

Literature from the Modern Middle East: Making a Living Connection

Webb and his students recommend contemporary Middle Eastern texts and other resources that will help American students learn more about this important part of the world.

W

hile our country is deeply involved in the Middle East, most Americans, including our students, lack knowledge about the region.¹ Yet

from Afghanistan to Palestine, from Morocco to Iraq, there is a vibrant and exciting literature by living authors that can bring the diverse experiences and perspectives of this vital part of the world to our classes. My students have found contemporary Middle Eastern literature to replace stereotypes, transform worldviews, develop personal connections, and humanize Islam and Muslim people, and learn about Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Persians, and Pushtans. Readings from a class I recently taught included many authors from the Middle East, two of them Nobel Prize laureates. Some of the works, such as *Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, are already well known. Many others, such as *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafahi, are gems waiting to be discovered. The class also encompassed contemporary films, video casts, speakers, and online resources—a variety of possibilities that any secondary teacher can draw on. I offer resources, ideas, and strategies that other English teachers can use to integrate Middle Eastern literature into their classes.

Several times a week my students and I wrote blogs responding to our reading and continuing our discussion about the Middle East. Students were able to create their blogs for free in just a few minutes on Blogger.com, and as the semester progressed they were able to develop and personalize them, changing styles and font, adding links, images, and video clips. All of our blogs were linked together via a “blog roll” listing class sites, and students and I could comment on each others’ post-

ings. As we did background research on texts we were reading, we were able to post links on our blogs that everyone could follow.²

Connecting with Characters

The Middle East is such a large, diverse, and historically complex region it is hard to know where to start. My suggestion is to begin with literature addressing the Israeli/Palestinian crisis—it is central to the conflicts in the region and offers students important opportunities for rethinking preconceptions about Arabic people. Perhaps the most important novel that my students read was *Wild Thorns* by Sahar Khalifeh, according to ArabWorldBooks.com, “the foremost Palestinian novelist, widely acclaimed for being the first feminist Palestinian writer, and for her ‘sensitive, economical and lucid’ style.” *Wild Thorns* captures Palestinian life in the West Bank under Israeli occupation and it is an ideal text to introduce American young people to a living Middle Eastern writer (grades 10–12).

Wild Thorns takes place in the town of Nablus and focuses on the Karmi family, whose members have diverse experiences and viewpoints. There is Adil, seeking moderation and commuting against his father’s wishes across the border to work at a construction site in Israel, and his beautiful sister Nuwar secretly in love with a revolutionary. There is also Adil’s brother Basil, a teenager who throws stones at Israeli soldiers and ends up in prison, and his cousin Usama, a sensitive boy who left the West Bank to work in the Gulf States but has returned determined to become a resistance fighter. The book portrays the challenges of everyday life in Palestine: unemployment, military domination, travel through check-

points, and the exodus of educated people. My students reacted on their blogs:

I like the contrast between Adil and Usama: the difference in their opinions and ideals and how each thinks the other goes about fighting the occupation by the wrong means. Usama was a poet as a boy, he dies a poet, and in between he seems to have tried to convince himself he was another person, one without dreams and feelings. Adil was, I think, my favorite. He seemed at times to see past the propaganda of both the Jews and the Arabs. He was caught in the middle and trying to accomplish what he could and still maintain some understanding and dignity. . . . They are all just people grieving and struggling in a difficult time.—Diane Hall

One of the most significant parts of *Wild Thorns*, in my opinion, was the scene where Basil is arrested. There are children flooding the streets, yelling and laughing at the Jewish soldiers. They are screaming in protest to show their disgust at the occupation. . . . There is absolutely no innocence left in Palestine, even the children are getting arrested. When Basil is taken off, his father is cold and shows no remorse or sadness that his son is in jail. He merely says, “But what came over the boy? Does he think he can free Palestine all by himself?” (Khalifeh 106).—Molly Grube

