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# Multilevel Text Sets in a Middle School Classroom

Merryl Gladstone

*Bank Street College of Education*

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**Multilevel Text Sets in a Middle School Classroom**

**By**

**Merryl Gladstone**

**Mentor: Mimi Rosenberg**

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## **Abstract**

As students reach middle school, they are expected to read on grade level and to have mastered the complex process of reading. In fact, many students are still mastering the skills necessary for fluent reading of grade level material. The struggling readers need to read instructional level material and receive instruction in decoding, fluency and comprehension. Indeed many middle school students would benefit from reading instruction, as the reading demands in middle school are very different than those faced in elementary school. Middle school reading draws much of its material from expository texts, while elementary school programs typically use narrative texts as their main source of reading material. Students therefore need instruction on text format, text structure, vocabulary, note taking and summarizing.

In this independent study, I first examine the developmental nature of middle school students and then I look specifically at the needs of struggling readers. Through a review of the literature, I examine some of the different attempts by middle schools to support low achieving readers. Then based on the George and Stix (2000) article "Using multilevel young adult literature in middle school American Studies," I create a reading program that, uses multilevel text sets to meet the needs of all of the readers in an 11's classroom at the Bank Street School for Children. The premise of the program is that through multilevel text sets, each student will be able to read instructional level or independent material while still participating in the class curriculum. The use of multilevel text sets allows teachers provide reading instruction and to create developmentally appropriate and responsive classroom structures. I discuss the planning and implementation of the program and I reflect on its strengths and weaknesses.

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## **Introduction**

I first started seriously thinking about the subject of middle school reading while working as a literacy tutor with a sixth grade student, Sam. At the time Sam was reading at a between a fourth and a fifth grade level. During our first meeting I asked Sam what areas he felt we should be working on. He immediately responded that he wanted to work on reading, which was consistent with what his teacher had recommended.

Sam's class was reading *Shabanu*, a novel by Staples Fischer, in conjunction with their social studies unit on religion. The book was a challenge for many of the students in the class, even those who were reading at grade level, and particularly for those like Sam, who were not. When reading with Sam, I quickly realized that *Shabanu* was very frustrating for him. Sam's level of discomfort with the book made it impossible for him to use it as material with which he could practice and strengthen his reading skills. Despite his difficulties with the book, Sam was nonetheless very eager to participate in his class' literature discussions. Therefore, instead of spending our tutoring sessions focusing on his reading development, I spent our time trying to catch him up on the content of *Shabanu*.

While I was working with Sam I was also completing my masters degree in education and was excited to apply the skills I was learning to a middle school context. Before I started working with Sam, my practical experience had consisted of teaching in lower elementary school classrooms and my fieldwork experience working as a reading specialist in the lower school at the Bank Street School for

Children. At Bank Street a key part of the lower school curriculum was to determine the students' instructional reading level through informal and formal assessment procedures. Each student's instructional level corresponded with a selection of appropriate texts, which the students could be expected to read with 95 percent accuracy and recall at least 75 percent of the text (Gunning, 1998, p. 73). Matching a student to an instructional level is important because the high rate of accuracy provides students with the opportunity to employ the skills and strategies of good readers while still being able to make sense of the text. This practice is essential for readers who are building fluency and comprehension skills.

The practice of finding students' instructional levels or, more specifically, the practice of linking assessment to instruction was an application of my graduate school training at Bank Street College of Education. Both the Bank Street children's school and the graduate school believe in a child-centered approach to education. Manning (2000) defines a child-centered education as an approach that provides "developmentally appropriate and responsive curricular, instructional,...and overall educational experiences in a safe and peaceful environment" (p.154). In a child-centered education, the children's educational experiences are driven by their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. One of the first books I was assigned to read in my introductory literacy class was Marie Clay's *Becoming Literate: The construction of inner control* (1985). In *Becoming Literate*, Clay emphasizes that a new reader can be guided to develop the necessary literacy controls by having instruction that begins with assessment and then continues by building on the reader's strengths. One of my favorite concepts of Clay's is what she describes as

“roaming around the known”, where the teacher discovers what the reader knows about the act of reading and then spends time solidifying and building onto the known (p.55). Though Clay was writing specifically about beginning readers, “roaming around the known” is something that is applied, in many elementary schools, to the instruction of *all* readers. This approach is effective with such a wide range of readers because it creates an educational space in which the educator can provide scaffolding that both supports and challenges the learner. “Roaming around the known” is another way of working within Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development,” where it is believed optimal learning can occur (Berk,1994, p.30). Vygotsky believed that children learn best when the person working with them offers the necessary assistance for mastery while simultaneously prompting them to take more responsibility for the task as their skill increases.

In reading, the necessary scaffolding can be provided not only by the teacher, but also by the material itself. Texts that are at a student’s instructional level can enable the student to learn within their “zone of proximal development.” Instructional level texts allow readers to practice what they know while still leaving enough of a challenge for students to further develop their decoding and comprehension skills. The use of Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” and Clay’s “roaming around the known” are consistent with a child-centered approach. In fact, "roaming around the known" and "zone of proximal development" seem to be detailed explanations of what a child-centered education involves.

When I began working in Sam’s 11’s class (sixth grade), it was clear to me that the child-centered teaching that I had come to know in the Bank Street lower

school classrooms, while still present in the middle school classroom, had taken on another form. Middle school students are in a different place academically, socially and emotionally than elementary school students, and they face different demands. The curriculum and the activities in the middle school classrooms are still shaped by the developmental needs of the students, and the students there, like in the lower school, play a large role in leading classroom discussions and project planning. But the developmental growth of adolescent students allows for more formal thinking and content focused studies. In addition external demands, such as standardized testing, often influence the content of the classrooms. As a result the need to cover more curricular content, in a deep and detailed manner seems to play a more dominant role in determining classroom structures and interactions in the middle school as opposed to the lower school.

The difference between the middle school and lower school was particularly pronounced in the area of reading. By the time students reach the sixth grade they are expected to have a solid foundation of reading and writing skills. These skills allow them to function more independently in middle school classrooms where more attention is paid to a comprehensive and critical learning of content. The problem for Sam, as for many other students in his 11's class, was that he did not have a strong foundation in reading and writing. He still needed reading and writing instruction and appropriate material on which to practice his developing skills.

Sam's teacher, John, was aware of the reading and writing difficulties in the classroom and responded by providing a variety of supportive measures for the struggling readers and writers. These measures included providing discussion



questions along with reading assignments, supplying visual supports like graphic organizers, and conducting detailed class discussions.

In addition, one of the ways the school itself builds supports into the curriculum, is by bolstering expository reading assignments with a narrative text. All upper school classes use narrative books to supplement their study of social study subjects. The use of narrative often helps students better relate to other people, places and times. The framework of literature, the characters and the immediacy of the stories, make subjects that are outside of the realm of the students' experiences more accessible.

In line with the school's balance between narrative and expository texts, John selected four pieces of literature that his students were to read over the course of the school year. These four books would complement the specific social studies units that would be taught throughout the year, the theme of which was identity and religion. *Shabanu* was the first of these books that students would independently read and discuss as a whole class . This novel coincided with a general study of world religions. It was important to John that the class work together on a single novel at a time because he felt it would allow for a common reference point in the group's literature and social studies discussions. Because *Shabanu* was too difficult for some of the students, John had to offer supports that would enable the struggling readers to participate in the classroom discussions. One of the important supports that John offered was summaries of the assigned *Shabanu* reading. These summaries greatly helped the struggling readers' comprehension of the material, which in turn helped increase their participation in classroom discussions. But as the reading specialist (in

training) in the classroom, I wanted to scaffold the students' learning so that they were able to work with the content of *Shabanu* while still finding ways for them to develop their reading skills. Taking into account the needs of eleven and twelve year olds, and the middle school context, I wanted to find ways of creating a zone of proximal development for the students; I wanted to find ways for them to "roam around the known".

My solution was to find books from a range of reading levels that all dealt with similar themes. This would allow students to read books that were at their instructional reading level and still participate in the curriculum in a meaningful way. Before I present my approach to strengthening a middle school reading and social studies curriculum I will discuss the middle school context in greater detail, focusing specifically on the social, emotional and academic needs of students, particularly those of struggling readers. I will also consider the literacy demands of middle school classrooms and some of the programs designed to help students meet these demands and especially support struggling middle school readers.

### **The Middle School Context**

In the 1960s, middle schools were developed in response to the call for a school environment that would help students, age ten to fourteen, transition "from the self-contained elementary school to the departmentalized high school" (Irvin,2000, p.21). Prior to the 1900s, students in America attended elementary school for eight years, and for those who continued on with their education, four additional years in high school. In 1910, "the first official junior high school opened its doors in

Columbus, Ohio” (Irvin, 2000, p.21). Junior high schools continued to open their doors throughout America with the recognition that students needed a transitional school between elementary and high school where the structures were vastly different. But by the 1960s, the structure of junior high schools had grown to mimic that of high schools. In addition, Irvin cites a 1965 study by Alexander and Williams, which presented scientific evidence that documented the earlier maturation of young people (p.216). This meant that the sixth, seventh and eighth grade students were developmentally less like their elementary counterparts with whom they attended school. Thus, the concept of the middle school began to take hold in America. Its growth arose out of many of the same impetuses that had spurred the development of junior high schools over half a century earlier. The middle school was created to meet the developmental needs of ten to fourteen year olds and to encourage a smooth transition to the independence-oriented high school.

### *Developmental Aspects*

When students enter middle level schools, they are dealing with changes on many levels. Students aged ten through fourteen are experiencing important physical, social, emotional, and cognitive developments. Each student ultimately experiences and responds to these changes differently.

The most dramatic and obvious changes that occur during the middle school years are those associated with the growth spurt that precedes puberty. This growth spurt is marked by an increase in height, weight, heart rate, lung capacity, and muscular strength (Irvin, 2000, p.16). Sexual maturation follows this growth spurt

with different genders and individuals following different maturation patterns. These physical changes have an enormous social and emotional impact on the individuals experiencing them.

During this time period, peers and social relationships become extremely important. Friendships become vital as individuals seek comfort and security in the bonds that they establish with their peers. "Because rejection by peers represents a major crisis, students at this age spend much of their time trying to figure out ways to win acceptance by their peers" (Irvin, 2000, p.18). Comfortable and secure friendships help individuals to develop a strong sense of self and a positive self-esteem. The support provided by strong peer connections and the resulting high self-esteem often produces individuals who tend to be more motivated and higher achieving (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 2000, p. 290).

The social validation that young adolescents receive from positive social interactions greatly contributes to their emotional development and specifically to their development of a positive self-concept. Irvin (2000) defines self-concept as an individual's "description of roles and attributes" (p. 22). She goes on to explain one's "self-esteem is the evaluation of one's self-concept" (p. 22). With the advent of formal thinking, young adolescents begin to acquire the skills necessary for reflection and introspection, which help them to develop a positive self-esteem. Schools can support the growth of an individual's positive self-esteem by creating environments that do not entirely "focus on competition, social comparison and ability self-assessment" (Irvin, 2000, p.23). Supportive schools provide opportunities for students to learn through positive and meaningful interactions with their peers

An outgrowth of positive self-esteem and a strong self-concept is self-efficacy. “The term self-efficacy refers to an individual’s judgement about his/her ability to perform a certain activity and the effect this perception exerts on the conduct of the activity” (Henk & Melnik,1998, p.60). In other words, individuals who have a good sense of self-efficacy see themselves as being empowered and this sense of empowerment supports their academic and social interactions. They have a strong sense of intrinsic motivation and internal locus of control. Young adolescence is a crucial time for developing a sense of competence and confidence, “an attack attitude about challenging tasks, willingness to take risks, and a sense of personal potency” (Ellis,1998, p. 91). Schools support growth in the affective dimension by providing a meaningful curriculum in which students feel safe as well as challenged. Students need to be provided opportunities to receive the “self-esteem building message that their voices count, and they need to experience a sense of belonging to a community; they need to hone their ability to reason and analyze” (Kohn,1994, p. 297).

All of the developments in the social and emotional domains are intrinsically linked to the cognitive developments that young adolescents are simultaneously experiencing. Students in this age group are growing out of Piaget’s concrete operational stage, in which they were able to think logically about real experiences, and into the formal operations stage. Formal operations are characterized by the ability to think reflectively and to reason abstractly (Irvin, 2000, p. 25). This intellectual change occurs gradually and at different times for different individuals. For most people this change in thinking begins around 12 years and is not firmly

established until approximately age 15 (p.25). This new capacity for abstract thinking helps young adolescents “make sense of new social demands, new feelings, and an emerging self-concept” (p. 25). Likewise their experiences in the social and emotional realms often provides a vehicle through which young adolescents can make sense of abstract concepts in the academic arena. Often including the social and personal pieces into the classroom helps students apply their new reasoning and perspective taking skills. Social formats like discussions and debates “help students consider issues that are important...and to resolve conflicting viewpoints as they are forced to reexamine their own views in light of the views of others” (p. 26). The process of social interaction helps students to bridge from the concrete to the abstract, and in turn, enables them to mature both socially and intellectually.

