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Sonia Nimr

Hans Christian Anderson Award 2026





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Biographical Information




Sonia was born in the small town of Jenin in the occupied West Bank in 1955

In 1973, She graduated from high school and went on to study Middle Eastern Studies at Birzeit University in Ramallah. After completing her degree, she pursued a Master's in Middle Eastern Studies at the American University in Beirut, and later moved to London to earn a Ph.D. in Palestinian history at the University of Exeter, England, specializing in oral history.

During her studies, Sonia worked as an educational officer for the Palestinian Costume exhibition at the Museum of Mankind in London, where she discovered her passion for writing children's books and storytelling. She later joined the British Museum's educational services, continuing her work in the field.

In 1999, Sonia returned to Palestine with her husband and son. She initially worked at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, where she headed the newly established museum department. In 2006, she transitioned to academia, becoming an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies at Birzeit university, a position she holds to this day.

Reflecting on her long journey as a writer, particularly for children and young adults, Sonia explains, "In a small town where nothing much happens, I developed a passion for reading. I read everything I could lay my hands on, from classical and popular Arabic books to translated European classics."



But it wasn't just books that fueled her creativity. Her early years were steeped in myths and superstitions, which infused her world with vibrant colours and fantastical stories. These tales captured her imagination, filling it with intricate and surreal details. As a child, the line between truth and fiction was often blurred, and she couldn't always distinguish one from the other. To her, everything felt intensely real, but also magical, leaving a lasting impact on her writing.

Sonia's first two illustrated children's books, *Al Tanbours' Shoes* and *Clever Swallow*, were published in 1996. Both books, inspired by Palestinian folk tales, are written in rhyme, capturing the essence of cultural storytelling.

Over the years, Sonia has published 21 books for children and young adults, her imagination, combined with her sense of humor and accessible language, made her books very popular in the Arab world. This success has earned her several prestigious awards and led to her books being translated into multiple languages. Her book *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands* won the Itisalat Book Award in 2014 and the Palestine Book Award in 2021. Another work, *Thunderbird*, earned the Al Sharjah Festival Reading Award in 2010 and the Publishers' Award in 2018. To name but a few.

Sonia's talent has been recognised internationally, with three of her books included in the IBBY Honour List in 2004, 2014, and 2024.

In addition to her published works, Sonia has created three interactive, unwritten stories that allow children to become part of the narrative, helping to develop the storyline and fostering creativity in her young audience.

<https://www.sonianimr.com/>



Why I Write

When I was six years old, our neighbor “Um Ibrahim” said to me: “In my days the penny talked”.

A Talking penny? Wow, this made my imagination go wild! I imagined the penny with a mouth and eyes and human face. What did it say? And how? She did not say, but I totally believed her. After all, if walls have ears, then it is quite natural for pennies to talk.

As a child, I tried to understand and decipher the mysteries of world in my own way and that was much more interesting. No, much more fantastical than any adult’s explanation. I believed that once humans go to sleep the stars start singing and sometimes whispering. Ah, how many nights I stayed awake trying to understand what they say. But when I asked my mom and she began to give me a scientific lecture about the sound of crickets’ chirps at night to attract mates, something I did not understand, but it made the magic disappear, and the bond I thought I weaved with the stars fizzled away.

In the world of children, everything is bigger, fantastical, and magical. Everything can be recreated in a thousand ways, a mere stick becomes a witch’s broom or a train, a stone can be Ronaldo’s Golden ball, and stars can sing.

Then comes the real world. Something we call adulthood. When the world is real enough and scary enough to turn all these child creators into cynical, unappreciative, forgetful adults who understand the language of money and numbers, and who see the stick as just a stick, and the stone as something to kick out of their way; the stars dead things in the sky.

Therefore, as a writer, there is nothing that gives me more pleasure than seeing the eyes of a child getting wide as they discover a little secret which I hid in one of my books, or their smiles at getting the joke, or squeals of joy when the hero finally succeeds in their quest.

That secret bond which I try to weave between me and my readers as I whisper in their ears "it's ok to be a little mischievous". It's okay if you burn your tongue when trying your first sip of tea. It's okay if you scrape your knee trying to follow that little red ant's journey into the labyrinth of her nest. It's okay to laugh loudly until tears and snot wet your face. This is the stuff that makes you who you are, wherever you are: a child.

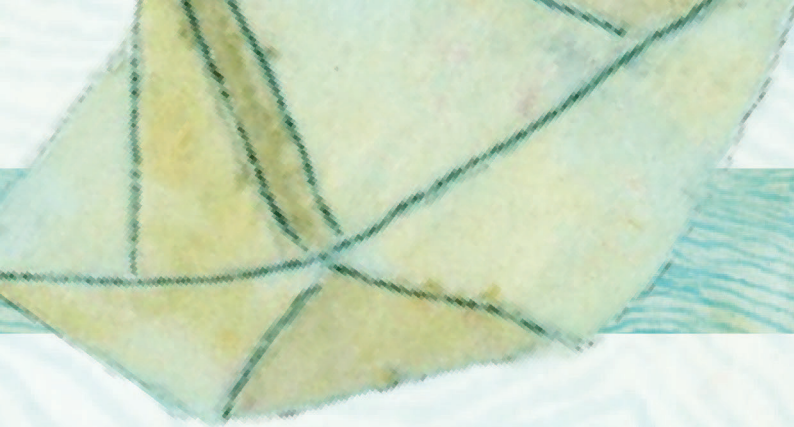
Writing for children in general should not be an act of educating; there are schools for that. Nor should it be for teaching morality; there are parents for that. It should not be a language exercise, there are teachers for that. Then what are children's books for?

They should simply be fun to read. A joy, a festival to the eye and a carnival in the heart. Children's literature should hope to be an eye-opener to the possibilities and the potential of the world they are going to grow into.

Yes, this motto poses such a huge challenge to the writer, and an even bigger responsibility especially when writing for young adults.

I write for the girls who are always told to be quiet, and the youth who are constantly told they are too young to change the world. In the space between my thoughts and the page, I see the faces of girls with fire in their eyes, of young souls struggling to find their place, of dreamers who don't yet know how powerful they are. My mission is to hold up a mirror, so they can see the strength that's always been inside them, waiting to be unleashed. I write to empower, to encourage, to affirm that their voices are worthy, their dreams are valid, and their courage is infinite.



A decorative element in the top left corner consisting of several overlapping triangles in shades of yellow and green, outlined with dark green lines.

