



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MIDDLE EAST OUTREACH COUNCIL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE 2025 MIDDLE EAST BOOK AWARD

The Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) is proud to announce the recipients of the 2025 Middle East Book Award, honoring exceptional books for children and young adults that deepen understanding of the Middle East and its societies. This year's selections celebrate themes of identity, resilience, and the enduring power of cultural heritage.

The winning titles were selected by a committee of MEOC members, including educators, librarians, and outreach coordinators, across three categories: Picture Book, Youth Literature, and Youth Non-Fiction. Winners were announced at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference.

PICTURE BOOK

Winner

A Map for Falasteen: A Palestinian Child's Search for Home, by Maysa Odeh, Illustrated by Aliaa Betawi. (Henry Hold & Co, 2004.)

This gentle and heartfelt picture book follows a young Palestinian girl living in diaspora who struggles to locate her homeland on a map at school. Confused, Falasteen turns to her family, whose stories encourage her to understand her people's history and her own place in the world, learning that home is always where the heart is. Filled with beautiful, inspiring illustrations, it is a story of family and resilience.

Honorable Mentions

Hilwa's Gifts, by Safa Suleiman, Illustrated by Anait Semirdzhyan. (Candlewick, 2025.)

Ali visits Palestine just in time for the olive harvest, where his grandfather, Seedo, and Hilwa—his favorite tree—greet him. The story, which features dynamic illustrations and is peppered with Arabic words, highlights the family tradition of gathering for the bountiful harvest, conveying that tradition is the greatest gift of all. Dynamic illustrations and a graceful text peppered with Arabic words, plus a glossary and author's note, make for an intimate picture-book debut about a child discovering his heritage.

The One and Only Googoosh: Iran's Beloved Superstar, written and illustrated by Azadeh Westergaard. (Viking Books for Young Readers, 2004.)

A celebration of Googoosh (born Faegheh Atashin), one of Iran's most iconic musical artists, who was widely considered Iran's first superstar. Although she was silenced and disappeared from public life for over twenty years after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, her fans kept her music alive. This is an unforgettable love letter to Iran and a cultural icon.

YOUTH LITERATURE

Winner (older readers)

Just Another Epic Love Poem, by Parisa Akhbari. (Dial Books, 2025.)

Just Another Epic Love Poem is a beautifully written YA novel-in-verse about a queer Iranian-American teen discovering first love while navigating family, faith, and cultural identity. The lyrical prose blends Persian and Mexican-American cultural elements with emotional honesty, celebrating trust, forgiveness, and self-discovery. Tender, nuanced, and immersive, the story is a moving exploration of love, identity, and belonging.

Winner (younger readers)

Salma Joins the Team, written by Danny Ramadan, illustrated by Anna Bron. (Annick Press, 2024.)

Salma Joins the Team is a heartfelt novel for young readers about a Syrian refugee whose choice to swim on her own terms models confidence, identity, and empowerment. The book offers readers both inspiration and insight into the refugee experience, and with expressive illustrations and a relatable, emotionally honest story, it gently explores cultural traditions, family expectations, and personal growth.

Honorable mention (older readers)

Huda F Wants to Know, by Huda Fahmy. Dial Books, 2025.

Huda F Wants to Know is a witty, heartfelt graphic novel about a Muslim-American teen navigating parental separation, cultural expectations, and mental health. Huda Fahmy's expressive art and sharp humor make complex topics relatable, while authentic cultural details offer both insight and connection. Balancing specificity with universal adolescent experiences, this book is both a mirror and a window for young readers.

Honorable mention (younger readers)

The Treasure of Tel Maresha, by Tammar Stein. Illustrated by Barbara Bongini. Apples & Honey Press, 2024.

The Treasure of Tel Maresha is a charming novel for young readers that weaves together two stories—Becca in present-day Israel and Rebeka in ancient Maresha—highlighting friendship, family, and the timelessness of childhood hopes and fears. Rich with history and archaeology, and inspired by a real child's discovery at Tel Maresha, the book conveys that memories live in the heart, not in objects. Thoughtful prose and evocative illustrations make history relatable, engaging, and emotionally resonant.

YOUTH NON-FICTION
Given in Honor of Lisa Adeli

Winner

Umm Kulthum: The Star of the East by Rhonda Roumani. Illustrated by Ahmed Abdelmohsen. Crocodile Books, 2024.

This story details the life of Umm Kulthum, an iconic Arab singer whose powerful voice captivated the region for over five decades. Born to a poor village sheikh in Egypt, she defied social norms to get an education and, despite early ridicule in Cairo, rose to become a celebrated artist and a symbol of cultural pride. Her perfect pronunciation and deep connection to the Arabic language endeared her to millions, earning her titles like "The Star of the East". This inspirational and compelling story is told for children for the first time.

Honorable Mention

Tales of Ancient Egypt: Myths & Adventures From the Land of the Pyramids by Hugo D. Cook. Illustrated by Sona Avedikian. Neon Squid, 2024.

Egyptologist Hugo D. Cook has scoured ancient texts and translated hieroglyphs to bring readers engaging and accessible stories from the over 3,000-year history of Egyptian civilization. The book combines historical stories, such as Cleopatra being smuggled into a palace, with rip-roaring myths, like a Cinderella story where a peasant girl marries the pharaoh. The level of the storytelling is both engaging and accessible for younger readers and beyond.

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For more information about the Middle East Outreach Council and a list of past winners, please visit www.meoc.us/book-award/.

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