Accompanying these substantial personal and cognitive developments are equally substantial changes in the literacy demands that they experience at school. When students enter the middle school they begin to explore the content areas in a more detailed manner than they did in elementary school. This in depth study typically depends on textbooks as the main source of information. Textbooks and expository reading require different reading skills that many elementary students have not yet acquired. Irvin (2000) sites a 1984 study by Armbruster and Anderson in which they determined that many middle school texts are “...poorly written and inconsiderate. In other words, they are written in such a way that the text is not easily understood or remembered, even by proficient readers” (p. 36). In fact, many texts are written on a level that is higher than the grade that they were intended for. In a 1992 study, conducted by Kinder, Bursuck, and Epstein, they examined ten eighth-

grade social studies books and found that all ten were written at least one year above grade level, with the average readability level being 10.9 (p. 479).

Yet, as the material grows more difficult, the actual amount of reading instruction decreases. Most middle school teachers often do not recognize reading development as being a continuum and simultaneously do not feel qualified to teach it (IRA,1999, p.13). While most secondary teachers acknowledge the importance of reading proficiency, “they are simply not comfortable teaching the strategies students need to read and write successfully, even when these literacy abilities are necessary to learn content” (Irvin, 2000, p. 36). In John Holloway’s article “Improving the Reading Skills of Adolescents,” he discusses a 1991 survey conducted by Arlene Barry in which she discovered a significant reduction in reading services at the middle school level (1999, p.80). Barry’s research found that schools were significantly reducing the number of pullout programs that they provided for low achieving readers. Instead, survey respondents, [administrators], expected educators to teach students reading in their content classes.” (p. 80). Irvin discusses a 1988 survey of middle schools, which found that "an above average, average, or slightly below average reader would have no opportunity for reading instruction in almost one-half of the schools in the United States" (2000, p. 230). Though schools expect is that content area teachers will teach reading skills, according to Barry's research, "many content teachers resist their role as reading teachers, citing a lack of time, skill and support" (Holloway, 1999, p. 80).

The increased literacy demands and the lack of reading instruction in the middle school is of particular consequence to the readers who are not reading on grade level.

The impact of the failure and frustration that struggling readers feel in their literature and content area classes greatly affects their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which in turn further impedes their reading development. When struggling readers receive negative feedback from their reading and learning experiences, they begin to lose their sense that "they are in control of their destinies, and that they are positively influencing others and contributing to their world" (Ellis,1998, p. 96). They feel less valued as classroom contributors and have weakened self-concepts about themselves as readers. These students develop

...the notion of ability as capacity, and begin to think of effort and ability as being inversely related. Therefore, they are capable of understanding that high effort, without success, is a sign of low ability. When students come to believe that ability is a fixed trait, then they become less likely to risk failure on a challenging task (Irvin, 2000, p. 49).

For these students, because reading is a challenging task, they often see themselves as incapable of doing it successfully. This perception of their reading ability influences the "frequency and intensity of their personal engagements with text, the nature of their interactions with the teacher, their effort expenditure when reading both within and outside of school, and their general orientation toward classroom literacy tasks..." (Henk & Melnik,1998, p.65). When students avoid reading they have fewer opportunities to develop their strategic reading abilities; thus they become locked into a cycle of negative feedback between their lack of



achievement and their poor self-esteem. The debilitating academic self-concept and the stifled sense of empowerment that struggling readers often feel, makes it incumbent upon educators to create environments that enable these students to experience real and meaningful success.

### *Reading Programs*

Educators have created a number of programs that are intended to meet the needs of struggling readers. In America, when a student is not functioning on grade level they may be enrolled in a variety of programs depending on the policies of their state and or school. Many of these programs attempt to remediate the student outside of the classroom, such as in an after school or extended day program, a summer school or even a retention program. Each of these programs have varying rates of success and have both positive and negative aspects to them.

After school and extended day programs have recently grown in popularity due in part to their ability to meet the needs of struggling readers as well as their ability to meet the needs of working families. The goal of these programs is to provide students with remedial instruction in a safe and supportive environment. Ideally, these programs have low student teacher ratios and are run by instructors who are well trained in effective practices (Rogalski & Jacoby, 2000, p.22). Both Kentucky and Massachusetts are states with exemplary extended day programs (Brown, 2001, p. 13). In Kentucky, the Extended School Services program, is seen as an extension of the schools' regular classroom program, where the activities are designed to directly support the curricula and the state's program of studies (p. 13).

The Academic Support Services Program offers extended learning time for students in Massachusetts who are not reading on grade level. In addition students may participate in the Individual Tutoring in Reading Program and receive at least 25 hours of instructional help (p. 13). Though these programs have reported great rates of success it must be considered that students are referred to these programs based on standardized test results. In addition, the student's progress is measured by a standardized test such as the Iowa Test for Basic Skills (p.13). Often when programs measure their success according to the results of standardized tests, the instructors are sometimes obliged to teach to the tests. So although struggling readers often need comprehensive reading support, the instruction in the after school and extended day programs may be somewhat limited by their means of assessment.

Similarly students who are not reading on grade level are required to enroll in summer school programs. These programs, like the after school programs, vary both in terms of what they offer and in their success. Like the after school programs, students are recommended to the program and have their progress assessed based on standardized scores alone. Therefore, the instruction in many summer school programs is directed towards raising the students' test scores (Hartke,1999, p.24). Hartke reports that when high stakes tests are used, classroom learning can be reduced to test-coaching seminars, making it difficult for students to acquire a deep understanding of subject matter and the complex thinking skills that required in today's classrooms (p.24). In addition, summer schools have been found to be most effective for students who are six months to a year behind where they need to be (Grant & Richardson,1999, p.8).

Despite this fact, there are many summer programs that provide effective support and that show meaningful results. Brown (2001) reports on the Illinois Summer Bridges Pilot Program, which serves sixth grade students who performed poorly on the state reading assessments (p.12). This program employs a balanced reading approach and uses reading inventories as a means of assessing the students' progress. The program requires a minimum of 90 hours of summer instruction and 25 hours of professional development for teachers (p. 12). Students in this program also benefit from the 10 to 15 student limit on class size.

Though the Summer Bridges Pilot Program does stand out as an effective and well run program, most summer programs are plagued by low attendance and low completion rates. Studies show that that even in districts that require students to attend remedial summer school, a big turnout is 50 percent (Stenvall, 2001, p.18). In addition, one California study showed that only about 20 percent of the students enrolled stayed to the end of the program (p.18). These attendance rates speak loudly to the effectiveness of the current summer school programs.

Lastly, many schools require that students who are not reading on grade level be held back. These students are asked to repeat a year of schooling with the hopes that the additional time and instruction will better enable these students to meet the grade level standards. Often this can be an effective policy for struggling students who were wrongly placed in a grade or who are the youngest in their grades (Grant & Richardson, 1999, p.8).

Many 'late bloomers' are of average intelligence or above, but because they tend to have been placed in the wrong grade and then moved ahead before they were ready, their skills may be weak and they may have fallen far behind. Many of these

students find tremendous benefits...when they receive an additional year of growing and learning time(p. 9).

For the few students for whom retention can be a positive and supportive experience, there are many more for whom retention is really not an appropriate solution. There are students who have already experienced an additional year of schooling and for whom an another additional year might prove traumatic and counter-productive. For these students a second year would make the age difference too extreme "and the fact that the previous additional year did not help to solve the student's problems indicates that other interventions are needed" (Grant & Richardson,1999, p. 9). In fact, most studies indicate that for most students, including those who have never repeated a year, it is more productive to consider and to implement other interventions besides retention. These studies show that in addition to not improving a student's academic achievement, retention actually carries a large negative emotional impact for students and often contributes to behavior difficulties (Hartke, 1999, p.22). Hartke cites a study conducted by the National Research Academy of Sciences, that concludes that although grade retention policies typically have positive intentions they ultimately have negative consequences (p.22). This conclusion is similar to those reached by Owings and Magliaro (1998) whose article "Grade retention: A history of failure" reviews grade retention studies conducted as early as 1930. The early studies, completed in the 1930s and 1940s, show that retention did not support student achievement levels and had no positive effect on educational gain (p.86). Later studies in the 1950s began to show that not only did the retention policies hold no educational value, but that students who were retained had higher drop out rates than those who were not. The association between

retention and high drop out rates has continued to surface in subsequent studies including one done by Dawson in 1991. In this study, Dawson, controls for influencing factors such as prior achievement, gender and race making its findings reliable.

In an interesting 1989 review conducted by Holmes, it was found that not only does retention fail to hold educational value, it does in fact have negative effects on long-term student achievement (p.87). Holmes reviewed 63 controlled studies that compared the progress of retained students with that of lower-achieving promoted students; 54 studies showed negative achievement results for the retained students. Then Holmes conducted a more rigorous survey, in which he reviewed only those studies with the greatest statistical control. The negative achievement effects were again demonstrated (p.87).

In addition to the detrimental effects that retention has on students' emotional and academic lives, the demographics of those students affected must be considered. Hartke reports on a number of studies conducted in the 1990s that show that approximately 40 percent of retained students generally come from the lowest socioeconomic quartile (p.87). Furthermore, these studies found that "retained student tend to be male and African American, with parents who are less educated than the parents of nonretained students" (p.87). Retention's negative effects and its unequal application make it an unfavorable solution for struggling readers.

In addition to solutions like the ones mentioned above, many schools offer struggling readers remedial support that is more integrated into their school day.

These remediation programs include providing a remedial reading course, a developmental reading course, or reading instruction in the content areas.

The remedial reading courses are usually defined as pullout programs for students who are reading below grade level. These courses support reading development through instruction in “skill, vocabulary and comprehension. The primary source of reading material is narrative” (Irvin p.230). Though remedial reading courses offer students attention and support in areas where they may be the weakest, this kind of support is problematic because there is little transference to the reading required by the content area classrooms. “Students who receive isolated skill work and more experience with stories must still face the daily challenge of reading their science and social studies textbooks” (Irvin p.230). Remedial reading courses can be made to be more efficient and productive through the use of material that is reflective of the texts used in classrooms. Students must be taught the narrative and content area reading strategies, such as use of text structure and graphic organizers, which will support meaningful reading development.

Developmental reading programs are designed to be a normal part of a student’s progression through a school’s curriculum. Typically offered in the sixth grade, these courses are required for most or all students, though remedial students particularly benefit from the strategies taught. The developmental reading courses usually focus on “the development of comprehension, vocabulary, flexible reading rates, and study strategies...” (Irvin p. 231). The materials used in these courses include "everything from worksheets to basal textbooks to student-selected literature" (p.231). Despite the fact that these courses are offered to all students and that there is

a greater variety of material used, developmental reading courses like remedial courses are very often disconnected from the reading realities that the student experiences in the classroom.

To combat the ineffectiveness of teaching reading skills in isolation, some teachers have developed ways of presenting content and reading strategies concurrently. These teachers are teaching students to access “content when they read as well as teaching them the strategies they need to better understand the text and become more thoughtful readers” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p.9). Content area reading instruction often teaches students how to question the text, make inferences, monitor comprehension, identify main ideas, and make text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. This method of reading instruction is desirable and effective because it “allows the direct application of reading strategies to content” (Irvin, 2000, p.233).

Content area reading instruction, though it is actually offered in very few middle schools, is relevant and important for all students. It tries to provide the students with the tools they will need to meet the demands that schools and teachers ask of them. These tools not only enable students to complete tasks, but they enable them to do so in analytic and engaged manner. As educators, we need to look beyond the strategies that we can actually teach students, and we need to consider how our classroom environments and the materials that we use help or impede students reading development.

George and Stix (2000) present a comprehensive reading program that addresses the needs of middle school readers in their article, “Using Multilevel

Young Adult Literature in Middle School American Studies.” The authors present a seventh grade language arts and social studies classroom at the Wagner Middle School in New York City. The reading program is centered on the use of multileveled text sets that are connected to a social studies theme. In the case of the classroom presented in this article, the social studies theme was the Great Depression. The teacher created a text set using I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Angelou (1983), A Girl from Yamhill by Cleary (1988), Grandpa’s Mountain by Reeder (1991), Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Taylor (1976), and End of the Dark Road by Thrasher (1982). These books are written on a fifth to eighth grade reading level making it possible for all students to read the material at an instructional level while simultaneously allowing them to fully participate in the curriculum. By controlling the difficulty of the material, the teacher was able to create an environment such that student’s could roam around Clay’s known. In this space, students could practice reading with fluency and accuracy. The comfort level allowed them the room to practice necessary reading skills such as strategic reading and critical thinking. Allington (2001) reports on Swanson and Hoskyn 1998 analysis of 180 intervention studies. The studies looked at the success rates of various interventions when working with learning disabled students. Their analysis concluded that only three factors significantly contribute to student achievement; control of task difficulty was one of the factors (p.46).