One thing I found very intriguing as I finished up *Wild Thorns* was the passion and love that several of the characters had for their country. Basil, for instance, illustrates a typical young man who is willing to do anything for his country. He gathers with his friends at the local café to discuss the politics and even risks going to prison to stand up for his beliefs. He quickly realizes, though, how much he doesn’t understand and how naive he actually is. A lot of parallels can be drawn to American youth, and their response to the 9/11 attacks.—Heather Winowiecki

Notice how the students explore characters. Developing personal connections between students and characters was a strong starting point for crossing the large cultural distances between the United States and the Middle East. Teachers can draw on personal connections to foster more comprehensive understanding. In this regard, Heather’s comments turned out to be especially productive. Many students know people fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Making reference to Khalifeh’s *Wild Thorns*, Heather’s post connects American young people after 9/11 and rebelling young Palestinians in the

West Bank. As we discussed in class, these Palestinians may be the people that, without reading this novel, my students would likely have thought of as “terrorists.” Identifying with characters from contemporary literature by a living Middle Eastern writer was transforming their understanding and building a bridge between American and Palestinian experiences.

Additional Resources to Understand Context

Reading contemporary Middle Eastern literature calls for bringing in additional resources. Rather than a background lecture before beginning the novel, I found that learning about the context after connecting to the characters was more effective. Reading *Wild Thorns* led students to want to know more, to be updated on the most recent happenings in the Palestine/Israeli situation. President Jimmy Carter’s book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* had been recently published and provided valuable background information. Individual chapters could be easily excerpted. Dan Brim blogged,

I used to think that it was a matter of “good vs. evil” in the Middle East when I was growing up. After reading Jimmy Carter’s book, I see that things are hardly so black and white. The historical chronology in the first ten pages of this book painted a very clear picture for the points being made within the book.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing Carter describes is the separation wall being built by Israel in and around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As Linda Cross shared,

The wall constructed around the West Bank area is really unfair to so many. Built right along the border all the way around the West Bank, it divides peoples’ homes from their lands. There is even a church where many Palestinian Christians have worshipped for years that is cut off from the

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people it serves. The church is on one side of the wall and the worshippers are on the other side.

Other resources that were influential to students' understanding of the wall—and the reaction of Palestinian young people to it—were powerful video clips that I found on YouTube and that we watched and discussed in class. The first clip we watched, “Israeli Apartheid Wall” (1-28-06), makes the wall real, as a person simply walks along it, observing graffiti, trying to find “a view toward peace,” and wondering “Is there anybody out there?” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSgkxbHBdII). The second YouTube clip we studied was a five-minute trailer about a film called *Slingshot Hip Hop* shown at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. In the clip, Palestinian teenagers in Gaza, Akka, Tel Aviv, a West Bank refugee camp, and the Israeli town of Lid use rap music to describe their situation (www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rdS8zNp3ow). Created by

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the “Palestinian Lyrical Front,” the clip shows teenagers excited about rapping on stage for the first time. It depicts Arab teen girls in tank tops and baseball caps talking about how it was difficult for some Muslims to accept them as rappers but that “they won’t stop for anyone.” A young man walks along the street and is detained by an Israeli

police officer. Two teenagers point to their high school and describe how the library was removed and replaced by a police station inside the school. We watched this short YouTube clip twice and discussed the way the Israeli wall was affecting Palestinian lives, how the young people were responding, and how American rap music, originally expressing oppressed urban life in our country, has become a universal medium. These living teenage Palestinian rappers were making an immediate and powerful impression on the students in my class.

Short Stories, Graphic Novels, and YA Literature

While novels and Internet resources provide rich resources for cross-cultural studies, shorter works can also be effective and may be easier to fit into the

curriculum. Our understanding was enriched by contemporary Palestinian short stories. Although not likely to be found in a standardized textbook, these stories are easy to add to your course. The evocative four-page story “Stealing Away, We Returned,” by Rasmi Abu Ali, captures the experience of Palestinians sneaking back to their homes and olive groves after having been forced to leave (grades 6–12). My students responded positively to “Norma and the Snowman” by Yehia Yakhlaf, a story describing a university student who decides to join a group of Palestinian fighters (grades 10–12). Both stories are found in *A Land of Stone and Thyme: An Anthology of Palestinian Short Stories* (Elmessiri and Elmessiri).