I write because in the silence of the world, there are voices that tremble in the shadows, voices that are barely heard—children whose innocence has been stolen, whose laughter has been drowned in the roar of violence, whose dreams are now haunted by the horrors of genocide. I write because their stories must be told, for they are the forgotten, the tormented, the ones whose pain cries out from the deepest places of the earth. To hold space for the untold stories of these children, to give a voice to the voiceless, and to ignite a movement where every child, every young person, no matter where they come from or what they've been through can find the courage to rise and to be seen. Their lives, their dreams, and their futures are worth fighting for. And I write to ensure that the world does not forget them.

Children everywhere, whether in Palestine, Bangladesh, Sudan, Somalia, or any other place ravaged by genocide, war, poverty, or child labour deserve a brighter future. They deserve the chance to grow up believing in the possibility of something better. A book, at its best, can offer them a glimmer of hope, a reminder that there is a future worth believing in.

These children should be able to look back one day and say, "Yes, our lives were incredibly difficult, we barely survived, but perhaps, just perhaps, our children will inherit a better world."

This is a hope we must all share. Not just writers, but all of us as human beings. We must come together to create a future where no child is left behind. Where every child, regardless of their colour, religion, gender, or language, has the opportunity to thrive. After all, they are all children, and they deserve nothing less.

Contribution to Literature for Young Adults

"The joy of writing, brings the joy of reading"

Sonia Nimr: A Literary Force for Palestinian Culture, Identity, and Empowerment

Sonia Nimr is a distinguished Palestinian writer, storyteller, and academic whose contributions to children's and young adult fiction have made her a prominent voice in contemporary Arabic literature, as well as Palestinian literature. Her works does not shy away from complex social themes, is rich with tales mimicking tales from a very rich Arabic cultural heritage. Her stories also, weave together Palestinian folklore, history, and universal narratives, and empower readers, especially young girls, through diverse and dynamic characters. This essay examines her significant contributions in various areas, from cultural preservation to gender representation, hoping to show the impact her work has had /and still have on both the literary world and the global stage.

Nimr's literary accomplishments are most prominently celebrated in her works.

Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands: This award-winning novel for young adults is a modern take on traditional Arabic adventure tales, featuring Qamar, a female protagonist who embarks on a journey of self-discovery across different geographical regions, cultural spheres and different life stages. Through her travels, Qamar assumes roles that questions societal norms and challenge the normative gender expectations, we see her as a healer but also as a pirate. The book won the prestigious Etisalat Award for Arabic Children's Literature in 2014 and has been praised for its empowering portrayal of female agency.

Thunderbirds trilogy: A fantasy novel that blends themes of history, magic, and identity, offering a unique mix of the fantastic borderline science fiction world and the real in different historical epochs. The first book in the trilogy was published in 2017, with subsequent volumes following in 2018 and 2024, also, winning

Children's Stories: Nimr's portfolio also includes numerous children's stories such as Ghaddar the Ghoul, the Blue Door and also, A Little Piece of Ground which was a co-authored work. These works introduce young readers to complex themes such as cultural identity, loss, and hope, in an accessible and engaging manner.

Sonia Nimr's literary contributions are vast, diverse, and multilayered, spanning multiple genres, which makes it challenging to capture her impact concisely. However, by highlighting some key areas of influence, the hope is to shed light on her ingenuity as an author and her significance as a challenging figure in the world of literature, without reducing her influence to only these aspects.

1. Advocacy for Palestinian Identity

Through her storytelling, Nimr champions Palestinian heritage and deals with the challenges faced by Palestinians especially Palestinian children and young adults. Her narratives often feature characters confronting personal and collective struggles, illustrating the resilience, pride, and strength of Palestinian identity. Nimr's works present Palestinian life and experiences with nuance and dignity, countering stereotypes and offering readers a window into the everyday lives of Palestinians. In a time when Palestinian voices are often marginalized, her work acts as an important reminder of the cultural richness and historical depth of her people. To choose two works that best present such advocacy, *The Blue Door* and the *Thunderbird* trilogy stand out. The refugee status that the protagonist of *The Blue Door* has inherited from her grandfather's displacement—although it is not truly a status at all—is challenged by the very color of the door, which resembles that of the UN agencies, yet becomes a door to a free world with deep Palestinian historical roots. The child is not a refugee; the child is a free soul who owns the future and acknowledges the past.

Noor's daily life in the *Thunderbird* trilogy also reflects the difficulties faced by young Palestinian girls as they try to move from one place to another. Palestine is not only the backdrop for the protagonist's life; it is also the harsh reality she must navigate and fight against to find herself and, in the process, save the world.



2. Promotion of Arabic Literature

Nimr's works are instrumental in promoting Arabic literature on the global stage. By blending universal themes such as self-discovery, resilience, and empowerment with local stories rooted in Palestinian and Arab traditions, she bridges cultural divides. Her ability to craft narratives that resonate across cultural boundaries is a testament to the power of storytelling as a tool for cultural exchange and understanding. Perhaps this is best exemplified in *The Tanburi Shoes* and *The Clever Swallow*, which draw on the styles of Ibn al-Muqaffa and *One Thousand and One Nights*. These works bring Arabic cultural heritage to life through animal tales and poetry-like language, tailored for children. *Wondrous Journey* draws inspiration from the travel literature of Ibn Battuta, but is uniquely told through the perspective of a young girl.

3. Preservation and Revival of Folklore

Nimr's writing is deeply rooted in Palestinian oral traditions and folklore. She draws extensively from these cultural narratives, helping preserve and revitalize them amid the turbulence and challenges faced by Palestinian society. By reimagining traditional stories, Nimr not only contributes to the survival of her culture's rich heritage but also brings these stories to new generations, ensuring that vital aspects of Palestinian identity are passed on. Her works, including *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands* and various children's stories, weave folklore into modern contexts, making these traditions accessible to young readers while celebrating their cultural significance. This passion for folklore can be seen in several examples, including *Ghaddar the Ghoul, A Story That Begins and Ends with Lies*, and *When It Rained Fish*.

4. Academic and Storytelling Work

Beyond her literary contributions, Nimr is an academic who has worked in the field of history mainly as an Oral historian one can see why she is seen as professional storyteller. As a faculty member at Birzeit University, she plays an essential role in educating and inspiring future generations of writers and storytellers. Through her storytelling workshops, she encourages young people to embrace the art of storytelling, not only as a means of entertainment but as a powerful tool for preserving cultural roots and historical heritage. Her role as a teacher has allowed her to pass on her knowledge and passion for literature, helping to cultivate a new generation of creatives who appreciate the

value of oral traditions and storytelling. She has also led oral history workshops, where young adults become the storytellers of their own narratives and the keepers of their cultural identities. *Yalo, A Short History of Palestine, From Jerusalem the Story Begins*, and *From Eibal* are just a few examples of her long, dedicated career in education.