The instructional level reading that the text sets provided the students not only gave them a platform on which they could develop their reading skills, it also enabled them to feel successful. These seventh graders are at a time when they were



beginning to explore their self-concepts and to develop their self-esteem and self-efficacy. At the Wagner Middle School they were provided the opportunity to conceive of themselves as successful readers and classroom contributors.

In addition to the emotional impact that successful reading has, Allington cites many researchers whose work establishes a link between student success and their level of engagement. This research, beginning in the 1970s, consistently shows that students who were given “tasks where success was low were far more likely to cease work in the task and engage in nonacademic behaviors than were students working at high success rates” (p.45). Berliner’s 1981 study found “that success rates had a substantial impact on student learning. They produced strong, consistent evidence that tasks completed with high rates of success were linked to greater learning and improved student attitudes about the subject matter being learned” (p.44). Allington points out that even before all of these studies were done, Betts, in 1946 focused specifically on reading and the positive impact that success rates had on student learning. Wagner Middle School’s multilevel text sets foster student achievement because they are at student’s instructional reading level allowing them to practice their reading skills and to think critically about the content. In addition, they enable the student to feel successful about their abilities thereby increasing the likelihood that the students will develop a strong sense of self-efficacy and continue to return to the task of reading, engaging in a cycle of success.

Middle school is a time when students explore their independence and are often motivated by their ability make their own decisions. In the Wagner Middle School, the teachers selected the five books that made up the text set, but the students

were then able to choose which of the books was best for them. Atwell (1998) believes that allowing readers to “select their own books has a major impact on students’ fluency, reading rate, and comprehension” (p. 37). By selecting their own reading material, “students feel a sense of ownership in the curriculum and are likely to take responsibility for completing the reading” (George & Stix, 2000, p. 27). In the Wagner Middle School program students were given time to look through the books and were asked to choose their book based their reading level and the book’s interest to them. Teachers found that students were able to choose a book that they were capable of reading. The resulting reading groups that were formed around the books were heterogeneous, but those students who needed the easier reading were reading books at their level.

In the heterogeneous groups students read independently and engaged in discussions about their books. Teachers found that the cooperative learning that results from the literature groups produced greater understanding of the content and also provided an opportunity for students to nurture and develop social and communicative skills (George & Stix, 2000, p.28). Peers play a central role in the middle school student’s life. Literature circles recognize the social nature of adolescents and employ it to develop deep and dynamic book discussions.

In addition to the beneficial social nature of literature circles, students also benefit from the small size of the groups. Daniels (1994) states that “Small groups can be efficient, energizing, sometimes almost magical structures for learning. Why are they so powerful? The limited size invites every individual to be an active participant in sharing ideas and constructing interpretations” (p.10). Rather than

asking a student to share his or her ideas with a group of 25 to 30 students, the students are discussing in groups of five or six. So students who sometimes feel hesitant to contribute or who are overlooked by the teacher have a more secure and accessible space to participate in.

Literature circles also appeal to adolescent students because many of the discussions are student led. In the same way that self-selected texts motivate students, the sense of ownership and independence that comes with student led discussions inspire students to participate in thoughtful and meaningful ways. The text sets enable the literature circles to have a small enough number of participants so that each student can feel that they are a valuable contributing member of the group.

Of further benefit is the fact that the text sets are united by a theme that is connected to the social studies units that the students are studying. The literature serves as scaffolding for the social studies concepts. Topics in history and social studies are often abstract and detached from the students' lives. Literature, its narrative and characters, often make these concepts accessible and meaningful for students. In the article, "Use of Narrative to Teach Middle School Students about Reconstruction," Olwell (1999) explains that reading about the lives of individuals caught in a historical struggle sparks students' interest increases. The features of narrative texts allow students to imagine what they might have done in that situation (p.205). Not only do narratives bring historical topics to life, but they put history into a framework of a well written story rather than via fragmented facts. A narrative's ability to emphasize the humanness of historical events helps students to connect with history. In effect, what they are doing when they read historical fiction is relating to

people much like themselves but in another place and time (Fuhler, 1991, p.234).

The connections and the framework that narratives provide are crucial for social studies students, particularly when it is taken into account that many of the expository texts that they will read are written above their reading level.

Text sets further support critical thinking and content comprehension because of the multiple perspectives that they offer. Cognitively, perspective taking is something that middle school students are beginning to develop; yet, it is something that is necessary to an understanding and analysis of history. Graves (1997) argues that "history offers insights from the past, views of diverse peoples in diverse times and settings, and multiple perspectives on complex issues and events" (p. 134). When using text sets, different groups within one class read different books that relate to the same subject. These books can be selected to represent different points of view from the same period. Text sets then scaffold students, allowing them to be reflective and sensitive to various consequential points of view.

The reading program at the Wagner Middle School in New York is comprehensive and child-centered. It is developmentally responsive to the needs of the seventh grade students. It is designed to meet the students' reading needs while still being meaningfully connected to the content area curriculum. It is also comprehensive in that it not only gives importance to the teacher's educational approach, but attention is also given to the appropriateness of the reading material. Lastly, this program meets the students' needs in a way that is consistent with their social, emotional and academic selves.

## **Applications: Multilevel Text Sets in a Bank Street 11's Classroom**

### *Planning*

After working with Sam for a few months, I wanted to find a way for him to become more involved in his classroom discussions. I wanted to stop working on catching him up on the content of his classroom and start working on his reading skills. When confronted with these issues in an elementary school classroom, I would begin by finding reading material for the student that was on his or her instructional reading level. I wanted to do the same for Sam in a middle school context. While this idea was brewing in my mind I came across George and Stix's (2000) article in which the use of multilevel text sets in a New York City public school is described. I approached John, Sam's teacher, with the idea and he was open to and excited about it from the start. Sam's limited participation was something John was concerned about in addition to the concerns he had for other students who were struggling with sixth grade material. I first began by meeting with John to discuss the unit. John introduced me to Naomi Shihab Nye's book Habibi, which would be the literature that the students would read to support their social studies work. In social studies they would be studying Jerusalem. The class would be looking at Jerusalem as a place of intersection for three of the world's major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This exploration would be further connected to the yearlong theme of religion and identity.

Habibi takes place in the 1990s and is about a fourteen year old girl, Liyana from St. Louis. She lives there with her father, who is Palestinian, her American

mother and her younger brother. Just before Liyana enters high school, her parents tell her that the family, in order to better know their Palestinian and Muslim roots, will be moving to Jerusalem, Israel. Over the course of the book we see Liyana acquaint herself with a new country. In Israel she confronts different identity issues relating to her connection to America and Islam. She also questions what it means to have a home and a homeland. Nye utilizes a nonlinear structure to convey Liyana's story. Her writing is lyrical and she uses figurative language to paint visceral pictures for the reader.

The content of Habibi was relevant and developmentally appropriate for eleven and twelve year olds. The structure of the story, the figurative language and the vocabulary make the book a seventh grade reading level and certainly appropriate for higher levels as well. Though, I loved the book and I knew it was material that Sam would be interested in, I also knew that it would not be something that he would be able to read independently. As a result, I began my search for books with the hopes of creating a text set. I used Habibi as the model for my search. My goal was to find books that would complement Habibi's themes of identity and homeland and have the same high quality writing. The books also needed to support the Jerusalem curriculum and most importantly, they needed to be written for a range of reading levels, the lowest being a fifth grade level.

I quickly found a number of books that dealt with the topic, and almost as quickly I began to find that most of them did not equal Habibi's quality. Many of them were almost propaganda for either side, others were simply poorly written, or set in a much earlier time period and most often the books I found were too hard.

Luckily, just as my list of Jerusalem books was petering away, a friend of mine who works at a children's bookstore showed me Boudalika's (1998) If You Could Be My Friend. If You Could Be My Friend is a collection of letters written by Galit, an Israeli teenager living in Jerusalem's Old City, and Mervet, a Palestinian teenager living in a refugee camp 15 minutes outside of Jerusalem. The book is edited by a Greek documentary film maker, who meets the girls after traveling to Israel to make a documentary on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The two girls begin writing each other when they are fourteen and continue until they are seventeen when they finally meet each other. Over the course of the book the reader sees a friendship develop built on the hopes of peace. Both girls struggle with ideas of power, second class citizenship, individual versus community and homeland. Most of all the girls try to grapple the with tension of understanding their friend's point of view while remaining loyal to their family and country's opposing point of view. From this dichotomy they try to make sense of their worlds and establish their own hopes and beliefs. Sadly, by the end of the book the reader sees the friendship begin to fall apart. As Galit faces her future in the army, she finds it more difficult to separate the Islamic extremists' terrorist attacks from her Muslim friend's hopes. She hold's Mervet responsible for the violent actions and tells her the she no longer thinks that they can be friends. Despite this distancing, when Boudalika offers to arrange a meeting at the close of the book, both girls jump at the chance.

Galit and Mervet's letters are written at a fourth or fifth grade level. Though their writing is filled with emotion and complexity, their sentences and vocabulary are often simple. In addition, the text structure is memoir like in that it is a first

person exchange of letters. Before each letter, Boudalika provides some context by writing a summary of the news events that happened at that time. Her summaries, like a newspaper article, have a more complex vocabulary, but are still manageable at a fifth grade level. Because this book dealt with similar issues as Habibi, was of equal quality, and was an appropriate reading level, I decided to show it to John as a recommendation.

Habibi and If You Could Be My Friend became the text set for John's class. The two books were great as a pair, but we were hoping to have a larger selection. We were worried about the dynamic of having the class divided between two books, particularly with Jerusalem being such a complex and political issue. At the same time neither of us was willing to introduce a book of lesser quality for the sake of providing greater choice. If this were a unit that John or I were going to do in the coming years I would continue to keep an eye out for books that might broaden the class' experience.

After rereading both books I decided that the students would need more background prior to their reading of the books. Both books deal with the complex issue of the conflict in Jerusalem. In the class there was a range of awareness. Some students who were Jewish and were somewhat aware of the conflict, while others had family in Israel and were very aware of the conflict and its consequences. There were also students who did not know that a conflict existed at all. In addition, even the Jewish students who had an awareness seemed to me to have a one sided understanding of what was going on in Israel. In casual conversations that I had with these students they were only able to take the Jewish perspective.



In an effort to balance the classroom discussions, I decided it would be necessary to provide all students with some relevant knowledge. Through the Global Action Network, an organization that works with teenagers to produce documentary films about their lives, I found the documentary "Seeds of Peace"(1998). This film was made by six Israeli and Palestinian teenagers who attended the Seeds of Peace camp in Maine. After attending this camp, which was established to encourage a dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian youth, each teenager was given a video camera to document their life over the course of the coming year. The players in this film document their individual experiences and their attempts to connect with and to understand their Israeli or Palestinian counterparts. It is a moving documentary that provides an honest look at how the conflict is experienced by these youth. It clearly shows the weight that the conflict bears on these teenagers' lives. It portrays how difficult and scary it is to reach out to people on opposing sides. Because of its comprehensiveness and because it was self-made, I thought it would be a great way to start of the unit. It would excite and motivate the students as well as provide them with some background knowledge regarding the different points of view involved in the conflict. Lastly, I felt it would be helpful for students to have an image of Jerusalem as they read.

In addition to the movie, I wanted to students to have a sense of history regarding the Israeli and Palestinian conflict as well as some knowledge of the facts. In order to accomplish this I decided to arrange for the class to make a group timeline. I found web sites that had outlines of various detail on the history of Israel spanning the time of 3000 BC to the present. I decided I would have the class partner

up and then I would assign each partner a period of time to research using the various timelines. Each partner would receive a packet of articles and timelines covering their particular period. In addition they would need to go online to research their period using an online and interactive timeline. After students researched their time period, they would need to select at least two important events and write a summary as well as a headline for them. Finally the class would compile their time periods to make a complete timeline. My intention was to provide all students with the necessary background knowledge for the two books. Both books could be read without this knowledge, but because the books were selected in order to bring immediacy and meaning to a social studies unit on Jerusalem, I thought it was necessary for students to have factual background knowledge.

When planning how the students would actually work with Habibi and If You Could Be My Friend, I decided to adapt the literature circles that George and Stix (2000) mention in their article. Traditionally literature circles, as Daniels (1994) describes them are “a sophisticated fusion of collaborative learning with independent reading, in the framework of reader response theory” (p.17). Daniels goes on to list twelve defining characteristics of literature circles. The characteristics of literature circles include small, flexible groups that gather regularly to discuss a shared, self-selected book. The meetings aim to be conversational, in which students select the topics to be discussed and teachers act as facilitators in the discussion. Teachers evaluate the students through observations and through students’ self-evaluations (p.18).

In my adaptation, students would select their books from the two that John and I had selected. I would preview the books with the students. This would include me introducing them to the books; I would provide a summary of them, tell some of my reactions to the books and read a selection from each books. In addition, I planned to pass the books around and provide time for the students to flip through them to get a further sense of the language and the story. To help them decide on the book that they wanted to read, I would ask students to think about whether they wanted to read a fiction book or a memoir type story. They should also consider the language of the book and the book's level of difficulty. To select a book, students would write their choice on a cue card along with a couple of sentences stating why they chose the book. I decided I would ask students to explain their decision to reduce the influence of peer pressure. I also decided before hand that if any of the real struggling readers chose to read Habibi, then either John or I would talk to them privately and recommend that they read If You Could Be My Friend.

