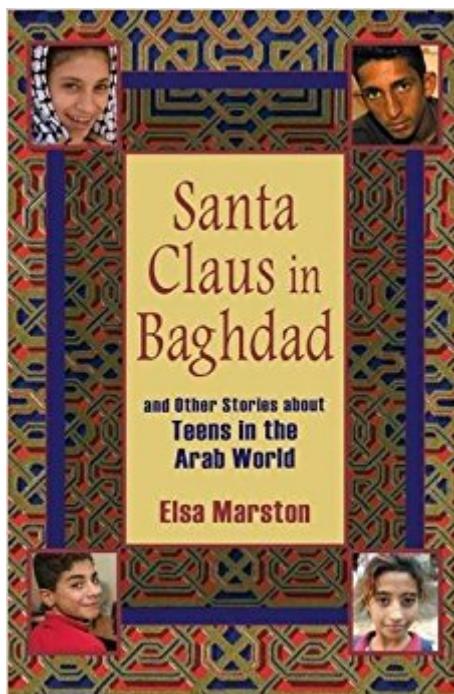


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# Santa Claus In Baghdad And Other Stories About Teens In The Arab World



## Synopsis

What is it like to be a young person in the Arab world today? This lively collection of eight short stories about Arab teenagers living in Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and a Palestinian refugee camp engagingly depicts young people's experiences growing up in the Middle East. The characters, drawn from urban and rural settings and from different classes as well as a mix of countries, confront situations involving friends, family, teachers, and society at large. Along with some specifically Middle Eastern issues, such as strife in Iraq, the hardships of life in a Palestinian refugee camp, and honor crimes, the young people deal with more familiar concerns such as loyalty to friends, overcoming personal insecurities, dreams of a future career, and coping with divorcing parents. Coming of age in a complicated world, they meet life with courage, determination, and, not least of all, humor. With accompanying notes that provide contextual information, *Santa Claus in Baghdad* brings a fresh perspective to youth literature about the Arab world.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 11 - 15 years

Grade Level: 6 - 10

## Customer Reviews

Grade 7-10 •Eight short stories illuminate the experiences of adolescents in modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan, yet many of their conflicts and concerns are universal in nature. In the title story, 13-year-old Amal learns some lessons about

honor, gifts, and the act of giving when her seven-year-old brother confuses their wealthy uncle with Santa Claus. Suhayl cooks a homemade meal to bring joy into the life of his divorced mother in "Faces." Other situations are unique to the Middle East. For example, Mujahhid defends a Palestinian olive grove against the occupying Israeli military in "The Olive Grove." In the stellar "Honor," a beautiful young woman faces a possible "honor killing" at the hands of her disgraced family after she is seen in public with a man. "The Plan," in which a young Palestinian refugee in Lebanon orchestrates a meeting between his older brother and his charismatic art teacher, is utterly charming. Touches of suspense, romance, and humor keep the pages turning in this fine collection. Themes of faith, loyalty, and coming-of-age are sensitively handled and compellingly depicted. Notes explain each story's historical, political, and social context. This collection is an expanded version of *Figs and Fate* (Braziller, 2005). It will be popular with fans of Deborah Ellis and Suzanne Fisher Staples, and will also be an excellent supplemental reading choice for world-cultures curricula. Amy Pickett, Ridley High School, Folsom, PA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"A unique anthology of stories, highly recommended to young adult readers everywhere."  
The Midwest Book Review "A window into often misunderstood and stereotyped Middle Eastern cultures.... Marston's sensitive tales feature compelling characters, interesting dilemmas, and vivid language that evoke a Middle East rich in tradition and filled with a love of poetry and learning." Lyn Miller-Lachmann, Multicultural Review "Author Elsa Marston has written a wonderful book about the Middle East...[a] compelling collection...offers real insight into why the conflicts continue, contracts what Americans think they know and how little they really know about the causes of the conflicts from the standpoints of innocence and tragedy and perilous lives of young children clouded only by the desire for peace. I read it and I couldn't put it down until I was finished. I hope you will read it too. This book needs to be in every library." Ray Hanania, Middle East Book Review and Announcements (<http://ibookreviews.blogspot.com/>), Sunday, Dec 14, 2008 "Reading this collection will be invaluable for Arab American YAs and for all in our culture eager to understand the Arab culture, the Middle East conflicts, and current events." Claire Rosser, Kliatt Magazine, July 1, 2008 "Though few examples of popular culture depict Arabs in a positive light, Marston's collection is one of the exceptions. Marston, who worked and traveled extensively to the Middle East, has an uncanny ability to understand the Muslim culture and relay her characters' innermost thoughts to Western audiences." Chantal Walvoord, ForeWord "A realistic portrait of the Middle East that mixes possibility and bleakness in equal