5. Empowerment Through Literature and Feminist Perspectives

Sonia Nimr's literary works are celebrated for their strong, independent female protagonists who consistently challenge traditional gender norms. Her empowering narratives inspire young readers, particularly girls, to recognize their strength and potential. In *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands*, for example, the protagonist Qamar boldly defies traditional gender roles, embodying resilience and determination. Through such stories, Nimr positions girls as the heroes of their own journeys, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-belief. And to this Noor in *Thunderbird* is yet another powerful girl that saves the world through history as well as face all the discrimination and societal limitations a girl in Palestine can face.

For when, Nimr's writings delve into the complex gender dynamics of Palestinian and Arab societies, her Noor shows Sonia's nuanced portrayals of female characters, the critique of patriarchal systems and it sheds light on the societal constraints faced by women. Far from being victims of circumstance, her characters are resilient figures who navigate and challenge these expectations. This feminist perspective is a defining feature of Nimr's work, offering a powerful counter-narrative to traditional portrayals of Arab women. By presenting strong role models, she empowers young readers to challenge stereotypes and redefine their roles within society.

6. Challenging Societal Taboos and Addressing Social Issues

Sonia Nimr boldly addresses sensitive and often taboo subjects within Arab culture, using her writing to explore themes such as slavery, piracy, and rigid gender roles. In *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands*, for example, she introduces a female protagonist who defies societal expectations, challenging traditional gender norms. By weaving these topics into her narratives, Nimr not only confronts cultural taboos but also fosters critical thinking, encouraging young readers to engage with complex historical and social issues.

Beyond cultural and gender themes, Nimr's works delve into significant social challenges, such as bullying, abuse, and peer pressure. For instance, *Mukhtar*, a character with large ears, is bullied for his appearance, which impacts his self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Similarly, in *The King of Tales*, the protagonist is marginalized and belittled by peers. Nimr also critiques the stifling of curiosity in *Mandora*, where children are discouraged from being inquisitive. These narratives highlight the struggles of individuals who face rejection, marginalization, or societal pressure. Through broader themes of resilience, self-discovery, and overcoming adversity, Nimr's characters encourage readers to reflect on such challenges, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the complexities of social dynamics.

7. Diversity and translation

Translating children's literature from English to Arabic is part of Sonia's vital work as she aspires to introduce young readers to diverse cultures, ideas, and perspectives while enriching Arabic literary offerings. It fosters cross-cultural understanding, encourages a love for reading, and ensures that global stories are accessible in a language that resonates with Arab children, nurturing their imagination and intellectual growth.

Sonia Nimr is more than just a writer; she is a cultural ambassador, an educator, and a tireless advocate for Palestinian heritage and identity. Through her richly imagined stories, she preserves and celebrates Palestinian folklore, while simultaneously empowering young readers—especially girls—to challenge societal norms and embrace their own strength. Her work transcends borders, offering readers worldwide a window into the world of Palestine, and reminding us all of the universal power of stories to connect, inspire, and transform. As an academic, a storyteller, and a prolific writer, Nimr has created a lasting legacy that will continue to inspire and influence generations to come.



Appreciative Letters



I first saw the Palestinian writer, storyteller and academic, Sonia Nimr perform on stage in London in 2012. I was spellbound. I regretted not having filmed her, and I looked up and down for a recording of that performance, but didn't locate it at the time.¹ Ten years later, I found myself once again in her captivating presence. This time, I was prepared with my phone camera and caught her [magical performance of her favorite Palestinian folktale](#). This recording has been on my seminar syllabi viewing list since. Sonia is not only a masterful storyteller and a captivating writer, but her work has had a great influence on the field of children's literature to date and it is my sincere pleasure to write this letter of endorsement for her.

Sonia's best known book *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands* won the second edition of the influential Etisalat Award for Arabic Children's Literature, setting the bar for excellent young adult literature in the early years of the 'new wave' of Arabic children's literature when young adults began to be deliberately addressed with age-specific literature. Far from imitating the ready-made forms and content of young adult novels that came from the Anglophone world, Sonia's writing was original in both regards, demonstrating that an authentically Arab Young Adult novel that addressed regional concerns using regional storytelling and narrative forms was possible. I am currently writing a scholarly piece on this modern classic and am enjoying rereading it over and over again.

The novel was later translated into English by Interlink in 2020, and I selected it as the sole integral reading for my class of PhD and industry specialists at the Antwerp Summer School for Children's Literature. The book, drawn from the timeless threads of traditional storytelling, a genre that is dominated by women, is a Palestinian novel par excellence. The novel fosters notions of heroism that enable an emancipatory mindset and engages young readers in an embodied adventure, antithetical to the vicarious adventures of the digital age or the comfortable familiarity of globalized stories.

I have been a juror for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2016 where Sonia was a candidate, and a juror for the Etisalat Award for Children's Literature in 2017 when her book *Thunderbird* was shortlisted. Working on those juries gave me the opportunity to read Sonia's entire portfolio and books and find her range inspiring. From cheeky picturebooks about grasshoppers with ambitions (*King of Tales*), to middle reader nonfiction history books (*The Tale Begins in Jerusalem, A Concise History of Palestine*), to collaborating with Elizabeth Laird on the well received young adult book *A Little Piece of*

¹ I later found that the London performance had indeed been filmed but posted under the title "[A trio of storytellers.](#)"



Ground, to her latest Thunderbird trilogy, Sonia's work reliably features plucky characters, clever writing, sharp humor and fast paced narration. Sonia is above all civic minded and has worked directly with child writers to help them foster their craft and tell their stories in the book *Yallo*.

I have interviewed Sonia, met her at IBBY congresses, had dinner with her, traveled with her, and shared books with her. I would like to share that Sonia the human is collegial and generous and embodies all of the qualities of the HCA laureate, and I unequivocally endorse her nomination.

