



**MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF
THE 2022 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Picture books and novels about access to education, a mobile library in Afghanistan, the history of cities, how the characters find ways to cope and find belonging and friends in new homes, how children cope with war, and interwoven stories from multiple cultures, connecting in ways that can be shared by all. These are the winners of the 2022 awards. Register for our webinar with a winning author in 2023 at <https://internationalizingsocialstudies.blog/>.

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, given in honor of Lisa Adeli** (reference or other non-fiction—e.g., memoir—intended for K-12 audiences or their teachers).

In order to be eligible for the 2022 Middle East Book Award, titles must have been published between January 2021 and June 2022. 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:

2022 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD RECIPIENTS

PICTURE BOOK

Committee Chair: Dr. Angela Selena Williams, Committee Members: Larry Michalak, Suriati Abas, Lori Stubben, Abby Limmer, Erin Sears

Award Winner:

[*Loujain Dreams of Sunflowers: A Story Inspired by Loujain Alhathloul*](#), by Lina AlHathloul and Uma Mishra-Newbery; Illustrated by Rebecca Green (mineditionUS, 2022)

Every morning Loujain watches her baba attach his feather wings and fly, but her own dreams of flying face a big obstacle: only boys, not girls, are allowed to fly. Yet despite the taunts of her classmates, she is determined to do it-especially because Loujain loves colors, and only by flying can she see the color-filled field of sunflowers her baba has told her about. Eventually, he agrees to teach her, and Loujain's impossible dream becomes reality-and soon other girls dare to learn to fly. Based on the experiences of co-author Lina AlHathloul's sister, Nobel Peace Prize nominee Loujain AlHathloul, who led the successful campaign to lift Saudi Arabia's ban on women driving, this moving and gorgeously illustrated story reminds us to strive for the changes we want to see-and to never take for granted women's and girls' freedoms. Ages 4-8/P K-3rd grade

Honorable Mentions:

[*A Sky-Blue Bench*](#), by Bahram Rahman; illustrated by Peggy Collins (Pajama Press, 2021)

It's Aria's first day back at school since her accident. She's excited, but she's also worried about sitting on the hard floor all day with her new prosthetic "helper-leg." She knows that before the war changed many things in Afghanistan, schools like hers had benches for students to sit at. If she had a bench, her leg would not hurt so much. The solution to this problem is obvious to her, so she gets to work. Bahram Rahman, author of *The Library Bus*, reveals again the resilience and resolve of young children - especially young girls - who face barriers to education. An author's note gently introduces an age-appropriate discussion of land mines and their impact on the lives of children in many nations, especially Afghanistan, which has the highest concentration of land mines of any country in the world. Ages 4-7/Pre-K-2nd grade

[*Nour's Secret Library*](#), by Wafa' Tarnowska; Illustrated by Vali Mintzi (Barefoot Books, 2022)

Forced to take shelter when their Syrian city is plagued with bombings, young Nour and her cousin begin to bravely build a secret underground library. Based on the author's own life experience and inspired by a true story, *Nour's Secret Library* is about the power of books to heal, transport and create safe spaces during difficult times. Illustrations by Romanian artist Vali Mintzi superimpose the colorful world the children construct over black-and-white charcoal depictions of the battered city. Author's and illustrator's notes provide historical significance of libraries, books and artworks in different cultures and time periods during times of war. As the co-director of the secret library of Daraya, Abu el-Ezz said, "Books are our way to wipe out ignorance." Ages 6-10/1-4th Grade

YOUTH NON FICTION, given in honor of Lisa Adeli

Committee Chair: Brielle Carlson, Committee Members: Brock Beaver, Alice Davidson, Zeena Faulk, Marina Huyler, Victoria Longoria

Award Winner:

[*A Land With a People: Palestinians and Jews Confront Zionism*](#), edited by Esther Farmer, Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, Sarah Sills (Monthly Review Press, 2021)

Stories touch hearts, open minds, and transform our understanding of the “other”—as well as our comprehension of our own roles and responsibilities— and *A Land With a People* emerges from this reckoning. It brings us the narratives of secular, Muslim, Christian, and queer Palestinians who endure the particular brand of settler colonialism known as Zionism. It relays the transformational journeys of Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, queer, and Palestinian Jews who have come to reject the received Zionist narrative. Unflinching in their confrontation of the power dynamics that underlie their transformation process, these writers find the courage to face what has happened to historic Palestine, and to their own families as a result. Contextualized by a detailed historical introduction and timeline charting 150 years of Palestinian and Jewish resistance to Zionism, this collection will stir emotions, provoke fresh thinking, and point to a more hopeful, loving future—one in which Palestine/Israel is seen for what it is in its entirety, as well as for what it can be.

YOUTH LITERATURE

Committee Chair: Emily Bollinger, Committee Members: Dilara Hafiz, Krishna Kulkarni, Gretchen Stulock, Lucy Thiboutot

Award Winner:

[*Travelers Along the Way: A Robin Hood Remix*](#), by Aminah Mae Safi (Feiwel & Friends, 2022)

Jerusalem, 1192. The Third Crusade rages on. Rahma al-Hud loyally followed her elder sister Zeena into the war over the Holy Land, but now that the Faranji invaders have gotten reinforcements from Richard the Lionheart, all she wants to do is get herself and her sister home alive. But Zeena, a soldier of honor at heart, refuses to give up the fight while Jerusalem remains in danger of falling back into the hands of the false Queen Isabella. And so, Rahma has no choice but to take on one final mission with her sister. On their journey to Jerusalem, Rahma and Zeena come across a motley collection of fellow travelers—including a kind-hearted Mongolian warrior, an eccentric Andalusian scientist, a frustratingly handsome spy with a connection to Rahma's childhood, and an unfortunate English chaplain abandoned behind enemy lines. The teens all find solace, purpose and camaraderie—as well as a healthy bit of mischief—in each other's company. But their travels soon bring them into the orbit of Queen Isabella herself, whose plans to re-seize power in Jerusalem would only guarantee further war and strife in the Holy Land for years to come. And so it falls to the merry band of misfits to use every scrap of cunning and wit (and not a small amount of thievery) to foil the usurper queen and perhaps finally restore peace to the land. Ages 12-14/7-9th Grade

Honorable Mention:

[*Tunnels*](#), by Rutu Modan, Translated by Ishai Mishory (Drawn and Quarterly, 2021)

When a great antiquities collector is forced to donate his entire collection to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Nili Broshi sees her last chance to finish an archaeological expedition begun decades earlier—a dig that could possibly yield the most important religious artifact in the Middle East. Motivated by the desire to reinstate her father's legacy as a great archaeologist after he was marginalized by his rival, Nili enlists a ragtag crew—a religious nationalist and his band of hilltop youths, her traitorous brother, and her childhood Palestinian friend, now an archaeological smuggler. As Nili's father slips deeper into dementia, warring factions close in on and fight over the Ark of the Covenant! Backed by extensive research into this real-world treasure hunt, Rutu Modan sets her affecting novel at the center of a political crisis. She posits that the history of biblical Israel lies in one of the most disputed regions in the world, occupied by Israel and contested by Palestine. Often in direct competition, Palestinians and Israelis dig alongside one another, hoping to find the sacred artifact believed to be a conduit to God. Ages 16+

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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>.