The class of twenty students would then be divided into literature circles according to their book choice. I would write up a series of comprehension question that the students would answer for homework and then use as a guide in their literature circle discussions. I decided to do this for two reasons. First, some students are more likely and better able to participate in a literature discussion if they have had time to think about the text and to formulate their answers. For these students, I wanted to provide this opportunity through the homework. Secondly, John felt more comfortable assessing individual students if he had a written representation of their work.

I decided to make the homework as open ended as possible. The homework would include two parts. The first part consisted of the comprehension questions. I included both open ended and more structured questions. I usually provided anywhere from six to ten questions, of which I asked the students to complete five. I created questions that asked the students to think about the text on a variety of levels. I asked them to organize factual information. I asked them to make connections between the story and their own lives and between the story and other books that they had read. Often I would ask them to visualize the reading. To do this I might ask them to create a detailed map of a character's journey or to illustrate a particular scene. In addition, I asked the students to do some sort of creative response. In order to complete the creative response students would need to select a part of the text to respond to. Students could choose a passage or a sentence. Their choice could be based on the fact that they liked the way the text sounded or because they were interested in the meaning it conveyed. Their response to the text could be in any form that they chose; it could be an illustration, a poem, or a creative writing piece. I also wanted to leave room for the students to create their own questions. This would be closer to what Daniels (1994) describes as being a key part of literature circles, self-directed comprehension work. I decided that I would use the questions that I wrote to begin the unit and then as I became more comfortable with the students I would ask them to write some of their own questions. The reading response questions for both Habibi and If you Could Be My Friend are included in the appendix.

In an effort to closely link the reading with the social studies work, I also planned additional assignments. These assignments would ask the students to further

research a factual aspect of a book. For example in Habibi, Liyana, the main character, visits some of the major religious sights in Jerusalem with her family. The assignment would be for students to each take one of the sights and to research its history and to make a post card for it with its factual information attached. In If You Could Be My Friend, Galit writes Mervet about a peace treaty that is signed. As an assignment I would ask the members of the group to research the peace treaty. In addition, I planned to provide them with articles from Palestinian, Israeli and American newspapers, all of which covered the signing of this peace treaty. After reading the different articles, the students could discuss the different perspectives.

In the actual literacy circles I planned to use five of the roles that Daniels (1994) describes (p. A1-A6). The first role I selected was that of Discussion Director. The Director would be responsible for generating the discussion questions and leading the discussion. This role is important in that it asks students to take charge of the reading. In order to successfully play this role they need to identify the important information in the story and formulate thought provoking questions. In addition, I chose the roles of Literary Luminary, who would locate interesting and important passages and the role of the Connector, who would find connections between the reading and the outside world. These two roles ask the students to examine the text closely, to select and interpret passages and to make connections between their selection and their own experiences. Next, I decided to include the roles of Summarizer. This person would prepare a brief summary of the reading. Lastly the role of Vocabulary Enricher would lookout for especially important or difficult words (p. A1-A6). As vocabulary development and summarizing are important reading

skills in the middle school context, I felt that these last two roles would be particularly relevant.

So that the entire the class could benefit from the different perspectives offered by the books, I also designed activities that the whole class would work on. Daniels (1994) refers to this type of activity as jigsawing (p. 76). George and Stix (2000) also refer to jigsawing in their description of the Wagner Middle School program (p.28). When the class jigsaws, representatives from each book meet together to discuss a specific theme. For example, one of themes I planned for a jigsaw activity dealt with the idea of being an outsider. It was something that both books had discussed in the reading assignment and that students had touched on in their homework assignment. For the jigsaw activity, I would ask students to first meet in their own literacy circles to discuss the idea of being an outsider. They would be asked to talk about what it means to be an outsider, who in their book is the outsider and why. Then students would jigsaw; they would meet with representatives of the other book and share their examples of outsiders. From there, they would come up with a list of defining characteristics. Lastly, we would regroup as a whole class and discuss the definitions and how they apply to the Israel context as well as to our own experiences. I have included some example of the jigsaw work that the class did in the appendix.

To conclude the unit, I thought that I would ask the literature groups to develop a cumulative project. I gathered some possibilities such as having the groups create a bulletin board collage that displayed and discussed the major issues in the book. I also tried to arrange for Israeli and Palestinian pen pals as well as a

correspondence with the authors of the two books. Ultimately, I decided to leave the cumulative project open for discussion, though I would present the above projects as possible options.

### *Implementation*

Following what I had planned, John and I showed the class the documentary “Seeds of Peace” (1998). John began by explaining that they were starting a new unit in which they were going to study Jerusalem. With that brief introduction, the class gathered around the television and they were riveted. Based on the students’ comments following the film, I could see that watching it had been like watching a reality TV show, only it took place in Israel and it dealt with highly emotional and political issues. The movie was effective in bringing the conflict’s issues to life. They had pictures of the disputed land and of how each side lived. They had faces, which did not look very different from their or their friends’ faces, to associate with the issues. I know that the movie had a powerful effect because students from both groups referred back to the movie through out the class discussions. Students would specifically say that as they read, they imagined Sivan or Bushra, two documentary characters, in the situation. The movie became the reference point for the class. It was something that the whole class shared and it was concrete link to their feelings and ideas.

After the movie the students were motivated for the timeline. When we asked the students what they wanted to find out from a timeline, most said that they wanted to know who was on the Jerusalem land first. Others wanted to know who had been

on the land the longest and still others wanted to know how the Palestinians became refugees. Students were also motivated by the collaborative nature of the project and the fact that they would be working on something that was of such a large scale (the timeline would hang at the front of the room). Students commented that they enjoyed the brevity of the reading. The research was based on other timelines, so they appreciated that their reading was no longer than a paragraph at a time.

During the research period, John and I taught some expository reading and writing skills. We had lessons on note taking and summarizing and provided graphic organizers for the students to reinforce the lessons. Note taking and summarizing were skills that we returned to throughout the unit.

The timeline provided a brief illustration of Israel's history. It gave the students more factual information to build their ideas on. In addition, it helped to organize the complexity of the conflict. Students had a sense from the film and from their own knowledge that there were a lot of factors and players involved in this conflict. The timeline provided a cohesive picture of the events that have led us to the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The students were at first excited to learn that there was information on who had settled the land first, the Jews. For many in the class this meant that the Jews deserved the land. This assessment held true until one student pointed out that Native Americans settled New York first. This student asked how others would respond if they were told to leave their home and the city because the Native American wanted to return to their homeland. For some students this brought the complexity back to the situation, while other were happily willing to abandon their homes, or at least some New York land.



When it came time for students to select their books I was anxious to see what the groups would look like. A friend of mine, who teaches the third grade at a school similar to Bank Street, assured me that when she used literature circles with her eight year olds they did a great job selecting appropriately leveled books. The eleven year olds in John's class did equally well. At Bank Street selecting instructional material is something that students are taught to do over the years. All of the students who read at a lower reading level selected If You Could Be My Friend. Some of the strongest readers also selected this book stating that they liked first person or true stories. Many of the students who chose Habibi did so because they said they like books with a lot of description. In the end two heterogeneous groups of ten and nine students were formed. All of the students were able to work on the book that they selected. Interestingly, the literature circle that read If You Could Be My Friend had six boys and four girls, while the Habibi circle had only three boys and six girls. In the If You Could Be My Friend group, three of the six boys were weak readers and two of the four girls were weak readers. The rest of the readers either read on grade level or were very strong readers. In the Habibi group two of the girls and one of the boys were grade level readers and among the youngest in the class. I am still not sure why so many of the boys choose to read If You Could Be My Friend. I do not know if it was something about the format of the book that appealed to them; though some of the boys commented that they like it because it was shorter while others said that the immediacy of the letters appealed to them.

After the book groups were formed, the class, John and I agreed to a compromise on the homework. The Habibi group wanted a shorter writing

assignment since their reading assignment was longer. We all agreed that the Habibi group would choose three questions to answer, while the If You Could Be My Friend group agreed to choose five questions to answer, since they had less reading to do.

The written responses to the reading were well thought out and thorough, particularly for the struggling readers. There was a significant difference between the quality of their responses for this book as compared to their responses for previous books. Sam, who in the past wrote short paragraph responses to the comprehension questions, was now writing three page, typed responses. His were some of the best thought out in the group. Another student told me that for all of the previous work she has had to read the book and answer the comprehension questions with her tutor or her mom. She proudly told me that she was doing all of the work for this book on her own. Again, her answers showed a clear understanding of the text, and she made a good attempt to grapple with the complex issues that the book raises.

After a few sessions, I began to limit the number of questions that I provided and I asked the students to choose three questions to answer and to make up and answer two of their own questions. As a group we discussed the different kinds of questions that they might ask. We discussed meaningful and thought provoking questions versus one word answer questions. This was a conversation that they had had before and they were all clearly up for the task of devising their own questions. They came up with thoughtful questions that often asked that the person make connections between themselves, the world and the text.

I began the literature circles by using Daniel's (1994) roles. Students selected their own roles and I provided them with graphic organizers to help them carry out

their responsibilities. I provided them five or so minutes before the start of our discussion to fill out the organizers and to prepare their thoughts. We used these roles for one session. The students were very cooperative, but most of them did not want to do the different roles. These students were very experienced in generating questions and in participating in small group discussions; as such the roles seemed somewhat redundant. I decided to keep two of the most popular roles, the Discussion Director and the Literary Illuminator. Before the discussions began I again gave the students five minutes to organize their thoughts and to prepare for the discussion. The students could choose how they wanted to participate. They could do the work of the Discussion Director and choose questions to bring up with the group, or they could be the Literary Illuminator and select passages to share and discuss with the group. This was a good compromise as it allowed all students participate equally and meaningfully. I think students' participation was also supported by the fact that they could base their questions and ideas on their homework. It helped that they had a written response that they could refer to.

We had 45 minutes for literature circles, so after the five minute preparation period, we would begin our discussion. We would go around the circle and each student would raise an issue to be discussed. Then the student would guide the discussion. He or she would call on responders and give them feedback to their responses. I would also participate in the discussion, sometimes restating what students said, sometimes summarizing the collective ideas and sometimes raising further questions. After the group heard from three or so people, we moved onto the next questioner. After about 25 minutes I would wrap up the discussion and move

onto the students' creative responses. Students could decide if they wanted to share their responses. Most often the students chose to respond by writing a piece of poetry or by doing an illustration. In one of the beginning sessions a student shared a very powerful Haiku poem that came in response to Galit and Mervet's friendship. From then on, the most common creative response was Haiku poems. The frequency of them in no way compromised their impact. The students managed to manipulate the language to convey poignant thoughts regarding the conflict.

Overall I was very happy with how the literature circles went. I was delighted with the struggling readers' degree of participation. These were students, who with previous books, sat silently through discussions, whereas for these discussions they were banging on the table demanding to be called on. Three of the four struggling readers in the If You Could Be My Friend group were some of the strongest participants. They really thought through the questions and responded with answers that showed their complex thinking. In addition to the literacy circles the whole class regularly met for the jigsaw groups. These meetings provided a sense of class cohesion. Students liked sharing information about their books and were curious to find out what was happening in the other book.

The jigsaw groups also allowed the teachers to answer a question that is often brought up with text sets. Will the curriculum be as rigorous for the students who are reading the easier book? During the jigsaw groups, John and I could see that the groups were involved in equally thought provoking work. For example, when the groups gathered to look at the theme of outsiders in their books, representatives from both books had to explore and synthesize complex ideas of power, dominance, desire

and self-identity. The easier read, If You Could Be My Friend, had characters whose outsider status was equally nuanced. Students at first looked at the situation literally and assessed that both Mervet and Galit were equally outsiders as both lived outside of the other's world. Then a student pointed out that Galit, the Israeli, does not want access to Mervet's Palestinian world whereas Mervet does want access to Galit's world. This started a debate regarding power and the exact details of what Mervet really wants. The student tried to clarify whether or not Mervet really wants entrance into Galit's world or if in fact she simply wants the land that Galit is sitting on. The debate continued on and was left open with some compromises and agreements made. When the If You Could Be My Friend people met with the Habibi people, they brought with them their questions of power and desire. Many in the joint groups decided that only the individual themselves could determine if they were the outsider. Ultimately, the jigsawed groups generated a sophisticated definition of an outsider; "A person who doesn't belong. A person who does not have power in a group." They qualified these definitions by saying that their perspective plays a role in determining who is and who is not an outsider. They concluded that it is up to the individual to determine if they are or are not an outsider. Their definition was well supported with details from their books.