Very best wishes,
Yasmine Motawy

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As a publisher from Brazil, co-founder and editor in chief of Tabla publishing house, I'd like to recommend the work of the Palestinian author Sonia Nimer for the prize. We have translated to Portuguese/Brazil two amazing books by her: *A story that begins and ends with imagination* and *Wondrous Journeys* (to be released by July this year). The children title *A story that begins and ends with imagination* is being adopted in many schools and in Governmental Programs for public schools and libraries as the São Paulo Department of Education and the Belo Horizonte Department of Education. It's a fantastic book with a rare consistency and quality of text. Sonia Nimer is no doubt one of the greatest storytellers of our time, bringing together the everlasting richness of the traditional stories transmitted orally through generations and the contemporary voice and approach needed to keep alive the essential messages. Also, she has a great sense of humor that add a special flavor to her fantastic literary skill.

With warm regards

Laura Di Pietro

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Laura Di Pietro".

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Interview with Sonia

Palestinian historian, academic, and award-winning author Dr. Sonia Nimr has written more than a dozen books for young readers, including the 2014 Etisalat Prize for Arabic Children's Literature-winning YA novel *Wondrous Explorations in Strange Nations** (Rihlat Ajeeba fi al-Bilad al-Ghareeba):



Dr. Nimr spoke at the festival, with author Kevin Crossley-Holland, about “Myth and Mythconception,” saying that she was born in the 1950s and raised by her mother, who raised her logically and “by the book.” Her mother took her from a young age to Nablus to buy books, but these were “never magical tales, never folktales.”

While her mother did nurture her imagination, Nimr said, it was only later that she thought about why the neighbor's daughter knew all these stories about djinn and that she sought the treasure that was all around her. “When I sought it,” she said, “it was like Alaa al-Deen going into his cave” in the 1,001 Nights.

In addition to her children's and YA books in Arabic, Nimr has one full-length book in English, *Ghaddar the Ghoul and Other Palestinian Stories*, as well as a collaboration with UK author Elizabeth Laird. Also, courtesy of Ibby UK, you can watch Dr. Nimr's fun and funny oral storytelling in English and in Arabic on YouTube.



While at the 2017 Emirates LitFest for a series of workshops and events. Dr. Nimr also answered a few questions for ArabLit.

You began writing in an Israeli prison in the mid-1970s?

SN: I wrote two stories when I was in Israeli prison, but both were confiscated. Then I thought, Ah! I could write children's books.

Why children?

SN: I didn't know then. I just felt: This is what I want to write. I was 20 then. Later, when I was at the British Museum, I wrote two stories in English, and both are based on Palestinian folktales. They were not published [in English], so they were published in Arabic in 1996 by Tamer Institute.

And you know now, why you chose to write for children?

SN: I turned 62 yesterday, but I am 16. I never tried to suppress the child inside me – I kept it always there. It pops up every now and then, in books and otherwise. I'm a professor at Birzeit University, and there again sometimes the child comes up in my lectures.

What's the relationship between you as a historian who has gathered oral histories, and you as an author of books for young people?

SN: Oral history is my professional career. But I'm sure meeting people and listening to their stories must have affected me one way or another, although I did not collect stories.

You said, in a journal article, that Palestinian folktales and traditional storytelling suffered a setback in the refugee camps.

SN: After 1948, when people went to the camps, they needed different, realistic stories. Not because they don't like folktales. Because they wanted to revive the Palestine they lost. So these [folktales] were substituted by stories of how we left Palestine, the journey of suffering: how was it in our homeland, our homes, our gardens.

And you're bringing back folktales?

SN: I can't pretend that I'm bringing them back, because there are academics who have studied them in proper anthropological books. As far as I'm concerned, I want to bring back folktales to the children in a new form. Having said that, the original ones are not always polite and they're not always politically correct. So what I'm trying to do is to rewrite the folktales I keep the spirit, the magic, but at the same time I rewrite it...to be approved by librarians.

Are there red lines that hold you back?

SN: No, not really. For one reason: Folktales in Palestine were not told for children, they were told for adults. The old women who told stories never refrained from mentioning body parts, bodily functions. This doesn't hold me back, it just gives me the opportunity to reform the story. If I wanted to keep the story in its original form, I would put it in an anthropology book.

You do wonderful live storytelling. And, in your books, you use techniques that seem to come from the world of oral storytelling: repetition, patterning.

SN: In children's books I try to keep rhyme. Sometimes, I feel the music in the story creates more interest in the story. Not in the young adults, of course. But definitely, rather than writing a story, I'm telling the story. It's storytelling rather than story-writing.

Both when you do children's and young adult?

SN: Yes, both. When you read my books in Arabic, you're listening to a story, actually. This is how I like to write.

How do you feel your way through the relationship between fos7a (Modern Standard Arabic) and 3ameya (colloquial, spoken Arabic) when you're writing books for children?

SN: This was a big argument back in Palestine. Most of my children's books were written in colloquial. At the same time, they're not heavy colloquial. They're closer to the standard Arabic, but they are in colloquial. I thought: If I want to write in rhyme, in colloquial, then I'm keeping the music and the magic. Children relate more to colloquial. Not because colloquial is better, but because standard Arabic, for some children, reminds them of...

School?

SN: Schoolbooks. And they don't like schoolbooks, because they're boring. But then again it depends on the type of story I'm telling, because some of my books are not in colloquial but in standard Arabic.

Palestinian children's and YA literature is a more vibrant space than literature for young people in most other Arab-majority countries. Why is that? Tamer Institute?

SN: Not only Tamer Institute. For the past 20 years or so, we've realized how important it is to give a different literature to children. Think of it as part of the resistance. Well, it's not like it's my agenda to resist. But somehow it's in the background that we want to give the children something different. Life is bleak in Palestine under occupation. It's not a happy life. So children's writers try to make their stories not only vibrant, but also colorful, magical. To let the children know there are other worlds.

How can Arabic children's & YA literatures reach more audiences and become more accessible?

SN: Actually, one thing I have to say for Tamer Institute is that they distribute children's books to all schools, even to Gaza.

Unfortunately, though, not all countries have this. What difference does it make, having real children's literature in the schools, vs. just textbooks?

SN: In the past 10 years, [Palestinian] children have started to have book discussions, which is really nice. It gives you, as an author, feedback, usually honest feedback, from children. Also, the whole idea of discussing books means that your opinion matters. And that helps them understand that children matter and their opinions matter.



What about the problem of distribution? Children's books are distributed well inside Palestine, but what about other countries?

SN: It is a problem because, for example, I know this book won the Etisalat Prize (Rihlat Ajeeba fi al-Bilad al-Ghareeba), but I would to see people from Egypt, Morocco, or Saudi Arabia to read my books.