Many of the stories we read were from the collection *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani—a writer who emerged as the students’ favorite. Kanafani’s stories often concern the experience of Palestinian refugees and the long (60-page) title story is a disturbing tale of four Palestinian refugees seeking work in Kuwait. I won’t give away the powerful ending, but Frankie and Dan were compelled to comment:

“Men In The Sun” gave me a whole new perspective of the world. This story’s ending has left me in shock, and I feel as though there is this void that the story left empty on purpose. I really liked how the story gave all of its characters life through their memories. . . . The characters made you feel their struggle and understand their reasons so well that I really did feel sad for them by the end, even Abul Khaizuran.—Frankie Velazquez

I’m sure I wasn’t the only person to sit down and read this in an hour because I couldn’t stop reading about halfway through it. Though the idea of smuggling workers and being utterly and totally poor in a barren land may be foreign to most of us in this class, the story was quite exciting, and it ended quickly and abruptly, with an echo in the dark desert nighttime sky.—Dan Brim

Kanafani’s other stories are also powerful, and students found “Tales of Sad Oranges” and “Letter from Gaza” especially meaningful (grades 7–12).

Unlike the other Middle Eastern writers I refer to, Ghassan Kanafani is now dead; he might be still living, if he had not been killed by a car bomb in Lebanon when he was 36 years old and had young children. His niece was killed with him. Ac-

cording to Wikipedia, Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, has claimed responsibility for their deaths. Reading Middle Eastern authors will likely lead students to inquire about their lives, to understand a different world through the reader-author connection. Students inspired by Kanafani's writing will want to see Steven Spielberg's 2005 film, *Munich*, which explores the actions of Mossad at the time of Kanafani's killing. Nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, *Munich* offers one background to Kanafani's short stories.

Another engaging resource that will provide students with historical context is the graphic novel *Palestine* by Joe Sacco. Based on his visits in 1991 and 1992, Sacco's illustrations capture the destitution of the West Bank, Gaza, and refugee camps in a way that is still relevant and provides backdrop for works of Palestinian literature. This "comic journalism" is full of interviews with Palestinians and includes flashbacks to important historical events.

For younger students, grades 6–9, a good choice for learning about Palestinians is Naomi Shihab Nye's young adult novel *Habibi*. Nye is a respected Arab American poet I have heard speak at NCTE Annual Conventions. *Habibi* makes it possible for American teenagers to understand Palestinian life since the story is told from the point of view of Liyana, a girl from St. Louis with an American mother and Palestinian father. When she is 14, Liyana's family moves to Jerusalem and she learns firsthand about her Palestinian relatives and their relationship with Israel. In a *Romeo and Juliet* twist, Liyana falls in love with Omer, a Jewish boy. (This YA novel is a good pairing for Shakespeare's classic.) Another book for younger readers is *Samir and Yonatan* by Daniella Carmi. Samir, a Palestinian boy who breaks his leg, finds himself in an Israeli hospital where he finds surprising friends. His memories give vivid depiction of life in the occupied territories.

Broadening Perspectives

After focusing on Palestinian literature, students were able to extend to a wide range of wonderful works for middle school and high school students by living authors from Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Morocco. Though there isn't space here to address all of these works and countries, see Appendix 1 for the titles, students' comments on

the texts, and recommended grade levels. Themes of these texts include family life, Islam and women, the impact of war, education, wealth and poverty, class and ethnic differences, the relation of East and West, and so on. Using literature circles allowed students to bring a wide range of texts to class discussion (for more on this method, see Daniels).