### *Reflection*

We have not finished the unit yet, but I have begun to think about what I would do differently to improve the unit if I were to do it again. I believe the main thing that I would like to do is to try and connect the text sets more closely with the

social studies unit. The social studies work that the class ended up doing dealt with the history of the three major religions that have their roots in Jerusalem. They looked at the origins of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Habibi and If You Could Be My Friend raise so many social studies related issues such as conflict resolution, the connection between religious beliefs and everyday political actions, the connections between religion and land, different causal relationships and the importance of perspective taking in diverse communities. These were all issues that the students discussed in their literature groups, but it would have been more helpful for them to have had the chance to examine them beyond their discussions using expository reading and writing.

In addition, I would have liked to have spent more time working with the Habibi group. Throughout the unit, John worked with the Habibi group while I worked with the If You Could Be My Friend group. I think it would have been more interesting for both of us to have spent time in the other groups. It would have allowed us a better sense of how the whole class was experiencing text sets.

## **Conclusion**

Multilevel text sets made a significant difference in the lives of the struggling readers and in the classroom dynamic. Having all of the students read material that was on their instructional level allowed them greater access to the content of the classroom. The struggling readers were not limited by material that they could not make sense of. They were full participants in the classroom; they had the opportunity to be like valued and successful members of the class. This positive

reading experience fueled their motivation. The students turned in work that was carefully and thoughtfully written. Though the struggling readers have difficulty reading sophisticated language, they were all able to show that with the appropriate material, they were each quite capable of sophisticated thought. These were once students that teachers felt were concrete thinkers. Sam, 10's teacher commented, that he had difficulty making connections with narrative texts. His 11's teacher, John, has said that he felt Sam has trouble inferring information from literature. Both teachers felt that he was not able to go below the surface of material and really engage it. The work that Sam completed in this unit proved all of this wrong. He is a deep thinker who has the right to see himself as such. He has the right to be given the opportunity to practice critical thinking and to practice expressing and manipulating his ideas. In the appendix, I have included Sam's reading response answers to the first book, Shabanu, which he read with his class. This book contained difficult language and it had a complicated structure. Sam's responses for this book are short and often inaccurate. His answers for Shabanu greatly contrast with his answers for If You Could be My Friend, which were thoughtful and extensive.

Sam also deserves the chance to improve his reading by practicing on material that is appropriate to his reading level. It should not be assumed that because a text's language is easier to decode, it is also conceptually simpler. The struggling readers who read If You Could Be My Friend were held to the same high standards that the Habibi readers were, and were required to produce grade level or higher work. The difference is that they were asked to do so with appropriate material. For low achieving readers, reading appropriate material in heterogeneous groups means that

they can develop their reading skills, practice fluency, nurture a positive self-concept and practice critical thinking. They are given the chance to step into and wear the shoes of a successful learner.

Multilevel text sets provided developmentally appropriate supports for all of the students in John's 11's grade classroom. Students were motivated by their ability to choose their own book and to lead the discussion groups. The students appreciated the intimate atmosphere of the small groups and valued the additional attention that the teachers could give them. Most importantly, multilevel text sets allow students to read instructional level material while still participating in the classroom curriculum. Because the text sets provide instructional level reading, students have the opportunity to practice and develop their reading skills. The success of this reading program speaks to the importance of understanding the reading process as one that is continually developing. The process of learning to read can be placed on a continuum such that learning and instruction will not have a fixed end point. Ultimately, the use of multilevel text sets was effective because it acknowledged the continuum that middle school students are on both in terms of their social, cognitive and emotional growth as well as in their development as readers.



# Appendix

## A. Comprehension Questions

The following are the comprehension questions that I designed for Boudalika's If You Could Be My Friend and Nye's Habibi. The students were given three to four days to complete their reading assignment and to answer these questions. These assignments would be used as guides during our discussions. Students would lead the discussion based on any of the homework questions or book topics that they wished to discuss. In addition, students would decide if they wanted to share with the group their creative response.

# If You Could Be My Friend

## Assignment 1

### Page 4-13

1. \*Choose **5** Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

## QUESTIONS

### The Introduction

1. Using the introduction to the letters, write a description of Galit and Mervet
  - Make a detailed description including their age, where they come from, their religions, and any information you may know about their families.
2. What points of view do you think these girls are bringing to their letter writing friendship.
3. Why do you think Litsa, the editor of this book, wants to introduce these two girls.
  - What does she hope to achieve and what might some possible outcomes of this letter exchange be.
  - What might Mervet and Galit learn about each other; what arguments might they have?

## The Letters

4. Galit is Jewish, but on page 10 she describes her house an Arab house. How might her home be an Arab home or why might she have called it an Arab home?
5. On pages 10 and 11, what is the feel of Mervet's and Galit's first letters to each other.
  - How do they feel writing to each other?
  - What are they willing to share about themselves? In other words, what facts, or important parts of themselves do they communicate to each other? Use their letters to support your ideas.
6. How would Mervet's and Galit's friends and classmates react to their letter exchange?
  - How would the peer pressure affect you if you were involved in such a correspondence?
  - Would you being willing to remain open and reach out to this new friend?
7. What curiosities do you see them having about each other?
  - What misconceptions or misinformation do they seem to have about each other?

**If You Could Be My Friend**

**Assignment 2**

**Page 14-24**

1. **\*Choose 5 Questions to Answer\***

and

2. **Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**QUESTIONS:**

1. How has the intafadah changed Mervet's life?
  - What sort of things did she do before with her family and what is her life like now?
2. On page 15, Mervet writes, "When dad comes home late-you never know." What does she mean by this and why does she write this?
3. Also on page 15, who are the soldiers that Mervet's older sister Mannal is afraid of?
4. On page 17, Mervet asks Galit if her school is closed as well.
  - Is Galit's school closed?
  - Why would it be closed?
  - Do you think an Israeli or Palestinian school would be more likely to be closed? Why
  - What does Mervet's question you about how much they know of each other's lives?
5. Galit writes that she will be excited for elementary school to end and high school to begin. She points out that she will be happy that she will notice have to practice the school drill for bombs.

- Who might the bombs be from?
  - How would you feel if this were something that you practiced in school?
  - Would you be willing to start a friendship through letters with someone whose countrymen were threatening to attack your school, or bus, or home?
6. On page 20, Galit writes to Mervet, “Tell other Arabs not to throw stones at Israeli cars or at our soldiers. Then maybe the soldiers will change their minds.”
- How do you feel about Galit writing this to Mervet?
  - Do you think she is right?
7. On page 22, what is Mervet’s response to Galit’s suggestion about the stone throwing and the soldiers?
- How does she view the Israelis?
  - How do you think Galit views the Arabs?
- Use evidence from their letters to support your thoughts.

**If You Could Be My Friend**

**Assignment 3**

**Page 24-37**

**1. \*Choose 5 Questions to Answer\***

**and**

- 2. Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. Use what you have read on page 25 to describe how Galit views the Arabs. Use evidence from the book to support your thoughts.
2. On pages 25 and 26, Galit tells Mervet about her grandmother. Why do you think she is sharing this information with Mervet?

On pages 27 and 28, Mervet responds and tells Galit about her grandmother's life.

- What is she communicating with this story?
  - How do the two grandmother stories compare?
  - What are the similarities and the differences?
3. Do you think Galit and Mervet have a good understanding of each other's lives?
    - Where in their letters do you see signs that their letter writing is giving them a better idea of how the other person lives?
    - Do you think this better understanding will cause either Galit or Mervet to change their feelings about the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

4. How does Mervet feel about Israelis?
  - What kind of distinction or separation has she made regarding Israeli people and Israeli soldiers?
  - Is Mervet right to make this separation? In other words do you think that Galit different then the soldiers?
    - Can you separate civilian people, or non-army people, from their country's army?
  - How connected do you see yourself to the actions of your countries army?
  
5. Compare Mervet's life in a refuge camp to Galit's life in Jerusalem. Use specifics from their letters. Talk about how violence, the infatadah, and the soldiers affect their lives.
  
6. How do you think Galit will respond to Mervet's final letter (pages 33-37)?
  - What if one of Galit's cousins is a soldier in Mervet's camp?
  - How would you react if you were Mervet?



**If You Could Be My Friend**

**Assignment 4**

**Page 38-42**

**Creative Response: Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. Were you aware of how close Mervet and Galit lived to each other and yet how different their lives are?
  - Do you think it is possible that such different lives could exist between two kids living 15 minutes apart in New York City?
2. On page 39, what does Galit mean when she says that she and Mervet are insignificant?
3. Also on page 39, Galit describes how she, like Mervet, feels the effects of the conflict.
  - Describe the different ways, at least three, that the conflict effects Galit's life. How is she, like Mervet, not free?
4. Refer to page 40, and describe what happened to Galit's family's relationship with an Arab family.
  - Compare the stone throwing that she describes to Mervet's experiences with soldiers attacking villages.

## If You Could Be My Friend

### Assignment 5

Page 43-54

#### 1. \*Answer 5 Questions \*

and

#### 2. CREATIVE RESPONSE

Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

1. How does Mervet's patriotic song compare to Galit's?
  - Read these songs like poems; try to decipher or figure out their meaning.
  - Ask yourself and write down what each song is communicating.
  - What ideas are these songs trying to get people to believe?
2. What does the curfew mean? How does it affect Mervet's life? Who enforces it?
3. On page 47 and 48 Mervet describes her hope for the future.
  - What are her hopes?
  - How are they different from Galit's dreams?
  - What do Mervet's plans for the future tell you about how she sees her homeland in the future?
4. Why do you think Galit writes to Mervet about the book with the invisible sheep herder?
  - Do you think a meeting will ever be possible between Galit and Mervet?
  - What do you think would happen if they were to meet?
  - Would their conversation be any different than it is in the letters?
  - Would they feel any different about each other?

5. Use Galit's description of her encounters with Arabs to describe how she now feels about them.
  - Tell what you think of her descriptions?

**If You Could Be My Friend**

**Assignment 6**

**Page 55-63**

**Answer the Questions and the Creative Response**

**CREATIVE RESPONSE**

**Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. What is Nabil's story?
  - Why did Mervet's parents name her new baby brother after him?
  
2. On pages 56 and 57, Mervet decides to open up to Galit and tell her what she believes concerning Palestine and the intafadah.
  - What does Mervet write and how does she view the current situation?
  
3. How does Galit feel about Mervet's views?
  - How as the conflict affected her life?
  - What has it done to her view of Arabs?
  
4. How does Mervet view martyrs versus how Galit sees them?
  - Can their two views be reconciled?
  
5. What is Galit's plan to resolve the conflict?
  - What does she think should be given away and why?
  - What is she not willing to give away and why?
  - What do you think of her plan? Is it fair?
  - Would Mervet be happy with this plan?

If You Could Be My Friend

Assignment 7

Page 64-71

1. Answer 3 of the questions

2. Make up and answer two of your own questions.

-These questions should start with a "Why" or a "How" or have a "why" or a "how" in them somewhere. (Why and How questions usually require more thinking to make and to answer. For example, "What is your name?" versus "Why did your parents give you that name?"

-Your questions will be a part of our discussion.

**3. CREATIVE RESPONSE**

**Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. How does Mervet explain that the Jews and Arabs are related?
  - Do you think this should help or hurt the Israeli and Palestinian conflict?
2. What does Galit's experience during the Gulf War?
  - How have these experiences changed Galit's views?
3. On page 70, how does Galit explain why Arabs live in camps and why they live with a curfew.
  - Do you agree with her, why or why not?
4. Has Galit's world and life, which is only 15 minutes away from Mervet's grown more similar to or different from Mervet's life?
  - Do you think these experiences will bring the girls closer together, why or why not?

**If You Could Be My Friend**

**Assignment 8**

**Page 72-78**

**Choose to do three questions and make up 2 of your own.**

1. How does Mervet defend the Arab actions in the war?
2. What is Mervet's point of view on peace? How does she explain to Galit that she is being unfair?
3. On page 74, Mervet talks about her future again. How is discussion of her future different then how she saw her future before?
4. On page 77, Galit was disappointed with Mervet's letter. What did she mean when she said she was hoping for more? What do you think she was hoping to hear from Mervet?
5. Both Mervet and Galit live with and feel the consequences of violence, but Mervet and Galit see two different causes to the violence. They see different people as being responsible. What does Mervet see as the causes, and who does she think is responsible? What does Galit see as the causes, and who does she think is responsible?

If You Could Be My Friend

Assignment 9

Page 79-81

1. Answer ALL **3** questions and MAKE UP **2** questions of your own.

2. **CREATIVE RESPONSE**

Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

1. What was your response to Galit and Mervet's meeting?

2. Turn back to your initial thoughts about the Israel and Palestinian conflict.

- What are your views now?
- How have Galit and Mervets' letters shaped and changed your views?

3. It has been ten years since Galit and Mervet's meeting. Mervet was 14 and Galit was 15 years old. Now they are 24 and 25 years old.

- What do you think their lives are like?
- What do you think they are doing?
- Do you think that they still communicate with each other?

# Assignment #10

## Middle East Poetry Packet

Read through the poems. Choose two poems to respond to.

Respond by....

- Analyzing the poem
  - Take it apart and tell what you think it means.
  - Read the poem and translate it line by line or in chunks of lines (3 or 4 at a time).

