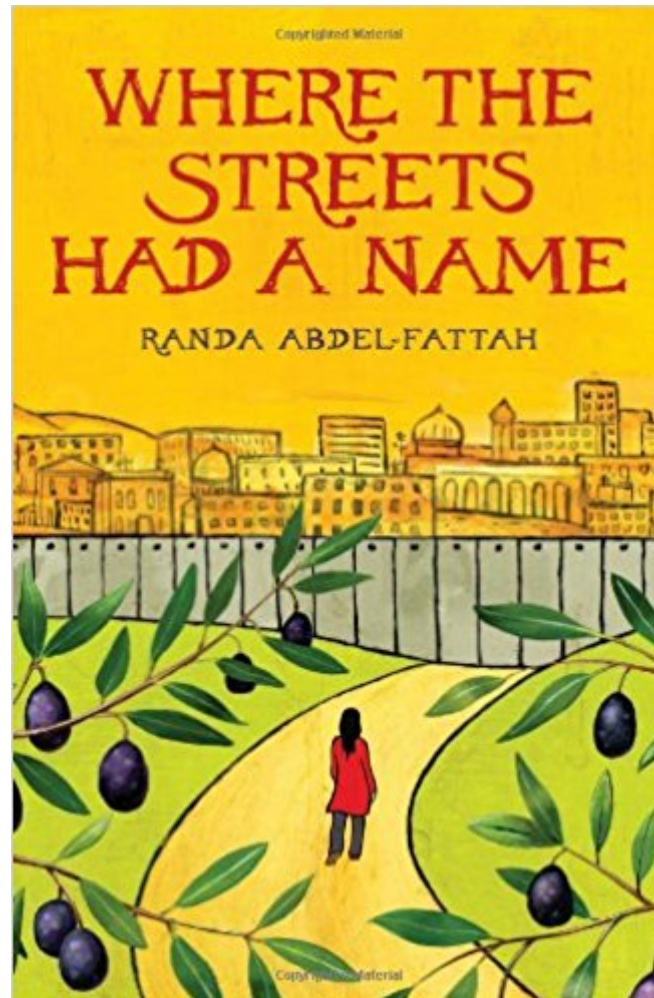




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# Where The Streets Had A Name



## Synopsis

Critically acclaimed author Randa Abdel-Fattah's middle-grade debut about the journey -- and risks -- a Palestinian girl will take to save her family. Thirteen year old Hayaat is on a mission. She believes a handful of soil from her grandmother's ancestral home in Jerusalem will save her beloved Sitti Zeynab's life. The only problem is that Hayaat and her family live behind the impenetrable wall that divides the West Bank, and they're on the wrong side of check points, curfews, and the travel permit system. Plus, Hayaat's best friend Samy always manages to attract trouble. But luck is on the pair's side as they undertake the journey to Jerusalem from the Palestinian Territories when Hayaat and Samy have a curfew-free day to travel.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8  
Physically and emotionally scarred, Hayaat lives behind the Israeli-built Separation Wall in the West Bank City of Bethlehem. When her beloved grandmother falls ill, the 13-year-old decides to make her way to Jerusalem to fill an empty hummus jar with soil from the land of her grandmother's ancestral home. She is certain that this will mend her heart. Unfortunately, although Jerusalem is merely minutes away, curfews, checkpoints, and an identity card that doesn't allow her to cross the border mean that Hayaat and her soccer-loving, troublemaker friend Samy face a perilous journey. This novel is an important addition to a very small body of existing books that tell

the Palestinian story for young people, and an intensely realistic setting brings that story to life. It is full of humor, adventure, and family love, but doesn't try to hide the heartbreaking and often bitter reality of life under Occupation. Abdel-Fattah manages to walk the line of truth-telling and sensitivity. She has avoided vilifying Israelis and, in fact, Hayaat and Samy could not have completed their journey without the help of a Jewish Israeli couple sympathetic to their cause. A cast of quirky characters adds both humor and realism to the story, making the devastating circumstances more palatable to young readers and keeping the story light in spite of a heavy topic and some dark realizations as the plot moves forward. --Sharon Senser McKellar, Oakland Public Library, CA (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

Since her Palestinian family lost their home, times have been hard for Hayaat, 13, who lives in Bethlehem on the occupied West Bank. To try to comfort her beloved dying grandmother, Sitti, Hayaat journeys to get some soil from the Jerusalem garden that Sitti longs for. Hayaat's friend, Samy, joins her on her quest. His mother was killed, and his imprisoned father is a heroic activist to some, but Samy is bitter: "He traded me for the cause." At the many checkpoints, the friends encounter soldiers, both brutal and kind, and also an Israeli peacenik couple who helps the kids get past the towering barriers. Hayaat's immediate, wry, and irreverent narrative intensifies the story of anguished struggle and Palestinian politics. The author leavens the story with humor; Sitti farts a lot, for example. The suspense builds, though, to heartbreaking revelations, particularly about the violent episodes that Hayaat has tried hard not to remember. Grades 5-8. --Hazel Rochman

