

Arab Writers: Pain, Perseverance and Prizes.

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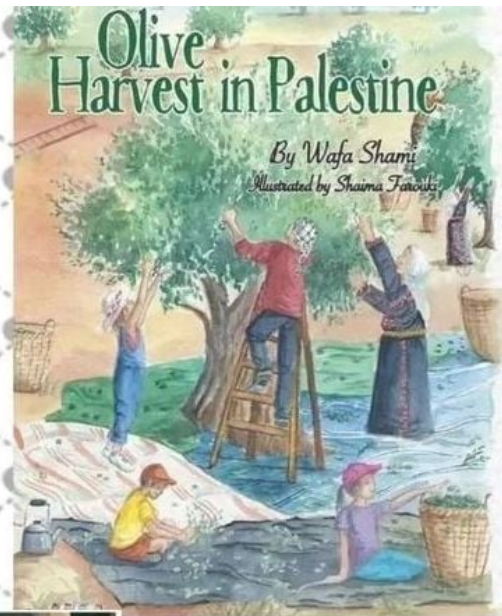
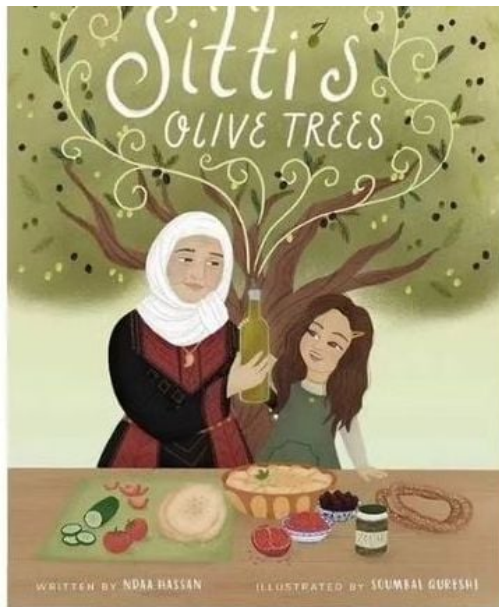
Arab writers have a tough job these days. Here, I'm talking only about those of us in the US. (Although this affects us all.) Whether poets, journalists, novelists or comedians, we have an extra responsibility to record our pain, unite our fractured people, and celebrate our existence and endurance.

We must continue to celebrate while we praise our martyrs; we must struggle to maintain and fortify our budding artistic community while we assist needy families overseas; we must reaffirm our cultural values and noble heritage while being presented with horrifying headlines; we must stand strong and hone our skills to speak for those pained and smothered by unstoppable tears, for those in fresh dug graves, for the unnamed beneath rubble. We must learn to forge genuine, trusted alliances that build on earlier achievements while restoring fractures.

We cannot be victims consoled into silence while our elders and our children need us to speak for them. The books and poems we manage to share must be more than substitutes for action.

Recent months have seen our most esteemed Arab writers honored with life achievement awards and prizes for new endeavors. Most recently two [Arab women](#), both [Americans](#), were among winners of the 75th American National Book awards. This was preceded by Poets and Writers' 2024 prize to Fady Joudah and American Academy of Poets award to [Naomi Shihab Nye](#). These outstanding individuals join associations of Arab filmmakers, comedians and visual artists. All demonstrate the breadth and depth of our commitment and excellence.

Vibrant Arab literary organizations today include [Mizna](#), RAWI, [New Arab American Theater Works](#) in Minneapolis, [Silk-Road Rising](#) in Chicago, along with [al-Bustan](#). All build on the legacy of Khalil Gibran's [al-Mahjar movement](#) founded in 1915. Yes, steadily growing for the past century!



This week, the work of two more Arab writers will be awarded for new writing endeavors. They are winners of a newly established prize for a grade-school level manuscript by Arab Americans. The award is in honor of author [Naomi Shihab Nye](#). A Palestinian American, Nye is a pioneer whose poems and stories for children feature Arab characters.

Naomi Shihab Nye prize winners augment an already expanding body of children's literature by Arab authors. Hosted by Al-Bustan in [Philadelphia Dec 14th](#), winners of a new competition created stories we expect to see between book covers soon. First prize winner is [Alia Yunis](#), author of [The Night Counter](#), and a journalist and filmmaker. She is joined by [Pauline Kaldas](#), a professor of English and editor whose latest novel is *A Measure of Distance*.

The importance of [books for children](#) is undiminished in schools, homes and libraries. Even while animated phone screens capture the eyes of our infants, children love books. Books fire the imagination of our youth with stories of magical rabbits, dragons and superwomen. Most importantly, today's books reflect the vast range of cultures and characters in the US. We are now flooded with children's books on Islam and being Muslim. There's Shifa Shafadi's (@Muslimmommyblog) [Amina Banana Series](#). Which reminds me of Kezzeiz' [Fasfoose Mouse](#) series. And, oh yes: Darraj's [Farah Rocks](#). (I happily can't keep up.) Stories about Arab American families and heroes – mythical and historical – join a welcome stream of Native American, African American, Italian, Vietnamese, Irish, South Asian, Chinese, Nigerian, Caribbean and other global tales. Such richness. Together they represent new interpretations of this country. And the world.

Stories of our grandfather's secret gardens, our new baby sister, a lost friend, are as appealing to growing minds as fantastic dragons and fairy princesses. Drawing on their

specific histories, geographies and religions, Caribbean and Iranian tales introduce us to an entirely new panorama of characters.

Hard to resist. New parents, teachers, and writers in other genres are jumping into the challenge of nourishing hungry young minds with delicious tales.

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