Or

- Write about the feeling that the poem leave you with.
  - What does it make you feel?
  - What does it make you think of?
  - What point of view do you think the author is getting across to the reader.

Enjoy them and have a good break! See you soon.



**Habibi**  
**Assignment 1**  
**Pages 1-25**

1. **\*Choose 5 Questions to Answer\***

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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## Questions

1. Discuss the move that Liyana and her family are making.
  - Where are they moving to and why?
  - What reasons do they give for their move?
  - Do you agree with her family's reasons?
  - Is this something that you would be willing to do, why or why not?
  
2. On page 5, Liyana is sitting in a restaurant with her family. They have just told her that they will have a garage sale before they move. She is imagining all of the belongings and memories that she is attached to in St. Louis. She is imagining what it will be like to move to a new place. The narrator then asks for Liyana, "Who would they be if they had to start all over again?"
  - What does the narrator mean by this question? They are still the same people, so how will moving change who they will be?
  
3. Liyana also realizes that when they move her father will no longer be an immigrant; instead, now Liyana will be an immigrant.
  - What will this mean for her?
  - What will she be giving up and what might she be gaining from her new status as an immigrant? Use your own knowledge as well as information from the book to answer this question.

4. On page 9, Liyana describes a list of things she knows in her hometown. Write down some of these things and tell why you think she has thought of them. In other words, what do her hometown things mean to her?
  
5. On page 12, Liyana states that she knows the latitude and longitude of her world. She does not mean that she literally knows the latitude and longitude of her home, what does she mean by this?
  - Try and describe the latitude and longitude of New York, or your home area, as Liyana does for her hometown.
  
6. Also on page 12, Liyana declares that her country is an age, not a country. How can this be; what does she mean by this?
  
7. What do you think Liyana is feeling as she packs?
  - Could she and Rafik go without these belongings?
  - What do you think their lives would be like without these possessions?
  - If you, like Liyana were moving to another country and could only take a limited amount of things, what would you take?

Habibi  
Assignment 2  
Pages 24-46

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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## Questions

1. Draw a picture of Jerusalem as it is described in Liyana's father's story. **Include as many details** as you can. \*Think about the desserts, their colors; \*think about the buildings, the material that they are made of; and \*include how you imagine the street traffic.

or

Draw a picture of the welcoming party that greeted Liyana and her family at the hotel. **Include as many details** as you can. Think about the \*colors that you see and try to \*capture the feeling of that meeting. **Label** as many people as you in your picture.

2. What does Liyana mean when she says that she wishes that politicians would trade desserts like her father did as a child?
- Who were her father's neighbors when he traded desserts?
  - What happens when you trade desserts? What makes dessert trading worthwhile?
  - Liyana's father wonders why people would only want to live with people who are just like them. How does this connect with her fathers dessert story?

3. How does Liyana's father's story of Jerusalem (the one that she reads to her class) compare to what you know of Jerusalem's/Israel's history?
4. On page 29 in her father's story, Liyana says that the story of the Native Americans made her father sad. How might the experiences of Native Americans compare to those of Palestinians as her father sees it?
5. Also on page 29, Liyana talks about the Jewish tragedy in Europe and how, from her father's point of view, it should make the Jews more sensitive to what was happening to the Palestinians.
  - Do you agree with her father?
  - Can you also see the other side in which it might make the Jews want a secure and safe land in which they were the ones in power?
  - Which point of view makes more sense to you?
6. On page 38, she states, "You step off a plane and you're in a new universe."

When she was in America she said that she was always different because she was half-American and half-Palestinian. She is still the same person, but she is now in a new place.

- What does it mean for her to be who she is in this new universe, in her new home country?
  - What do you think is new for her and how do you think she feels?
7. Discuss the differences that you notice between her relatives in Israel and her relatives in America.
    - What does Liyana think of her new relatives?Use information from the book to support your ideas.
  8. On page 45 and 46, Liyana describes a dream that she has.
    - How do you think this dream illustrates what she's feeling? Try to interpret her dream.

Habibi  
Assignment 3  
Page 50-74

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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1. Illustrate Liyana's ride to her grandmother Sitti's house. The family's ride is described on page 50-52. The real objects that they see are described and how they feel is described. Try to represent and convey what they see and feel.
2. On page 53, Liyana's family arrives at Sitti's house. Poppy, Liyana's father declares, "We're here!" Liyana responds by thinking, "they were here, but no one really knew her here, no one knew what she liked, or who here friends had been, or how funny she could be if she had any idea of what was going on. She would have to start from scratch."
  - What does Liyana mean by this?
  - For example, how does it help you to be yourself if other people know what you like and who your friends are?
  - Do you think that having people know you, your past, your likes, your friends, do these things help you to be yourself?
  - What does starting from scratch mean?
3. Discuss the issue of kissing from Liyana's and her father's point of view. (pages 60-61)
  - Is Poppy right?
  - Should Liyana follow the guidelines of her new society in order to protect herself?
  - What are the possible outcomes if she does versus if she does not?

- Is there a way to compromise?
4. What sort of things (rules, cultural practices...) will Liyana have to get used to in Israel? Use information from the book and from your own head to answer this question.

What are the rules and guidelines that you must follow as teenagers living in New York or America? What happens if you do not follow these rules?

5. What were some of the things that Liyana and her family saw on their religious tour of Jerusalem. Include sites that are important to the major religions in Jerusalem.
6. On page 72, Liyana questioningly comments that there is "so much holiness bumping up against so much holiness, doesn't it seem strange that Jerusalem would have so much fighting?"

Do you agree that it is strange that if there really religious people in Jerusalem that there should then be peace in Jerusalem, or does it make sense to you that because of the religion there would be so much fighting in Jerusalem? Why or why not?

**Habibi**  
**Assignment 4**  
**Page 75-99**

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. **Creative Response:** Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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1. How do you think she feels at her new school?

She says that she is an outsider in her new school.

- What does it mean to be an outsider?
- Make a list of all the ways she could be an outsider in her new situation.
- Also, how is her school experience different from it might have been in America?

2. What do you think of the way that Poppy handled his distant cousin who wanted the dress?

Poppy says that old customs have to be changed somehow.

- Why do you think he treated her as he did?
- Knowing this what do you then think of his views on kissing.
- Is he being fair?
- How do you decide which customs to change and which ones to respect?

3. Re-read page 84.
  - What does it mean to have people know Liyana?
  - What sorts of things do they need to know?

Liyana feels that knowing certain things about her and that having people know her helps her to be someone.

- Do you agree with her?
- Do people know you in your neighborhood, school or religious space?  
-If so, how do they make you feel; do they somehow help you to be someone or to be yourself?

4. Describe how Liyana was feeling when she was left alone with her grandmother.

In order to be willing to spend the night at her grandmother's house, she must be feeling more comfortable and secure in Israel.

- Talk about some of the ways that you see her feeling more at home in Israel.

5. How do you feel about Liyana's encounter with the spice seller and the Jewish man? Explain why you think the Jewish man may have said that the spice seller was dishonest.

On page 93, Liyana talks about the different ways that people deal with anger.

- Describe how people deal with their anger and what it does to them as Liyana sees it.
- Using Liyana's terms describe the anger that the Jews feel or that the Palestinians feel.

6. On page 99, Liyana feels totally alone as opposed to her brother, Rafik, who seems to have fit right in.
  - Why do you think he has found this move easier?
  - What do you think Liyana is grappling with and struggling with?



Habibi  
Assignment 5  
Pages 100-125

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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1. Part a: On page 100, Liyana and her brother try to decide on where the line is between a friend and an acquaintance. Based on the information in the book and your own thoughts, write down where you think the line is between a friend and an acquaintance.

Part b: Think about other things in this book that are divided between a thin line. What are some of the things that you come up with? Explain why you think they are divided between a thin line.

2. As Liyana sees a chain of military tanks come lumbering down the road, she feels the need to "change the mood." What does she and Rafik do and how does it then change the mood?
- Why does it work to change the mood?
  - Or, What is symbolic about this activity that helps it to change the mood?
3. On page 106, there is a discussion about an invisible hat. Poppy says that he would use it to secretly listen to what people are saying, so that he could hear people's true thoughts.
- What does Liyana use it for?
  - What does it tell you about how she is feeling?

4. What were some of the things that happen on Liyana's 29<sup>th</sup> day of school? What does she begin to realize?
5. On page 124, Liyana notices that in their new country her father refers to himself and the family as Americans. Before in America, Poppy called himself a Palestinian.
  - How does a move to a new country allow you to favor one nationality over another?
  - Why, since Poppy returned to Israel, is he calling himself an American?
6. On page 125, Liyana decides that she and Rafik "walk a blurry line."
  - What does she mean by this and why do you think she believes this?
  - Write about the ways that you see Liyana being Palestinian and the ways that you see her being American.
  - Do you see your self as "walking a blurry line?" How or why not?

Habibi  
Assignment 6  
Pages 126-156

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

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1. What happens to the gate of the Armenian Quarter at night?

- Why do you think they do this?
- What does this tell you about Jerusalem?

2. Why does Liyana like the green lamp?

- What does it tell you about her personality?
- Use this description that you get from the lamp and other information from the book to write up a profile about Liyana. You can also look on page 138 where the color green and Liyana are mentioned again by Rafik.

The profile that you make can be in the form of a paragraph, an outline, a web, or you can design what her yearbook page might look like.

- Think about what are her likes and dislikes are.
- What her temperament is; is she relaxed, anxious, short tempered, or happy-go-lucky.
- Is she a flexible person; is an open or closed-minded person?  
Tell why you think as you do.

3. We know that Poppy became a doctor to balance things out. What does this mean? How is he balancing things out?

4. There is a great difference between the lives of Liyana and Rafik and their new friends Kaled and Nadine.
  - What are some of the differences and do you think these kinds of differences are hard to bridge in a friendship?
5. On page 140, Liyana says that she feels incidental.
  - What does it mean to feel this way and list some reasons why she might feel incidental.
  - Think about ways that she might be incidental beyond just the moment when she is lying sick in bed.
6. Liyana gives us hints about the different separations that exist in Jerusalem between the Jews and the Arabs.
  - Write down one example that you see from the "Donkey on the Road" chapter.
  - Write down any other examples that you may find.
  - How do you think it feels to live on either side of this separation?
  - What does it feel like for the Jews and what does it feel like for the Palestinians.
  - Which side, if any, do you think Liyana lives on and why?
7. On page 154, Or and Liyana are talking about immigration and moving to new places. Or comments to Liyana, "a place is inside you-like a part of your body? Like a liver or a kidney? So how could you leave it?"
  - Based on Liyana's past thoughts and comments about how she feels leaving her hometown in America and her move to Israel do you think that she agrees with him?
  - Do you agree with either or both of them?
  - Do you think the United States is inside of Liyana?
  - Do you believe that a home or a place can never be replaced?
  - Do you think it's possible to have more than one home place inside of you?
8. On page 156, Liyana says, "Sometimes to hold a good secret inside you made the rest of the day feels glittery. You could move through the dull moments without any pain."
  - What is the secret that gets Liyana through this day?
  - Have you ever had a similar experience, such that you can just think of something somebody said or an experience you have had and "the rest of the day feels glittery"?

**Habibi**  
**Assignment 7**  
**Pages 157-183**

**1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\***

and

- 2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. On page 158 the gates of Jerusalem are mentioned.
  - Does this walled city remind you of any other walled cities that we have read about?
  - Discuss the ways that you see the two cities as being similar.
2. Knowing what Liyana knows about Israel and the rules that the Muslim community follows, do you think Liyana is being too risky when she goes off with Or? Why or why not?
3. Were you surprised to find out that Omer is Jewish?
  - Were you surprised at how Liyana reacted when she found out Omer is Jewish?
  - Both Omer and Liyana come from very different backgrounds and they are connected in many ways to opposing sides of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict. Despite these differences, can you understand how these two people connect and relate to each other?
  - Explain why you see them as being so close.
  - Do you think the author is saying anything about the conflict by presenting this relationship? Explain.
4. On page 165, Liyana presents the Arab point of view of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.
  - What does she say?
  - Do you agree or disagree with her?

On page 171-172, after Liyana's meeting with Omer, she says that she has a new feeling about Israel?

- What opened her view up and why was it successful in changing her feelings about Israel?
5. Liyana and her family are going to church for Christmas. At one of the churches they see a sign posted at the entrance which says, "NO ARMS ALLOWED INSIDE THIS CHURCH"
- Why is this sign particularly jarring and why does it seem so out of place posted on a church?
  - Or do you not think that it is out of place on this church?
6. Starting on page 178, what does Liyana say about being chosen and how does Or respond to her?
- Who do you agree with and why?
  - How does the idea of being chosen remind you of The Truth Lies Beneath? Explain.