Given the war and American occupation, examining the situation in contemporary Iraq is a natural and relevant part of reading Middle Eastern literature. Of course there is a deluge of information on Iraq, most of it emphasizing the perspective or experience of Americans. To explore Iraqi perspectives, teachers and students can

look at the new collection of short works in the 2008 anthology *Contemporary Iraqi Fiction* edited by Shakir Mustafa. Younger students may find inspiring *Thura's Diary: My Life in Wartime Iraq*. A nonfiction work, *City of Widows: An Iraqi Woman's Account of War and Resistance* by Haifa Zangana, offers a more mature perspective we don't often hear. Blogs have also been a vital way for ordinary Iraqis to express their perceptions of the occupation, and two books published from blogs and written under pseudonyms are high interest, educational, and appealing to students: *Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi* (by Salam Pax) and *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq* (by Riverbend). All of these works can be excerpted for class reading and discussion. I shared with students a powerful series of YouTube clips titled "Iraq Five Years Later" that examines contemporary life in Iraq, the effects of the surge, and how Americans are perceived in ways that go well beyond typical American news reports (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycJLL65dh60>).

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Addressing Stereotypes by Reading Living Authors

Reading Middle Eastern literature, learning about the culture and history, and thinking critically about the representations of Middle Eastern people helped us become more savvy viewers. Often after seeing a film we were motivated to do online research about the film and its portrayals.

There are so many images in the news, in contemporary film, in video games, and online that distort the lives and realities of Middle Eastern people; thus, reading literature from living authors in the Middle East calls for teachers to help students carefully think about stereotypes. An important way to consider these stereotypes is to have students discuss the documentary film *Reel Bad Arabs* (available in its entirety on DVD or in portions on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewaox9UA6NE) and explore the degrading images of Arabs as bandits, sheikhs, and terrorists found in Hollywood films students have likely seen including *Aladdin*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *True Lies*, *Back to the Future*, and so on. Of course there are many contemporary films addressing a wide range of issues in the Middle East—many that my students had seen or were watching on their own as the course progressed. Reading Middle Eastern literature, learning about the culture and history, and thinking critically about the representations of Middle Eastern people helped us become more savvy viewers. Often after seeing a film we were motivated to do online research about the film and its portrayals. Middle Eastern literature by living authors inspires us to seek cultural, historical, and political background information. That information may challenge our stereotypes and closely held ideas about the past and present role of the United States in the region.

Inviting Speakers and Visiting Mosques

Another powerful way to examine stereotypes is to bring in outside speakers. There are people from the Middle East or with significant experience in the region living in all parts of our country, and they are often open to visiting classrooms. I invited a woman from Egypt who had only been in the United States for a few weeks to visit my class. Stu-

dents were surprised that she wore jeans and spoke contemporary idiomatic English—she broke stereotypes and inspired discussion and reading about Islamic women. A Turkish man showed the students slides of modern Istanbul and a film clip about Turkish rock music. A Zionist defended Israel's treatment of Palestinians. An Iranian discussed his perspective on his country being described by American leaders as part of the "Axis of Evil." A Jordanian described two different schools he had attended in Jordan, one in the city where the female students wore jeans and short skirts and one in the countryside where women predominately wore burqas. An organizer of Iraq war protests in our community lectured students on how the America invasion violated international law. A team of three American soldiers with extensive on-duty experience in Iraq and Kuwait talked about the psychological impact of these wars on American troops.

It is *easy* to find speakers who might come to your class, and mosques, Islamic centers, and Islamic schools that your students might visit or—just go to <http://www.IslamicFinder.org> and put in your zip code.

I was able to arrange for my class to visit a mosque in our town. Students read selections of the Koran recommended by the Imam and were surprised to see that these selections were about Jesus and Mary. We removed our shoes in the mosque, learned about Islamic rituals of prayer, and were invited to ask any questions. We experienced a warm hospitality and were treated with Middle Eastern deserts of honey, nuts, and filo pastry. We talked with a young man who was the mosque's "Hafez"—he had the entire Koran committed to memory in Arabic and shared some of it with us. Not only had none of my Michigan students ever been to a mosque, but none had ever had a conversation with an Islamic person. Like the literature, video clips, and speakers, the visit and conversations were eye opening.