But they can't get hold of them.

SN: They could be available. For example, in the Emirates, the Ministry of Education bought the book, and they want to distribute it in schools, with some editing. Now it's more polite.

Oh. There's an edited version for the schools?

SN: I had to weigh it: accept the editing or not have the book read by a large number of students. So I agreed to it, although I don't find the editing necessary. I made this book for teenagers, which means you can't not talk about love. And they changed bar to a coffee shop, for example. For example, she [the narrator] has to go and meet pirates. So if she's going to go and meet pirates, she has to go meet pirates in the pirates' bar. There's no coffee shop for pirates. It saddened me, actually. But at least the main events are there, and I hope the girls will get the message that they can have the power to do anything once they set their mind to it.

Do you put a message into your book, or does it just come out that way?

SN: No, no, it just comes out. If I put a message, it becomes like a textbook.

There are many Arabic children's books with a message...

SN: And I hate that. It's not my job to put the wisdom of my life into a book, nor to give advice. They have enough of that at school! It's good enough for me if they enjoyed it. At the end of it, they must get something out of it. But I don't have a message to send. No, I have a story to tell.

Do prizes matter in developing more YA literature?

SN: I'm not sure, actually. I have a new book out called *The Phoenix*. Since it was published two months ago, I've already had several meetings with children and young adults, at schools and libraries, to get their feedback and to discuss the book with them. For me, this is what matters. Forget about the adults, because the adults have their own weird, cynical ideas. But young adults get the book the way you really want to say it.

You wouldn't write a book for adults?

SN: Oh, I've been writing one; I haven't finished it yet. It's not exactly a novel, nor is it a memoir. It's: How did I see Palestine as I was growing up? As I was growing up, Palestine changed, I changed.

Do you use your personal stories when writing for children?

SN: No. My personal stories don't matter, actually. I want to tell them something different. But on the other hand, I'm sure that somehow, even when I write for young adults, I come up somehow, one way or the other: commenting on things, making a joke here and there, which is my personality.

What kind of feedback do you get from kids?

SN: For example, last week, I was in Bethlehem. I had a book discussion at the Aida Refugee Camp. So these kids were from a refugee camp, thirty of them. They were very excited to tell me what they thought of the book. They were disappointed about the ending, but then they were satisfied because I told them there are three parts, and this is not the end. Of course some of them had suggestions. Some of them had really good ideas.

Would you ever take advice from child readers?

SN: Some of them I can't use. For example, if you have a bad wife or a bad stepmother, they want revenge. But with other ideas, some of them I'm going to use in my next book.

Can you say what they are?

SN: For example, one girl said: You used djinn in the book. Why don't you talk about the world of the djinn? In the book it says the worlds of the humans and the djinn should be kept separate. She said, But you're a writer, you can do both worlds. And I thought, Yes!

Are you going to write about the world of the djinn?

SN: I might, actually.

What are the books you read as a child, a teenager?

SN: Until I became a teenager, we did not have a bookshop or a library in my town. So when I was a little girl, my mother used to take me to Nablus, where she bought me books. I still remember the first book, and I was five. After that, I developed a passion for reading. Because we didn't have libraries or bookshops, I read anything that I could get my hands on: Hugo, Dickens, Mahfouz.

Do you have a favorite?

SN: A writer is my favorite while I'm reading him or her.

Do you have advice for young writers?

SN: Passion first. And foremost. And fun. If you don't have fun while writing, nobody will have fun reading. Apart from that, everybody can learn. But you need to have fun and you need to be passionate.





Ten

Most Popular

Books





Young Adults

Wonderous Journeys in Strange Lands *Rihlat Ajeeba fi Al Bilad Al Ghareeba*

Tamer Institute.

First edition 2013, second edition 2015, third edition 2023.

Ramallah, Palestine.

"peace is not the end, it is the beginning of the biggest adventure, LIFE"

In a tent at the foot of a mountain in Palestine, hundreds of years ago, our storyteller and her twin sister were born. Her name is Qamar (Moon), and her sister is Shams (Sun). Their small caravan is journeying from their mother's city back to their father's remote ancestral village atop the mountain. This village suffers from isolation—and a curse—which their young family tries to undo. But when both parents' lives are cut short, Qamar and her sister are left orphans. Qamar decides to pursue her parents' dreams of discovering the world—its people, places, and stories. With the red book that brought her parents together in hand, she sets out on a daring journey across empires, traveling by caravans and ships.

Reviews

Review for the Danish edition:

The novel will appeal particularly to young readers who want excitement rather than personal development.

<https://www.paedagogen.dk/anmeldelser/forunderlige-rejser-i-fremmede-lande-18587/>

Small in size but epic in scope: a delightful, profoundly meaningful adventure.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/sonia-nimr/wondrous-journeys-in-strange-land/>

Few books beat this one for pure storytelling delight. Packed with fantastical encounters and the uncovering of secrets, this novel is deliciously absorbing.

<https://ayearofreadingtheworld.com/2020/12/30/book-of-the-month-sonia-nimr/>



Young Adults

Thunderbird *Taer il-Raed*

Tamer Institute.
First edition 2016, second edition 2019.
Ramallah, Palestine.

"Sometimes, fear can be the only force that drives you forward."

The Thunderbird trilogy is a fast-paced, time-traveling fantasy adventure centered on Noor, a young orphaned Palestinian girl. Beginning in the present, Noor must travel back in time to collect four magical feathers from the phoenix before it burns and save the world. With the aid of a djinn taking the form of a cat and girls who look identical to Noor, each possessing one of the bird's powers, this initial volume launches Noor on her journey through different historical

Reviews

Skillfully rooted in history, geography, spirituality and adventure, Nimr's narrative travels at magnificent speed into a journey that grows more curious with every page.
<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2300366/lifestyle>

Noor's emotional motivations are well-developed, making her a relatable protagonist. The author's knowledge of local history and folklore makes this world really immersive and believable, and indeed I found the most interesting parts were those set in the past.
<https://glli-us.org/2024/05/15/intlyalitmonth-review-thunderbird/>

Intriguing, textured, and immersive.
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/sonia-nimr/thunderbird>

Fast-pace magical, and inventive
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/sonia-nimr/thunderbird-book-2/d>



Children

The Blue Door *Al-Bab al-Azraq*

Illustrated by Rauf al-Karai.
Tamer Institute, 2018
Ramallah, Palestine.

