



**MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE  
2023 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD**

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A magical olive that offers a glimpse of what might have been; a teenage surfer dealing with her life in two cultures; a young woman coming to terms with her sexuality in a place where it won't be accepted; and a young man realizing his future is outside his homeland are just some of the personalities at the center of the titles recognized by the 2023 Middle East Book Awards.

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 (with or without illustrations); collections of poetry; and/or memoirs appropriate for young adult readers in middle and high school).
- Youth Non-Fiction, given in honor of Lisa Adeli (reference or other non-fiction—e.g., biography—intended for K-12 audiences or their teachers).

In order to be eligible for the 2023 Middle East Book Award, titles must have been published between January 2022 and June 2023. 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 recognized titles.

## 2023 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD RECIPIENTS

### PICTURE BOOK CATEGORY

Committee Chair: Dr. Angela Selena Williams; reviewers: Maha Chahine, Mehmet Gultekin, Abby Limmer, Lori Stubben.

#### Award winner

[MAMA SHAMSI AT THE BAZAAR](#), by Mojdeh Hassani & Samira Iravani; illustrated by Maya Fidawi (Dial Books, 2023)

Mama Shamsi is off to the market, and Samira is joining her for the very first time! As they get closer to the bustling bazaar, Samira worries about getting lost in the crowd and comes up with a way to stick close to her grandma. This is a gentle and playful story, set in Iran, about new experiences and love between a grandmother and her granddaughter, written by a mother-daughter duo and illustrated by award-winning artist Maya Fidawi.

PreK-Grade 3.

#### Honorable Mention

[EGYPTIAN LULLABY](#), by Zeena M. Pliska; illustrated by Hatem Aly (Roaring Brook Press, 2023)

A rich, beautifully layered ode to the great city of Cairo, Egypt, its people, and culture. Each night, a young girl's Auntie Fatma puts her to bed, singing a lullaby filled with rich imagery of her home in Egypt. It is filled with memories of the flowing Nile, the busy streets, the vibrant city.

Grades 1-2.

### YOUTH NON FICTION CATEGORY, given in honor of Lisa Adeli

Committee Chair: Alice Davidson; committee members: Suriati Abbas, Brock Beaver, Melissa Cohen-Nickels, Jennifer Succi

#### Winner:

[FROM HERE](#) by Luma Mufleh (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2023)

With no word for “gay” in Arabic, Luma may not have known what to call the feelings she had growing up in Jordan during the 1980s, but she knew well enough to keep them secret. It was clear that not only would her family have trouble accepting her, but trapped in a conservative religious society, she could’ve also been killed if anyone discovered her sexuality. Luma spent her teenage years increasingly desperate to find a way out, and finally found one when she was accepted into college in the United States. Once there, Luma begins the agonizing process of applying for political asylum, which ensures her safety—but causes her family to break ties with her. Becoming a refugee in America is a rude awakening, and Luma must rely on the grace of friends and strangers alike as she builds a new life and finally embraces her full self. Slowly, she’s able to forge a new path forward with both her biological and chosen families, eventually founding Fugees Family, a nonprofit dedicated to the education and support of refugee children in the United States. A good story for high school students about the differences of a young person's life in two countries. The writing is engaging, and tells a unique story with a perspective that is relevant to today.

Grades 7-9.

#### Honorable Mention:

[FUGITIVE DREAMS: CHRONICLES OF OCCUPATION AND RESISTANCE](#) by Ramsey Hanhan (Fomite, 2022)

Fugitive Dreams is a slightly fictionalized literary memoir illustrating a sweeping 50 years of life under occupation through personal stories. Born in Palestine ‘on the “wrong” side of the border,’ Sameer finds his way to America to rebuild his life. His immigrant experience in post-9/11 America is laced to the ongoing conflict at home with the common threads of school shootings, police violence, human rights abuses, activism, and walls. For the sake of his daughter, he decides he must do something. An Easy novelized style with personal accounts. Relatable, courageous in personal reflection, and interesting. High School and Adult.

## **YOUTH LITERATURE CATEGORY**

Committee Chair: Emily Bollinger; Committee members: Dilara Hafiz, Tamara Ramirez, Lucy Thiboutot, Trisha Van Wager

### **Award Winner:**

[\*\*IDA IN THE MIDDLE\*\*](#) by Nora Lester Murad (Crocodile Books, 2022)

Every time violence erupts in the Middle East, Ida knows what’s coming next. Some of her classmates treat her like it’s all her fault—just for being Palestinian! In eighth grade, Ida is forced to move to a different school. But people still treat her like she’ll never fit in. Ida wishes she could disappear. One day, dreading a final class project, Ida hunts for food. She discovers a jar of olives that came from a beloved aunt in her family’s village near Jerusalem. Ida eats one and finds herself there—as if her parents had never left Palestine! Things are different in this other reality—harder in many ways, but also strangely familiar and comforting. Now she has to make some tough choices. Which Ida would she rather be? How can she find her place? An important coming of age story that explores identity, place, voice, and belonging.

Grades 7-9.

### **Honorable Mentions:**

[\*\*WAVE\*\*](#) by Diana Farid (Henry N. Abrams, 2022)

Thirteen-year-old Ava loves to surf and to sing. Singing and reading Rumi poems settle her mild OCD, and catching waves with her best friend, Phoenix, lets her fit in—her olive skin looks tan, not foreign. But then Ava has to spend the summer before ninth grade volunteering at the hospital to follow in her single mother’s footsteps to become a doctor. And when Phoenix’s past lymphoma surges back, not even surfing, singing, or poetry can keep them afloat, threatening Ava’s hold on the one place and the one person who makes her feel like she belongs. With ocean-like rhythm and lyricism, *Wave* is about a girl who rides the waves, tumbles, and finds her way back to the shore.

Grades 5-9.

[\*\*SHUBEIK LUBEIK\*\*](#) by Deena Mohamed (Pantheon, 2023)

Three wishes that are sold at an unassuming kiosk in Cairo link Aziza, Nour, and Shokry, changing their perspectives as well as their lives. Aziza learned early that life can be hard, but when she loses her husband and manages to procure a wish, she finds herself fighting bureaucracy and inequality for the right to have—and make—that wish. Nour is a privileged college student who secretly struggles with depression and must decide whether or not to use their wish to try to “fix” this depression, and then figure out how to do it. And, finally, Shokry must grapple with his religious convictions as he decides how to help a friend who doesn’t want to use their wish. Deena Mohamed brings to life a cast of characters whose struggles and triumphs are heartbreaking, inspiring, and deeply resonant. Although their stories are fantastical—featuring talking donkeys, dragons, and cars that can magically avoid traffic—each of these people grapples with the very real challenge of trying to make their most deeply held desires come

true.  
High School and Adult.

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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>.