"Where the Streets Had a Name" is an excellent novel for middle school readers, which is why it was chosen in 2011 by the Middle East Outreach Council (a group of U.S. educators who teach about the Middle East) as the outstanding work of Youth Literature. The book is funny and warm-hearted with well-drawn characters, an engaging plot, and a nuanced view of Palestinian-Israeli relations. I started out skimming it to evaluate it for classroom use and ended up enjoying it so much that I read the whole thing!

Yes most definitely! My daughter loved the book.. sge said it was amazing!

Read this book over and over. Never gets boring.

When I was a child I had a very vague sense of global conflicts in other countries. Because of my *Bloom County* comics I knew a bit about apartheid in South Africa. Later as a teen I heard The Cranberries sing "Zombie" and eventually learned a bit about the troubles in Northern Ireland. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict, however, had a lousy pop culture PR department. Nowhere in the whole of my childhood did I encounter anything that even remotely explained the problems there. Heck it wasn't until college that I got an inkling of what the deal was. Even then, it was difficult for me to comprehend. Kids today don't have it much easier (and can I tell you how depressing it is to know that the troubles that existed when I was a child remain in place for children today?). They do, however, have a little more literature at their disposal. For younger kids there are shockingly few books. For older kids and teens, there are at least memoirs like *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* by Ibtisam Barakat or *Palestine* by Joe Sacco. What about the middle grade options? Historically there have been a couple chapter books covering the topic, but nothing particularly memorable comes to mind. Enter *Where the Streets Had a Name* by Randa Abdel-Fattah. Written by the acclaimed author of the YA novel *Does My Head Look Big In This?*, Abdel-Fattah wades into waters that children's book publishers generally shy away from. Hers is the hottest of hot topics, but she handles her subject matter with dignity and great storytelling.

Hayaat was beautiful once. That's what her family would tell you. But since an accident involving the death of her best friend, she's remained scarred and, to be blunt, scared. Hayaat lives in Bethlehem in the West Bank in 2004. Her family occupies a too small apartment and is preparing for the wedding of Hayaat's sister Jihan. Unfortunately there are curfews to obey and constant checkpoints to pass. When Hayaat's beloved Sitti Zeynab grows ill, Hayaat decides to put away the past and do the impossible. She will travel to her grandmother's old home across the wall that divides the West Bank to bring some soil from in front of her old house. With her partner-in-crime Samy by her side, Hayaat reasons that the trip is attainable as it's just a few miles. What she doesn't count on, however, is the fact that for a Palestinian kid to make that trip, it may as well be halfway across the world. Hayaat, however, is determined and along the way she's able to confront some of the demons from her past.

In a lot of ways this book is a good old-fashioned quest novel. You have your heroine, battle scarred, sending herself into a cold cruel world to gain the impossible. That the impossible would be a simple sample of soil doesn't take anything away from the poignancy of her intent. By her side is her faithful sidekick, and along the way she meets a variety of different people. Some are bad, some are good, and all are human. So it's a quest novel, sure, but it's also a family dynamics novel. The story does a great job of making this an accessible novel to all