An important area that my class did not address is the growing literature by Islamic Americans or Americans of Middle Eastern background or descent. Many schools have students with this background—clearly we need to learn how to support them, especially in a post-9/11 world. In such

schools, community members and parents may be particularly valuable resources as classroom speakers.

Connecting Middle Eastern Literature to the Canon

The respected Palestinian American literary scholar Edward Said, who died of cancer in 2003, has written about “Orientalism,” the stereotyping of Middle Eastern people tied to the European and American interests in the region. I started our class by looking at some of the historically early representations of the Middle East in classic European and British literature.


We read authors and texts frequently in the secondary curriculum but that are often not put into dialogue with Middle Eastern writing. We found classic works available for free online, and, using Wikipedia, students gained some background about the enormous Arab and Ottoman empires that arose in the Middle East and that were centers of learning during the European “Middle Ages.” We began our literary reading with the interesting ninth story from the tenth day of Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1350 AD) that tells about the visit of Saladin, leader of the Muslim armies during the Crusades. Saladin comes to Italy in disguise and is offered generous hospitality by an Italian lord who, later, during a crusade, finds himself Saladin’s prisoner (<http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameron/engDecIndex.php>). When Saladin discovers the prisoner is his former host, he treats him royally and has his magicians fly him home overnight so he can be with his wife. In contrast to this “positive” romanticized depiction, we read the first part of Chaucer’s “Man of Laws Tale” (ll. 1–380), the story of Constance, a European girl who marries the sultan of Syria, converts him to Christianity, and then escapes his death and a massacre of his court led by her mother-in-law (http://www.canterburytales.org/canterbury_tales.html). We also looked at the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” and Shelley’s sonnet “Ozymandias.” The mysterious, violent, lustful, and deceptive stereotypes we also explored in some of the tales from the *Arabian Nights*, and, most extensively, in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Sometimes the best starting point for incorporating living writers into the curriculum is to connect them to classic writers and works. In his essay “Turning Turk in *Othello*,” Daniel Vitkus explains that some of the same ignorance that leads to stereotyping today was present at the time of Shakespeare—the English frequently confused and conflated terms as different as *Turk* and *Moor*, linking Muhammad and the Pope as devilish enemies to good Protestant Christians. The Renaissance was a time of warfare as well as economic and ideological competition between Europe and the Islamic world. One of my students, Diane Hall, wrote a paper arguing that by the end of the play, “Othello possesses characteristics that were [stereotypically] attributed to Muhammad. He is lustful, violent, angry, and delusional.” Drawing on Vitkus, Diane claimed that “The play *Othello* does in some sense portray Islamic culture; however, it functions on a larger level to warn the audience about the dangers of conversion. . . . These conversions are the result of subtle actions and words that eventually so envelop the victims that they cannot see clearly and cannot perceive the consequences of their actions.” Foregrounding the Middle East as a theme led students to new perspectives on Chaucer and Shakespeare, on Coleridge and Shelley, and also allowed us to recognize the repetition and transformation of stereotypes through time.

Conclusion

I admit that I decided to focus my literature class in the way I did because the current situation in the Middle East concerns me. Some studies claim that more than a million Iraqis have been killed as a result of the American invasion, and no resolution to the conflict appears in sight. Students can no longer remember when America was not at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of my students, their family members, and friends serve, or will serve, in the region. While I always think we should try to find

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ways to make the literary works we teach relevant, I believe that at the present time it is imperative to help Americans, our students and ourselves, better understand the Middle East. There is no more engaging or effective starting point than to bring writing of contemporary living Middle Eastern authors into our classes. 

Appendix 1: Contemporary Middle Eastern Texts

Under the Persimmon Tree by Suzanne Fisher Staples, grades 7–9.