*"One day, you will set paper boats afloat on this stream
and they will reach the end of the world."*

Every night, a little girl plays with her grandfather on an old magical blue door. It's their secret time travel portal. It takes them to a different time in Palestine and to her grandfather's destroyed village, which magically comes to life with colors, green trees, and vibrant life whenever he touches the ground.





Children

When It Rained Fish *Indama Amtart al-Samma Samakan*

Illustrated by Leena Naddaf.
Dar Al-Aswar
2021, Acer.

"Rumor has it that Saeed is still, to this day, sitting in front of his house, waiting for the chameleon to return and claim her gold."

The story of Saeed, who is not known for his smarts, unlike his wife. While looking for a paid job, he ends up stealing the chameleon's gold, triggering a bizarre phenomenon where the sky begins to rain fish, vegetables, and candy.



Children

A Story that Begins and Ends with Lies *Qisah Awalha Khayal wa Akherha Khyal*

Illustrated by Tahani Awedan, Tamer Institute.

First edition 2002, Ramallah, Palestine.

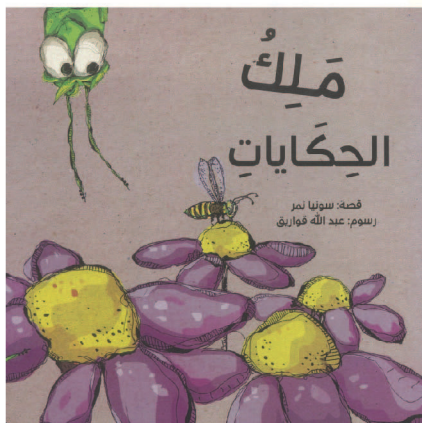
Illustrated by Rauf al-Karai. Second edition 2015



*"I seek not beauty or wealth in a bride,
But a mind that's sharp and stories to guide,
A heart that weaves tales with wisdom and grace,
A soul that lights up every quiet space."*

The king wanted his only son and heir to get married and presented him with choices: a princess, a rich girl, or a beautiful girl. However, the prince had a different idea; he wanted a girl who reads books and knows how to tell stories. He sought a story that begins and ends with lies. Girls came from all corners of the kingdom, each trying but failing to tell the prince a story that began and ended with lies. Just as the prince's patience began to wane, an ordinary girl in a simple dress approached him. She began to tell a most imaginative and fantastical story about a giant rooster that emerged from a round egg, a town inside a water melon and being shot in the sky by a canon and other fantastical details.





Children King of Tales *Malik Al Hikayat*

Illustrated by Abdullah Qawarik.
Tamer Institute. 2014
Ramallah, Palestine.

"I don't want to be your king, I only want to be your father"

On moonlit nights, the forest animals gather to share stories, but when it's the grasshopper's turn, they mock him, claiming he has no tales to tell. Determined to fit in, he tries to be strong like an elephant, roars like a lion, and even disguises himself as a chameleon, but to no avail. But later in the story with his son by his side, he returns to the gathering, finally ready to share his own



Children Zalloutah

Illustrated by Manar Nai'rat. Tamer Institute
first edition 2012, second edition 2014
Ramallah, Palestine

"For me, life between garbage bins is the best life"

This is the tale of a fly who loves her cozy home in the rubbish bin. When she gets into a squabble with other flies over her favorite spot, things take a turn for the worse. Ultimately, the landlady decides to close the bin, forcing her to leave. Now, she must find a new place to call home!



Children **Mukhtar's big ears** *Mukhtar Abu Deneen Kbar*

Illustration By Abdullah Qawarik. Tamer institute, 2011
Ramallah Palestine

"When the trees hear his music, they start dancing"

Mukhtar is a boy who feels self-conscious about his large ears, which make him the target of bullying in his village and among his peers. Despite his efforts to hide them, the bullying continues. However, Mukhtar has a special talent: he's the best lout player in the village, and his music brings joy to everyone.

When Mukhtar decides to leave, the villagers quickly realize how much they miss his melodies. They come to understand that their village is a brighter place because of him. In his absence, they learn to appreciate the true value of kindness and acceptance.



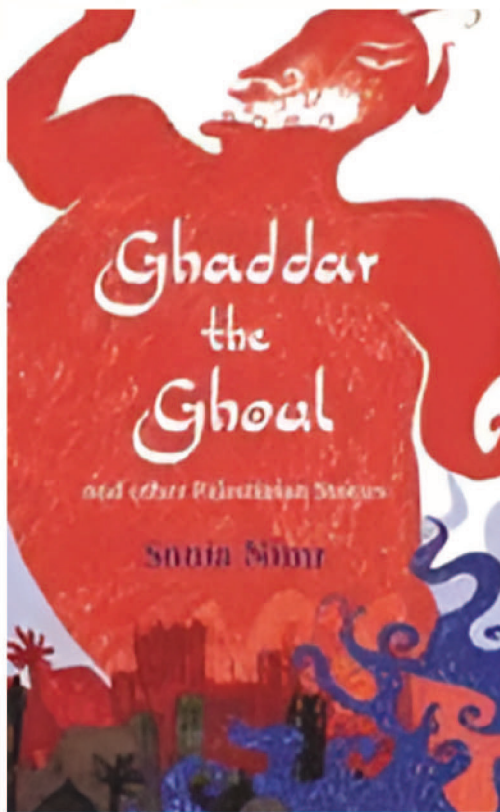
Children **Mandoura**

Illustrated by Anna Forlaty
The Child Cultural Centre, Al-Aswar, 2007
Acre

"Welcome to the Rainbowers Kingdom"

Mandoura is a curious girl with a heart full of wonder. She's captivated by the world around her, always asking questions. Her insatiable curiosity leads her to a tiny world inhabited by the rainbow painters. But when they discover they've run out of red, Mandoura embarks on a magical adventure, learning profound lessons about nature along the way. Will she be able to help them find the color red and finish the rainbow?





Children

Ghaddar the Ghoul and Other Palestinian Stories

Introduction by Ghada Karmi

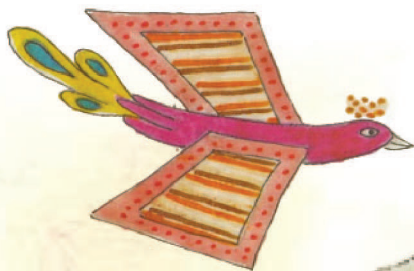
Illustrations by Hanna Shaw

Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2007, London

"Ah, that was punishment for what your father's father's father sin. It has nothing to do with you at all"

Why do we have the names we have? What does it mean to be stupid or smart? Why do snakes eat frogs? What makes a man-eating ghoul become a vegetarian? How can a woman make a bored prince smile? And how does the fox deceive the wolf? The answers are found in this engaging anthology of folk stories.