**Habibi**  
**Assignment 8**  
**Pages 183-212**

1. What is your reaction to what happen to Sitti and her house?
  - Why do you think the soldiers came?
  - Why would they want to see her grandson?
    - Can you imagine this ever happening in America, or do you think happens or has happened in America?
    - Do you think this will change how Liyana feels about Omer?
    - Do you think it will make it harder for them to come together?
2. Try and interpret Liyana's dream.
  - What do you think the cake represents?
  - What do you think Omer and she represent?
3. On page 196, the author says, "Liyana kept thinking how everybody was a little like everyone else and nobody was the *same*." Re-read that paragraph to get a better feel of what she is saying.
  - Do you agree with what Liyana is saying here?
  - What do you think made her think of this?

How would this statement be true for Omer and herself? Look at the Israeli and Palestinian points of view as they are presented in this book and decide how Liyana's statement might be true for them.

4. On page 207, Kaled tells the reader how his grandparents died. Explain what happened.
  - Do you think it is possible for a family like this to then go and befriend the Israelis or to make peace with them?
  - Explain your point of view?

Habibi  
Assignment 9  
Pages 213-243

1. \*Choose 4 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose one of the poems or poem starters at the beginning of the chapters and respond to it. Or, you can choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked and respond to it. You may choose the sentences or sentence because you like the way it sounds or because you like what it says. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

1. What does Habibi mean? How is it used in this book and why do you think the author, Naomi Shihab Nye, titled the book Habibi?
2. How do you think Liyana's first year in Israel has gone?
  - What has the move to Israel opened up for her?
  - How do you think she is coping with school?
3. On page 216, Liyana asks her father if he thinks that there will ever be a time where everyone in Israel gets along. Her father answers her by saying, "Nope."
  - Why do you think he believes this?
  - Do you agree with him?
4. Briefly describe what happened to Kaled and Poppy.
  - Explain how you feel about this incident.
5. Before, in the United States, Liyana could say that she was a Muslim, but now she is experiencing what it feels like to be a Muslim in Israel.
  - Do you think this will change her mind about peace in Israel and the conflict?



## B. Comprehension Responses

I have included the responses from six of the students in the If You Could Be MY Friend group. The first three responses are from students who are reading below grade level. Sam's is the first homework response presented. The last three responses are from students who are reading at or above grade level. Despite the students varied reading levels, each of them produced high quality work that reflected their close reading and their ability to think critically.

V+

[REDACTED]

3-18-01

If You Could Be My Friend

1. Mervet's poem or song is about the children of Palestine.

Mervet is acting as if she was a leader for the Palestine children. And she is telling them all from far or near those Palestine children should not be forgotten, and they should stand out. The song says that they should save their country, and how they have to rebuild the houses because of the intifada war. Galit's song is about how she sits near her grandmother who then tells her stories of what had happened a long time ago in that country. At the last paragraph Galit's grandmother mentions that the blue and white flag which for that country Israel is going to be the same flag color for today also be for tomorrow and how the land and sea is blue and white. Mervet's song is communicating about the children of Palestine and what exactly the children should do. What the children have to stand up to and that the children should never ever be forgotten. That the children have their own

Beautiful translation

[REDACTED]  
Grammatically this is a very nice sentence

Really complex ideas that you have written very well!

\* This could be a new paragraph because you are talking about a new person

rights. Then Galit's song is communicating how her

Very sensitive

grandmother first of all spends this quality time with her

granddaughter on the garden. Then it's also communicating

how the grandmother tells these stories of how the country use

to be and the flag colors how they are important and the way

they are smiler to the land and sea. Mervet's song is giving the

children the idea and trying to make them believe that they

need to stick up for them self's and that the people need to

treat them with some respect. That the Israel soldiers should

not touch or boss around the children. Galit's song is more

about her life. Galit's song is giving people the idea of how her

grandmother tells these old stories of the country. She also

tells stories about the blue and white flag and the land and sea.

This is good but it would be a little more organize if you kept all the market ideas together and all the Galit ideas in a separate paragraph

Your right!  
Mervet's song is really empowering for the future, and Galit's song is about Israel's past and how it will be there in the future.

2. Curfew means when you are locked home your not allowed to

leave and all you do is stay in. These curfews affect Mervet's

life by not letting her go to this committee of <sup>Palestinian</sup> Palestine woman.

Which Mervet goes to every morning and helps the children

learn and write. The curfew affects her because she is not

allowed to go to the committee of Palestine woman on the

curfew days. She once did try, but she got caught and was

insulted and threatened. The people who enforce these curfew days are the Israel soldiers. Whenever there is a Jewish holiday or an American politician comes to Israel there is a curfew day.

*Concise  
and accurate. Your comprehension is excellent.*

3. Mervet's hope's for the future is that she becomes a doctor and helps any race or any religion. She wants to help the very poor, her religions woman who suffer a lot when they are giving birth. She knows that there are people in Dheisheh who don't have enough money to pay for their own medicine or for a doctor. But she wishes that she would be nice with them and give them a gentle hand on their wounds, she also wants to build a hospital for everyone. Nothing would stop her of being a doctor not even when she gets married. Then she would do all this stuff for the poor. Mervet's plan for the future tells me that she thinks that her land will be the same and there will be

*IS  
When you own something or it belongs to it.*

*I'm glad that you explained why.*  
no change. The reason for this is because she is saying that there are <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~ entire people in Dhesheh who cannot pay for their medicine or for a doctor and she thinks that they are poor and always will be. She also said that the woman in Palestine suffer when giving birth. This all is true now but

when she is older it could change but this proves that she does not believe in change she thinks that her people will always be the same.

↑  
Good conclusion

4. A meeting between the two would be very hard I don't really know if it's possible for the two to ever meet. It would be hard because the soldiers would probably be the number one people to stop Mervet from coming in to Israel and they would also be the number one people from letting Galit out of Israel if their parent's had agreed of letting them go. They should go to a different country for a vacation and meet there. If they were to meet the secret of how the other person looks like would be revealed. But if they got caught by the soldiers that would be the very worst. It would be the very worst because the soldiers might do something to the Galit's family they would of course do something to the Mervet's family. If the friends of the two or even the neighbors saw and it got around in school that could be bad. First, both would have lost a lot of their friends they would be unliked and people would make fun of them. I think that the conversation from the two from the letters and from meet to meet would be both ways same and not the same.

Again - you have complete ideas that you have organized very well


> good point

First they would talk about some of the same stuff as they do in the letters like the land and their family. But they would never talk about the Israel soldiers attacking them or shooting at other Palestine's. Some other stuff they would not talk about would be that the Arabs wanting to push the Israel's to the water, or anything bad about the other culture. They probably would feel different about each other of what to say and what is not rude. They might not have too much stuff in common. They would just be very afraid.

I think th  
is an interesting  
point - people  
are often more  
honest in  
their letter  
then when  
they meet in  
person.

5. I think she is now getting a better relationship with them then before with the Arabs she has had 3 examples with Arabs that she mentioned. Some were well some were bad. The examples are that she was once got laughed at she got mocked at by a group of Arab woman. She also meets a nice Arab man in Yerolin who she wanted to help him move his groceries. But there was also another time when Galit's father told her about someone who was a lazy woman as Galit said she was. She was an Arab woman she knew how to speak Hebrew but refuses to use that language. Galit said that her father was very mad at her one day because she was making fun of his language and

was on his nerves Galit says her father would have hit her if they were not in the factory.

 - I am very impressed by your work. You show a very sophisticated understanding of the ~~text~~ book and you are very sensitive in your descriptions of Mervet and Galit.

Also, it is nice to see how careful you are being with your writing. Your sentences are nicely organized and they clearly state your idea.

You have put a lot of effort into this work!

P.S- I'd be curious as to why you chose the graphic that you did - let me know.





If You Could Be My Friend

Assignment 9

Page 72-78

Choose to do ~~three~~<sup>two</sup> questions and make up 2 of your own.

1. How does Mervet defend the Arab actions in the war?
- ✓ 2. What is Mervet's point of view on peace? How does she explain to Galit that she is being unfair?
3. On page 74, Mervet talks about her future again. How is discussion of her future different then how she saw her future before?
4. On page 77, Galit was disappointed with Mervet's letter. What did she mean when she said she was hoping for more? What do you think she was hoping to hear from Mervet?
- ✓ 5. Both Mervet and Galit live with and feel the consequences of violence, but Mervet and Galit see two different causes to the violence. They see different people as being responsible. What does Mervet see as the causes, and who does she think is responsible? What does Galit see as the causes, and who does she think is responsible?

6. What do you think it feels like to have a curfew? — Good question

✓ 7. How do you think Mervet and Galit would react if they had to switch places for a week?

that gets people to connect th ready to themselves

'excellent! This question ask people to imagine a new perspective

Thursday, March 29, 2001

## If you could be my friend

1. Mervet thinks that Galit is being unfair because she said that they could not be friends because she was Arab and she could not be a friend with an Arab because they kill Israelis. To me this is strange because it seems like Galit does not even realize the many more Arabs die than Israelis and yet Mervet still tries to be her friend.

5. Galit feels that if the Arabs behaved differently <sup>they own it</sup> there <sup>there</sup> situation would be different. If they did not throw stones the Israelis would not shoot them.

When Galit wrote this I think she <sup>meant</sup> that this whole problem is the whole

Israelis <sup>?</sup> fault and if they stopped this would all be over and this is not the first time she has said this. I think that Mervet thinks that the people that

are really causing the problems are the soldiers.

> I agree, but  
hard productive is  
it to keep blaming the other  
side?

### My Questions

6. If I were Mervet and I had a curfew I would feel trapped in my own home and I could not leave for days.

good description

7. I think if Mervet had to live in Galit's house for a week she would probably feel more comfortable and safe but it would also probably feel strange.



# If You Could Be My Friend

## Assignment 1

### Page 4-13

1. \*Choose 5 Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

## QUESTIONS

### The Introduction

1. Using the introduction to the letters, write a description of Galit and Mervet
  - Make a detailed description including their age, where they come from, their religions, and any information you may know about their families.
2. What points of view do you think these girls are bringing to their letter writing friendship.
3. Why do you think Litsa, the editor of this book, wants to introduce these two girls.
  - What does she hope to achieve and what might some possible outcomes of this letter exchange be.
  - What might Mervet and Galit learn about each other; what arguments might they have?



1. Galit is 14 years old and she is an Israeli. She is four and a half feet tall, with brown hair and dark eyes. She weighs 75 pounds. There are five kids in her family and she is middle one. Galit lives in Jerusalem in a Arab house.

Good details

2. Mervet thinks of her self as intelligent, pretty and studious. She lives in ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~city~~ <sup>city</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~west~~ <sup>west</sup>. She has six brothers and sisters and she is the second oldest.

3. I think Lisa brought Galit and Mervet together to accomplish peace between their societies. To talk about the problems that occur, and to see what their point of view is on this whole thing. I think sometime in this book they're going to have an argument about something because their own society has a different way of thinking.

Good point I think this will be interesting to look out for

4. In the first letters they sent each other they both felt weird writing to a stranger. I think Galit felt more open to writing to Mervet than Mervet <sup>was to</sup> writing to Galit. When I

very sensitive reading

Again -  
very sensitive  
reality!

read these letters there felt like there was  
an emptiness. When they learn more about each  
other that will probably go away.

6. I think their friends would probably not  
understand, why they were writing to their enemy.  
If they have a best friend who does understand  
them they would still be friends. - Would you  
be willing to reach out to someone else while risking  
losing your own friends?

7. I think they wonder what their houses look  
like what life style they live in. What's  
their day like. Galits' family does not want  
her going to Mervet's house because they think  
it's too dangerous. ... Remind you of the movie?

I don't know if you want to be my friend. I think  
that sounds weird asking someone if you want  
to be my friend. - Do you not like the little

I guess it is a weird way  
of approaching someone - maybe  
because English is not a 1<sup>st</sup>  
language for either of them?

intentional  
T. P. P. P. P.



**If You Could Be My Friend**  
**Assignment 10**  
**Page 79-81**

1. Answer ALL **3** questions and MAKE UP **2** questions of your own.

2. **CREATIVE RESPONSE**

Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

1. What was your response to Galit and Mervet's meeting?
  
2. Turn back to your initial thoughts about the Israel and Palestinian conflict.
  - What are your views now?
  - How have Galit and Mervets' letters shaped and changed your views?
  
3. It has been ten years since Galit and Mervet's meeting. Mervet was 14 and Galit was 15 years old. Now they are 24 and 25 years old.
  - What do you think their lives are like?
  - What do you think they are doing?
  - Do you think that they still communicate with each other?

# If You Could Be My Friend

## Questions

1. I think it was a nice meeting. It's funny how Galit seemed so much nicer during that meeting. They were both very nice to each other and it sounded like a good meeting. The only problem was the presents. I think Mervet worked hard on hers and maybe Galit did not show respect to her by not coloring in the flag, I think she might have been able to look it up.
2. Now that I have read the book my views are clearer now on how the Jews and the Palestinians live. Each one of their letters had something about what was happening and how their lives were going instead of some researcher telling me. I got a lot clearer views of the situation.
3. I think they both believe now in peace between the two races because of these letters. I think Mervet really believe in freeing the Arabs from refugee camps. I think Mervet is one of the more privileged Palestinians and would have an ok job. Maybe they do but its too hard to tell after the meeting I bet they sent letters but that would be a long time of writing letters and theirs a point were you might want to stop writing.