A contemporary work set in Afghanistan at the time of the American invasion after 9/11. Staples, not from the Middle East, is American and was the UPI bureau chief in South Asia, where she covered Pakistan and Afghanistan and she led a US AID literacy development project in the Cholistan desert (described in her first YA novel, *Shabanu Daughter of the Wind*); she is well informed. This appealing book will help students understand the Afghan war and the ongoing impact of the American invasion.

We begin in the small village of Golestan, Northern Afghanistan, in October of 2001, mere weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Taliban are passing through the Kunduz hills and creates conflict for a small farming family. . . . The images conjured in this book of the violence and terrorism of the Taliban are real and disturbing, but instead of the American point of view, we are able to get some insight from the other side of the playing field. Why were American bombs falling on innocent people and villages in Afghanistan?—Sara Keeler

The Day the Leader Was Killed by Naguib Mahfouz, grades 11–12

One of the best known Middle Eastern authors, the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988 and died in 2006. *The Day the Leader Was Killed* (103 pages) addresses questions facing young people from different points of view regarding living with their parents, finding employment, and marriage—all topics that will resonate with high school juniors and seniors.

The book takes place in Cairo, the capital city of Egypt. A middle-class family facing harsh times

narrates this story. There is Muhtashimi Zayed, the grandfather, and Elwan his grandson who at the moment is facing some difficult decisions in his life and hopes he chooses the right path.
—Ryan Kijewski

A Thousand Splendid Suns and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, grades 10–12

Students will love both of these best-selling novels about Afghanistan. To learn about the country, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is better—it ends soon after the American-led attack against the Taliban. Both novels contain some disturbing passages. After reading either novel students should learn more about America’s role in the “covert” war against the socialist government and about the most current situation in the country. Hosseini is raising funds to support the desperate children in Afghanistan—supporting this effort would make a good class project.

This book [*The Kite Runner*] is, so far, beyond fantastic, and is quickly becoming one of my favorites. If I’m in another class, I’m thinking about this book—if I’m hanging out with my friends, I catch myself wondering what’s going to happen next.—Dan Brim

A Thousand Splendid Suns was a gripping story and I connected with this novel even more than *The Kite Runner* because women’s rights are so important and it gave more perspective on modern Afghanistan history and politics than the *Kite Runner*.—Jennifer Barns

Persepolis I by Marjane Satrapi, grades 10–12

This graphic novel set in Iran was made into a film in 2007. The second volume addresses some mature topics better suited to older students. The narrator is from an intellectual, privileged family in the capital city—it would be interesting for students to search the Web to learn more about the Iranian revolution and fill in other perspectives.

A woman from Iran has taken a form that is not native to her country, and used it to tell parts of her life. She tells it with humor and conviction, and while being sensitive to all aspects as far as I can tell, she still lays the bald truth out there. For that, I admire her.—Patricia Schultz

I’ve read graphic novels before, and this has to be one of the best I’ve ever read! Marjane Satrapi

lived in Iran during the cultural revolution in the seventies, and the book is from her perspective as a young child. There is a very sad part in the first book where her uncle says goodbye to her for the last time as he is going to be executed.—Frankie Valezquez

Dreams of Trespass by Fatima Mernissi,
grades 9–12

Fatima Mernissi is a well-known sociologist and feminist in Morocco. Her memoir of a childhood during the 1940s explores women growing up in a traditional Muslim household, crossing boundaries, and developing solidarity.

Mernissi was constantly questioning the people around her. She wanted to know why the women were confined to the home while they men were allowed to go about town as they pleased. Mernissi's mother was definitely the strongest woman (or maybe even the strongest person altogether) that I have read about.—Molly Grube

The White Castle by Orhan Pamuk,
grades 11–12

The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006. His writing often addresses contact between East and West, traditional and modern. *The White Castle* is one of his shorter and more accessible works.

