography teacher, Robert McQueen High School, Reno, NV.

YOUTH NON-FICTION AWARDS

Winner: *THE UNWANTED: STORIES OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEES* by Don Brown (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2018).

The ongoing Syrian crisis is in the news daily. Don Brown's non-fiction story, in graphic novel style, brings to life the realities of war for the people of Syria. He begins with the teenage boys' graffiti and chronologically reveals the events that led to war. But this story is also about hope, determination and the desire to struggle for a better future. The strength of this story is Don Brown's focus on the people. The notes about his visits to refugee camps are a testament to the resilience of these displaced people.

Honorable Mention: *IBN BATTUTA: THE JOURNEY OF A MEDIEVAL MUSLIM (A CONCISE LIFE SERIES)* by Edouardo Albert (Kube Publishing, 2019).

Ibn Battuta traveled further than any other man in medieval times. His adventures are beautifully recounted in this easy to read, engaging retelling of his 75,000-mile journey. Especially helpful are the timeline, glossary and the section with further reading suggestions.

Sub-committee Chair: Roberta Robinson, Literacy Specialist, Saltzman Reading/Writing Clinic, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY; Reviewers: Lisa Adeli, Director of Educational Outreach, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ; William Daniel, social studies teacher, Littleton High School, Littleton, CO; Marjorie Hunter, AP World History teacher, Academies of West Memphis, West Memphis, AR; Kristin Tassin, Upper School History Teacher at Episcopal School of Acadiana, Broussard, LA.

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ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL

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 listserv, annual book award and a website.

This press release may be accessed at: <http://www.meoc.us>.