This compilation features nine Palestinian folk tales, cleverly retold in a modern context. The charismatic women, genial tricksters, mischievous animals, and other colorful characters imbued with a wry sense of humor delight readers young and old alike.

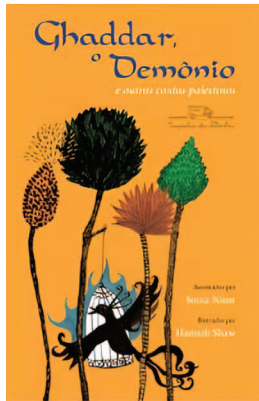
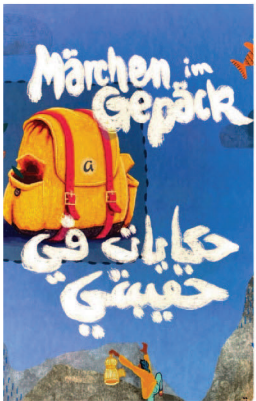


Translated editions



Thunderbird *Taer il-Raed*

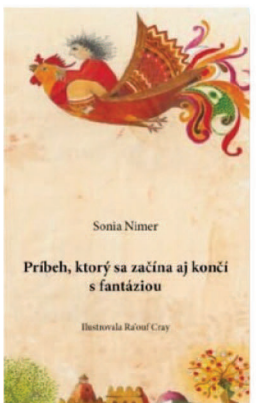
English «Thunderbird»
Translated Marcia Lynx Qualey
Texas University Press
Austin, Texas
Book One 2022
Book Two 2023
Book Three 2024



Ghaddar the Ghoul

German «Märchen im Gepäck»
Translated by Micaela Sauber
AphorisA, 2018

Portuguese «Ghaddar o Demônio»
Companhia das Letras, 2012



A Story that Begins and Ends with Lies *Qisah Awalha Khayal wa Akherha Khyal*

Slovakian «Pribeh, ktorý sa začína aj končí s fantáziou»
Civic Association Sinieckovo, 2023

Portuguese «Uma história inventada do começo ao fim»
Translated By Maria Carolina Goncalves
Tabla Brazil, 2022

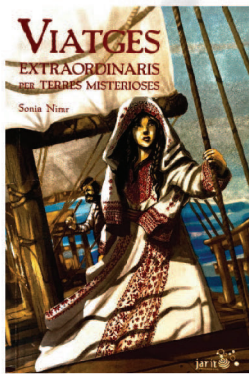


A Little Piece of Ground

Arabic «Qitaa' Saghera Min Al Ard»
Translated from English by Samar Al Qutob
Tamer Institute Ramallah, 2004

Wonderous Journeys in Strange Lands

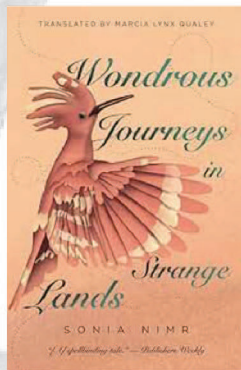
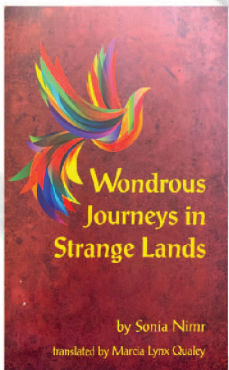
Rihlat Ajeeba fi Al Bilad Al Ghareeba



Spanish «Viajes Extraordinarios por Tierras Misteriosas»
Translated by Monica Carrion
Icaria editorial, 2016

Catalan «Viatges Extraordinaris per Terres Misterioses»
Translated by Monica Carrion
First Edition Jarit Associacio Civil, 2017

Catalan «Viatges Extraordinaris per Terres Misterioses»
Translated by Monica Carrion
Second Edition Jarit Associacio Civil, 2018



English «Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands»
Translated by Marcia Lynx Qualey
First Edition, 2021, Interlink Publishing Group, Inc.

English «Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands»
Translated by Marcia Lynx Qualey
Second Edition, 2024, Interlink Publishing Group, Inc.

Danish «Forunderlige rejser i fremmede lande»
Translated by Elisabeth Moestrup
Jensen and Delgaard Publishers, 2024



Farisi «سفریه سرزمین هاک غریب»
Translated by Qasim Fathi Nasher Atrah

Portugeuse «Viagens Fabulosas Em Terras Estrangeiras»
Translated By Maria Carolina Goncalves
Tabla Brazil, 2022

Awards & Other Distinctions

- 2024** IBBY Honor List, for *When it rained fish*.
- 2023** Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, for *Thunderbird*
Translated by Marcia Lynx.
- 2021** Palestine Book Award, Middle East Monitor, for *Wonderous Journeys in Strange Lands*
Translated by Marcia Lynx.
- 2018** Al-Sharjah Reading Festival Award, for *Thunderbird*.
- 2018** IBBY Short List, for *The Blue Door*.
- 2018** Sheikh Zayed Book Award, for *Thunderbird*.
- 2018** Publisher Union Award, for *Thunderbird*.
- 2017** Etisalat Book Award, for *Thunderbird*.
- 2014** Etisalat Book Award, for *Wonderous Journeys in Strange Lands*.
- 2014** IBBY Honor List, for *Wonderous Journeys in Strange Lands*.
- 2004** Hampshire Book Award, for *A Little Piece of Ground*.
- 2004** IBBY Honor List, for *A Story That Begins and Ends with Lies*.

Nominations

- 2016-2025** Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, as an Author, in Stockholm, Sweden.
- 2016** Hans Christian Anderson Award, as an Author, in Denmark.