This book was solidly the best read I've had in the last year at least. . . . [I]t is extremely interesting to see how two people from very different backgrounds might have so much in common with one another that their differing cultural identities cannot mask their similarities.—Ian Magee

Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi,
grades 11–12

Nawal El Saadawi is an Egyptian feminist writer and physician, and this disturbing short novel examines the oppression of poor women in that country.

Firdaus has lived a truly unfortunate life. She was beaten and neglected by her parents and sexually abused by friends and relatives before she even finished high school. Married to a cruel man, she flees and turns to prostitution as a means of survival. It was very powerful and I would recommend it to

anyone looking for a book that shows the struggles that some impoverished women face in the modern Middle East.—Heather Winowiecki

Zaat by Son'allah Ibrahim, grade 12

Son'allah Ibrahim is a popular nationalist writer from Egypt, imprisoned at one point for his political views.

Zaat is the name of a typical middle class Egyptian woman. The chapters alternate between her everyday life and the headlines of the Egyptian newspaper that she works for. Many of these newspaper events deal with Egyptian politics in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The chapters dealing with *Zaat's* life jump from event to event. If this isn't a story that flows, it is still well written and extremely interesting. Not the easiest, but definitely a good read.—Heather Winowiecki

Additional recommended Middle Eastern
literature for secondary students

An Apartment Called Freedom by Ghazi Algo-saibi tells the story of Saudi Arabian young men living as students in England.

Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery by Bahaa' Taher explores village life in Egypt and tensions between violence and peace.

Autumn Equinox by Jabbur Duwayhi narrates the experience of a young man returning to his Lebanese village after studying in America.

The Bleeding of the Stone by Yusuf Al-Quaid describes the encounter between a Bedouin young man in the desert in the south of Libya and two foreign hunters.

Daughter of Damascus by Siham Tergeman is collection of related stories about growing up in Syria.

Fate of a Cockroach and Other Plays by Al-Hakim, Tawfiq is the most popular work by Egypt's leading playwright.

Fragments of Memory is about a poor family in the north of Syria under the French mandate.

Girls of Riyadh by Rajaa Alsanea is written in the form of emails between four young women in Saudi Arabi about contemporary life in that country.

Last Chapter by Leila Abouzeid tells the story of a young woman high school student in Morocco who wonders if it is OK to be single.

Memid My Hawk by Yasar Kemal is one of the great novels of modern Turkey and addresses the struggle of a young man against a powerful rural landlord.

Memory in the Flesh is by the first novel written by an Algerian woman, Ahlan Mosteghanemi and treats the Algerian struggle for independence from France and disappointments of the independence era.

Only in London by Hanan Al-Shaykh follows four airplane passengers from Lebanon, Morocco, Iraq, and England as their lives interweave in London.

The Other Place by Ibrahim Abdel Mequid describes the experience of a middle class Egyptian living in one of the oil-rich states of the Persian Gulf.

The Square Moon by Ghada Samman is a collection of unusual short stories with gothic dimensions and surprise ending set in Lebanon.

War in the Land of Egypt by Yusuf Al-Qaid, Yusuf tells the story of a young man from the village sold into the Egyptian army to take the place of the son of a wealthy man.

West of the Jordan by Laila Halaby portrays the coming to age of four young Arabic women in Jordan, Palestine, and the United States.

Zayni Barakat by Gamal Al-Ghitani is an historical novel set in Cairo at the time of the arrival of the Ottoman Empire.

Notes

1. The author expresses his thanks to the many people who helped with this article, including his students and his friends Mustafa Mughazi, Mustafa Mirzeler, Jahan Aghdai, and Zaydun Al-Shara.

2. Student blogs have been significantly edited for clarity and length, but we have preserved the authors' intentions. The original student blogs may be found at Oriental-Interpretations.blogspot.com or AllenWebb.net. (For more information on the Internet, blogging, and teaching literature see my book *Literature and the Web: Reading and Responding with New Technologies*, written with Robert Rozema.)

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