## MY QUESTIONS

Do you think that this writing experience will want to motivate Mervet and Galit even more with their goals to achieve peace?

If they are still communicating what do you think their talking about in their letters or e-mail?

## CREATIVE RESPONSE

*They finally met*

*Under the bright shining stars*

*They are now rejoiced.*

**If You Could Be My Friend**  
**Assignment 1**  
**Page 4-13**

1. \*Choose **5** Questions to Answer\*

and

2. Choose a line, phrase or sentence from anywhere in the reading that you liked or thought was interesting and respond to it. You might like the way a line sounded or what it said. Your response can be anything that you like. You can draw, write a creative writing piece, a poem, or just anything that the line makes you think of.

\*\*\*\*\*

**QUESTIONS**

**The Introduction**

- ✓ 1. Using the introduction to the letters, write a description of Galit and Mervet
  - Make a detailed description including their age, where they come from, their religions, and any information you may know about their families.
- ✓ 2. What points of view do you think these girls are bringing to their letter writing friendship.
3. Why do you think Litsa, the editor of this book, wants to introduce these two girls.
  - What does she hope to achieve and what might some possible outcomes of this letter exchange be.
  - What might Mervet and Galit learn about each other; what arguments might they have?

IF you could be my friend ✓+

I)  
1.

-Galit is a 12 year old Israeli. She is 4ft 6in. tall, she has light brown hair and dark eyes. She weighs 75 lbs and is the middle child of the 5 children in her family. She is Jewish.

-Mervat is a 12 year old Palestinian girl. She describes herself as intelligent, pretty, and studious. She is Muslim.

2.

I think that these two pen pals bring into these letters the wanting of peace but while holding their parents points of view of the world. So they want one thing yet to get to what they want they have two different ways. And these ways where people are both trying to use those ways and just making the war bigger because the ways are completely different. So if you mix them you create conflict which is what is happening. And these two girls about minded are bringing these sides in their letter.

think this a very positive assessment of 2 girls' opinion as they begin writing - very thoughtful

Important insight - you should bring this up in discussion.

4.

Galit's house is described by her as a little arab house even though she is Jewish. The reason I think she says this is that either the house is very old was made when the arabs were there. Or she might of said it because her house is little and she thinks of arab houses as little so she describes her house as a little arab house.

too clearly and with analytical thought of 2 very real possibilities.

5. Mervat looks to be a very studious girl who writes...

to a palistine. she describes it as a dream. she seems very open to Merrert she says she wants to write her all kinds of stuff about her life. And she also says one day I will tell you the whole story of my family but it is too long and too sad to write it today in this letter.

Merrert feels shy to Galit, she doesn't know if she is friendly towards herself and she is also friendly to Galit she says this in her letter. She also tells Galit about her so she isn't that shy yet she it's hard to explain

I agree, think she has a mix thing - maybe is hesitant.

7 I see Merrert and Galit having the same curiosities about each other and they are really about one another's life & life styles.

II) "It is very strange feeling to be to a palistine. It is like a dream, a good dream." This line is friendly to Merrert. It is very well said and if someone wrote that to me I think I would make a huge effort to be this person's friend because they are so nice to me. So I think that Galit did a great way of starting her letter to Merrert, who she has never met.

good point!

[REDACTED]  
March 18, 2001

Reading/Writing

## If You Could Be My Friend

**The bold two.** Three haiku's on the phrase, "*In Ariel, the biggest Jewish settlement in the occupied territories, an anti-Arab measure has been implemented. Since this morning, free access by Palestinians has been forbidden. Those who have jobs in the neighborhood can enter, but they will have to wear a white badge declaring them to be 'Foreign workers'*" on page 49: — [REDACTED]

Your writing is amazing + very moving. You are skilled at manipulating words to create very powerful pictures. Most people can not write 1 effective Haiku + here you have 3!

It is my shadow

It follows me everywhere

Reveling my life

The badge restrains me

It shows all they want to see

I cannot brake free

They do not know me

All they can see is the badge

It covers my life

1. I think that the song that Mervet sung is about taking back Israel and turning it back into Palestine. The first stanza seems to mean that everyone who feels effected by the Jews owning Israel/Palestine should come and help the Arabs rebel against the Jews. I think that the second stanza is referring to the fact that Arabs did once own what is now called Israel. I think that that the third stanza means that the Arabs are strong and will not give up. Even the Intifada helps them grow stronger, which will help them rebuild their old houses that were destroyed. The last stanza I think was written to encourage people to fight. It seems basically be saying that it is going to be worth the fight to win back Israel or Palestine.

I agree -  
Patriotic  
Songs are  
meant to  
be motivational

I think that the song that Galit writes Mervet is the opposite of Mervet's song. It is saying that the Jews will always be in charge of Israel. I think that the first stanza is there to set up the second one. The second one says that Israel will always have the same government, and will always be run by Israel.

- They are opposites as they want opposite things - but I think both songs work to motivate their respective people.

2. The curfew is a time when all people in the refugee camp cannot go outside, or open their doors, and even windows. The soldiers are in charge of enforcing the curfew and have the power to do almost anything they want. They can even throw people in jail for braking curfew. The soldiers mostly have a curfew when there is a demonstration, or when American politicians come, or when there is a Jewish holiday.

→ good summary + definition

3. Mervet has planned to become a doctor so she can help her people, and anyone else regardless of their race or religion. She wants to build hospitals for everyone. Mervet wants to have a big house and give things to the poor.

4. I think that Galit and Mervet could meet with the help of Litsa Boudalika, the person who got the book together. There must be a way to get to the other place. They only live FIFTEEN MINUTES away! I think that if they knew that no one would be writing down their conversation and putting it in the book, it would be completely different. I think that it would give a completely different perspective of each other and I think it would be a great experience for both of them. - We'll have to see!

5. I think that it is hard for Galit to have her own perspective on the fight between Arabs and Israelis because her father and mother are obviously not that crazy about them. When she talked about the woman at her dad's office I think that she was speaking from him because she had heard it from him, and had not <sup>seen</sup> seen it. I think it is very similar to the kids at Bank Street. Most of them have very liberal democratic parents, so I think that almost all of the kids consider themselves liberal democrats.

- How is it similar to Bik. St.? - I think it's a good point that you should explain further.

Thanks!

### C. Sam's First Semester Comprehension Responses

I have included copies of a few of Sam's comprehension responses to *Shabanu*. *Shabanu* is the book that Sam first read with his class. It is an interesting story but the language is difficult and the structure of the story is complicated. It is written on a level that is above Sam's instructional reading level. I have included his responses to this book so that a comparison can be made with his responses to the book *If You Could Be My Friend*. This was the book that Sam read as part of the class' multilevel text set unit.



See me Soon! 11/16/00

1. Shabanu's relationship with Phulan is very good they like each other alot. Shabanu does not want Phulan to leave her. They stay in the quilt together they do alot of stuff together.

2. A major <sup>goal</sup>passage life is that they will be married.

3. The Bugti are trying to find Sibbi.

4. I think a dowry has to do with weddings. And she is having a wedding.

5. Shabanu family should help Sibbi like Shabanu wants to.

12/6/00

redo #2

1. Shabano does not like the storm because it's all the sand on them.

2. Shabano and the family lost lots of water.

redo

3. The story of the thirsty dead is that if you find a dead person dead because of being thirsty that means that the person's soul will always go with you follow you. It will give you bad luck.

4. Nawad is a ruler like in the army. Grandfather wants to be dead in the Nawad's army grave because he was in the war he fought in the war. And he wants to rest in peace with all the people in the army that were with him.

## **D. Jigsaw Meetings**

During certain times throughout the reading of these two books, the two groups would jigsaw to meet in new groups. These new groups were used to explore themes that were common to both books. The jigsaw meetings served to bring greater depth to the exploration of the themes as well as to create a share sense of community. In addition to discussion certain themes. Students would have the opportunity to share with the entire class their creative responses.

**Who are the main characters in your books?**

**Friends**

**Habibi**

**What are the things in life that are important to them and why?**

**Character's name:**

**Book:**

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**Character's name:**

**Book:**

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**Character's name:**

**Book:**

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**Some of the important things that you wrote will be the same for all of your characters, while some of the things will be different.**

**Why do you think that certain things are important to some of the characters but they are not important to other characters?**

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**List the things that are important you in your lives? Think about how where you live (New York City or America) shapes what is important to you.**

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**How are these important things shaped by where you live?**

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**What is your jigsaw group's definition of an outsider:**

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**1. Describe how the characters in the 2 books are outsiders.**

Friends

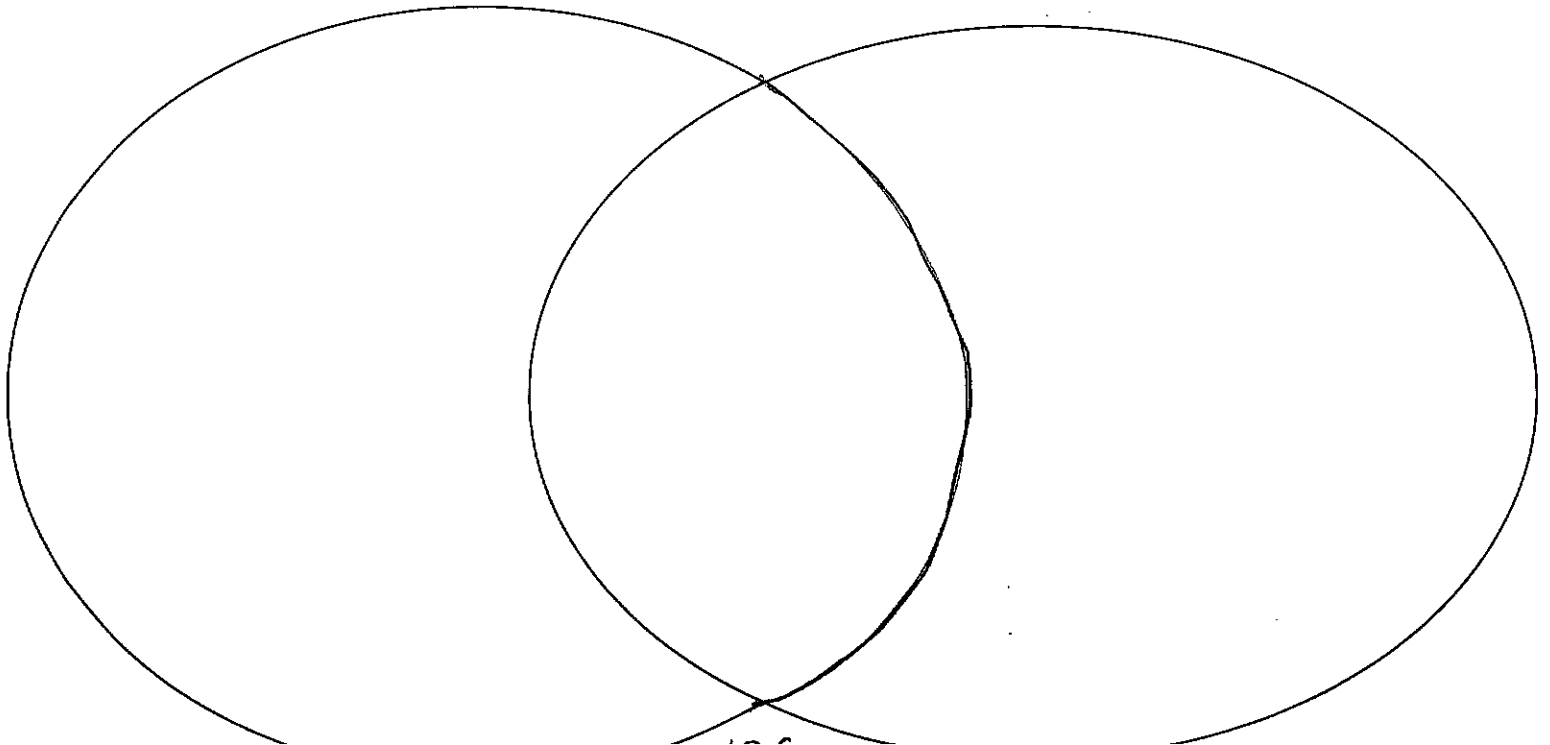
Habibi



**2. Do both of your outsider characters fit your groups definition?  
What is different about them or the same as outsiders?**

Friends Character

Habibi Character



**Liyana defines explains that there are three ways that she believes people deal with their anger.**

**1. Explain and discuss the three ways with the Friend in your group.**

- Read that passage from Habibi**
- Write down the 3 ways**

**1.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3.** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Use the information from both of the books and decide which of the 3 ways the characters use to deal with their anger. You can choose to talk about any of the characters.**

**Character 1**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Character 2**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**3. Now use the information provided in both of the books to decide how you see some of the Palestinians and some of the Israelis dealing with their anger.**

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