Complete Bibliography

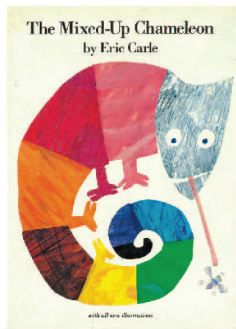
- 1** "Indama Amtart al-Samma Samakan", "When It Rained Fish", Illustrated by Leena Naddaf. Dar al Aswar 2021, Acre.
- 2** "Taer il-Raed", "Thunderbird, part3."; a Novel for young adults. Tamer Institute. First edition 2021. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 3** "Taer il-Raed", "Thunderbird, part2."; a Novel for young adults. Tamer Institute. First edition 2020. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 4** "al-Bab al-Azraq", "The Blue Door"; a book for children; Illustration by Rauf al-Karai. Tamer Institute, 2018, Ramallah, Palestine.
- 5** "Taer il-Raed", "Thunderbird, part1."; a Novel for young adults. Tamer Institute. First edition 2016, the second edition 2019. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 6** "Al-Ased Althi Faqad nawmaho", "The Lion Who Lost His Sleep"; a book for children; Illustration by Manar Buairat. Dar alaswar, 2014 Acre.
- 7** "Malik Al Hikayat", "King of Tales"; a book for children; Illustration by Abdullah Qawarik. Tamer Institute, First edition 2014, Ramallah, Palestine.
- 8** "Rihlat Ajeeba Fi Al Bilad Al Ghareeba", "Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands"; a Novel for young adults. Tamer Institute. First edition 2013, the second edition 2015, third edition 2023. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 9** "Min Eibal La il-Mina", "From Eibal to the Port."; a book co-authored with children and tamers team. Tamer Institute, First edition 2013, Ramallah, Palestine.
- 10** "Zalloutah", with Suad Naji. A book for children. Illustration by Manar Nai'rat. Tamer Institute, first edition 2012, second edition 2014. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 11** "Mukhtar Abu Deneen Kbar". "Big-eared Mukhtar"; with Suad Naji. Illustration By Abdullah Qawarik. Tamer institute, 2011, Ramallah Palestine.
- 12** "Min al-Quds Tabda al-Hikayah". "The Tale Starts from Jerusalem- based on oral history"; A work with young Adults. Tamer institute, 2009, Ramallah Palestine.
- 13** "Mandoura". A book for children; illustrated by Anna Forlaty. The Child Cultural Centre, Alaswar, 2007 Acre.



- 14 "Ghaddar the Ghoul, and other Palestinian Stories"; a collection of Palestinian tales for children and young adults (English). Introduction by Ghada Karmi, illustrations by Hanna Shaw. Frances Lincoln Children's books, 2007, London.
- 15 "Mogez Tarikh Falesteen", "non-fiction: Short History of Palestine"; A book for young Adults. Sonia Nimr with Saed Nimr. Tamer Institute, First edition 2004, Second edition 2008, Ramallah, Palestine.
- 16 "a Little Piece Of Ground", (English) Sonia Nimr with Elizabeth Laird. Macmillan Children's Books, 2003, London.
- 17 "Qisah Awalha khayal wa Akherha Khyal", "Story that Begins and Ends with Lies"; A book for children. Illustrated by Tahani Awedan, Tamer Institute, First edition 2002, Ramallah, Palestine. Second edition 2015 illustrated by Rauf al-Karai.
- 18 "Al Taneen", "The Dragon", with Suad Naji. Illustrations by 'Ala' Abu Ghoush. Tamer Institute, 2001. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 19 "Yalo", "Yalo: oral history of this village", with 4 children. Tamer Institute, 2000. Ramallah, Palestine.
- 20 "Al sononow al Dhaki", "The Smart Swallow". with Rasha Hammami. Illustration by Jamil Al Qeeq. Tamer Institute, 1996, Ramallah, Palestine.
- 21 "Hitha'a al Tanbouri", "Tanbouri's shoe". with Rasha Hammami*. Illustration by Jamil Al Qeeq. Tamer Institute, 1996, Ramallah, Palestine.

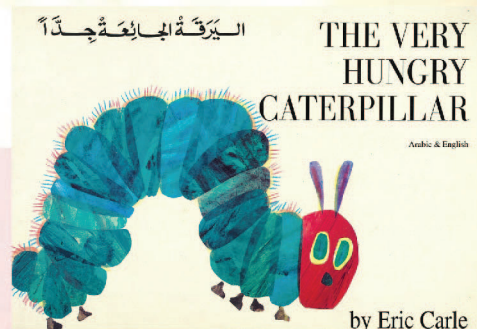


Books Translated by Sonia



The Mixed-Up Chameleon

Story by Eric Carle



The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Al Yaraqa Al Ja' eaa Jidan

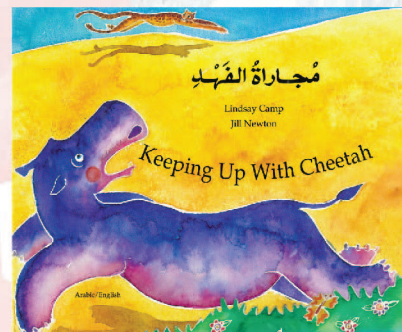
Story by Eric Carle



Dream Stealer

Sareq Al Ahlam

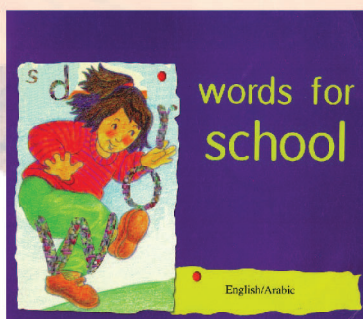
Story by Elaine Joseph & Maggie Raynor



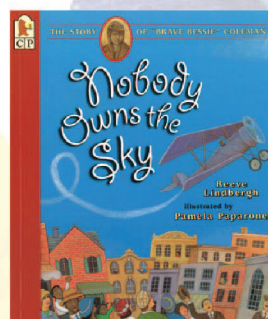
Keeping Up With Cheetah

Mojarat Al Fahd

Story by Elaine Lindsay Camp & Jill Newton



Words for School



Nobody Owns the Sky

Story by Reeve Lindbergh
Illustrated by Pamela Paparone



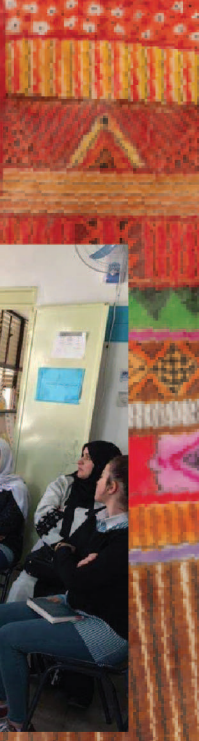
The Frog Princess?

Al Ameera Al Dofdaa' ?

Story by Pamela Mann
Illustrations by Jill Newton



Meeting the Readers



Portfolio Designer
Zainab Azmi Al Khatib
Faculty of Art, Music, & Design
Birzeit University