measure." ª Voice of Youth Advocates, August 2008" ... Marston's stories, while withholding nothing of the brutality of some of the more controversial aspects of Muslim life, present characters that are three dimensional and easy to empathize with. Her stories are filled with characters that are heroic, generous, and eager to improve their world." ª ForeWord" With annotations that make it especially useful for educational purposes and young readers, a welcome and human glimpse into an often misunderstood culture." ª Kirkus Reviews" An enjoyable and often surprising collection of stories about Arab teenagers.... The characters are complex and interesting, and the Middle Eastern settings are described in rich detail.... A good choice for classes discussing this part of the world or multicultural issues in general." ª School Library Journal

I chose this rating for a few reasons: the book arrived earlier than expected, in great condition (no writing or markings) and has a really wide variety of stories. I felt like it was a good representation of the diversity within Middle Eastern cultures. The stories were moving, heartbreakin, encouraging and funny- I think teens in the U.S. (or any English speaking populations really) would appreciate the stories, and would be able to identify with many of the stories and characters within the book.

An interesting collection in the vein of Jhumpa Lahiri, but not as "lived through."

Got the book for my 14 yr-old granddaughter. She had heard of it in school and seemed delighted to receive it. She has several Indian friends and an Iranian cousin and hopes to learn more about their countries.

For today's American teenager, this is a "must read". Our society is now increasingly multi-cultural while world cultures are being thrust together at an excellerating, sometimes violent rate. This means that awakening in young people a better understanding of Arabs and their culture is becoming vital. SANTA CLAUS IN BAGHDAD does that in a non-preachy, enjoyable way. Through these stories, we dip into the lives of eight teens growing up in the Arab world. Some stories are told in first person, some in third, some from a girl's point of view, some from a boy's. The physical and cultural settings differ from each other and even more from what the average American reader knows. However, it is the similarities linking the reader and the story characters that are most important. The young people portrayed here all share emotions and hopes that will resonate with any teen - anywhere. All are linked by the common theme of duty -- duty to one's self, to one's beliefs and to one's friends and family. I can't praise this book enough, and wish that the adults

currently managing our country had read and absorbed this book when they were young. It's message, that despite our differences we are all the same underneath, is one we all need to internalize.

This collection of eight short stories set in different parts of the Middle East gives insight into various cultures of a region that so often figures in the evening news. The author doesn't preach about issues, but shows ways that multifaceted problems affect teens whose needs and emotions are not all that different from our own. Some of the stories are funny; some are moving; all are fascinating. Marston is well-acquainted with the region from her years living there and extensive travel since. Cultural notes at the end of the book reinforce the common realities behind the specific events of the stories. The title story has recently been released as a movie.

This book lets you experience a different side of the Middle East. Through the reading of this book I learned how the history of this region of the earth impacts the people who live there today. The best story is "Honor." I would highly recommend this book being used in schools.

Half a world away, are children really all that different? "Santa Claus in Baghdad: And Other Stories about Teens in the Arab World" is a collection of stories that although fictional, express the real thoughts and beliefs of many Arabic Teens in the modern world. Showing the issues that Arabic students face, American readers will learn to empathize with these teens and not be scared of something they don't understand. "Santa Claus in Baghdad" is a unique anthology of stories, highly recommended to young adult readers everywhere.

Very good book

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