kids so you believe in Hayaat's family through and through. From her overbearing mother to her silent father to her grandmother, caught up in dreams and memories. You care about these people. You desperately want a happy ending for them. Needless to say, if a person writes a book about Palestinians for kids, be it a picture book or a novel, it's going to be considered a contentious subject. It's easy to avoid such subjects. Most middle grade does. Abdel-Fattah is to be commended for her guts then. Though her critics will try to find fault with her depictions of Israel, Abdel-Fattah's restraint is remarkable. There is a moment in this book when a curfew is in place and Hayaat peeks out at the streets at the Israeli soldiers patrolling there. She notes how young they are and how they must have families somewhere. That doesn't stop her from remembering how her best friend was killed with rubber bullets, of course. Later we hear the tale from Hayaat's grandmother of how she lost her home. When she and her husband went back, there were new residents living there. Through a translator they hear how the woman's family died in the Holocaust and there's that moment of feeling simultaneous pity and horror and anger. Regardless, one family has taken another family's home which is wrong and not a difficult thing to understand. What Abdel-Fattah does is continually show that everyone in this situation is human. You'll see similar techniques when authors write middle grade novels about Jim Crow in the American South. In those books you'll usually find one sympathetic white person in the midst of racists. Similarly, this novel has Mali and David, two Israeli's who object to the situation in the Middle East and have returned from their new country of residence to try and change things. Through their eyes you see that there is never a single way of thinking about something. There are a lot of things I admire about this book but it's the humor I particularly respect. This book is chock full of situations that are not funny. Curfews are not funny. Dehumanization of citizens is not funny. But between these bad times are moments of levity. You care deeply about Hayaat and her family and the little snatches of dialogue we get between characters can be telling. At one point Hayaat's grandmother explains to her that husband was killed by getting run over by a car shortly after understanding that he'd never be able to return to his home. Hayaat interrupts by asking if he died of a broken heart. " 'Yes, of course it was,' she says, looking confused. And every other part of his body. It was a big car'." There were a couple practical storytelling elements I would have changed, had I the power. For example, the moment when Hayaat pours the Jerusalem soil over her grandmother's hands occurs on page 237. Yet we have a good seventy pages left to go at that point. Admittedly, there's a lot of backstory to sum up. There's Jihan's wedding and the street kid that convinces Samy that he might contain the key to getting out of this life. Still, it was surprising to get past the most exciting elements of the book only to find everything was to be slowly slowly rectified. Another thing I would have included was an

Author's Note on the history of the region. The book sort of makes the assumption that kids are already aware of the history of Palestine and what it has been through. It assumes that they know why there are Israeli soldiers and checkpoints. Even a map of the region would have been important, particularly if it showed the remarkably short route Hayaat and Samy attempt to take. It would be interesting to hand this book to a kid who knew nothing about Israel/Palestine and see how much they comprehend. I suspect that this book would appeal to such kids with a yen for contemporary realistic fiction, but it would pair even better with taught units about Israel/Palestine today. Getting kids to care about children like themselves in other countries is difficult. Getting kids to care about children in countries they may not have even heard of before is even more difficult. Certainly this book pairs beautifully with Barakat's aforementioned *Tasting the Sky*. Both books beautifully convey an untenable situation that cries out for resolution. Abdel-Fattah's book fills a massive gap in collections everywhere. This is a book worth reading. Hopefully lots of folks will. For ages 9-12.

This is a story of hope in a land beaten down by fighting and hatred. Where people are evicted from their lands and forced into refugee camps possibly to languish for years. It is also the story of a Hayaat, 13 year old girl who wants to travel to Jerusalem to fulfil her grandmother's dearest wish. It is on this day long trip that we experience the hope for a positive future. Throughout the day, Muslims, Christians and Jews together having peaceful conversation, helping each other even at cost to themselves. Hayaat may young, but she has suffered much due to the strife in the West Bank of Bethlehem. While this has made growing up difficult, it has played a major role in helping to shape the woman she is becoming. I listened with rapt attention to this story. A family of seven living in a small apartment. While I couldn't imagine sharing a bedroom with my grandmother as well as siblings, I did envy the closeness that it brought them. In our western society, it is more unusual for grandchildren to have such closeness with grandparents and I feel that is a shame. Before reading this novel, I knew nothing about Palestine and the West Bank. It has made me want to learn more. This would be a good book for parents to read and discuss with their children. Kellie Jones did an excellent job reading the audio version. Her use of accents and Arabic words brought the characters to life. The written descriptions combined with the dramatic voicing left me feeling that I had truly stood on the hillside looking toward their ancestral home and feeling the wind that was blowing through the olive trees. This is a five star book and I encourage you to find either a paper copy or the audio, read it and learn about a culture other than your own.

Where the streets had a name by Randa Abdel-Fattah Reviewed by Moirae the fates book reviews. Thirteen-year-old Hayaat is on a mission. She believes a handful of soil from her grandmother's ancestral home in Jerusalem will save her beloved Sitti Zeynab's life. The only problem is the impenetrable wall that divides the West Bank, as well as the checkpoints, the curfews, and Hayaat's best friend Samy, who is always a troublemaker. But luck is on their side. Hayaat and Samy have a curfew-free day to travel to Jerusalem. However, while their journey is only a few kilometers long, it may take a lifetime to complete. (Synopsis provided good reads) This is a middle-grade book that should appeal to tweens wanting to learn about the conflict in Israel. This book does a wonderful job in showing what life is like over there, but it never felt preachy. I never felt like the Author was saying that all Israelis or all Palestinians are bad. Which is good, with conflicts such as this one, a lot times people can be preachy and bias, but I never felt like this was the case. The book does a good job in making it age appropriate while also allowing children to ask their parents questions about life in the middle east. The book shows how no matter what country people are from they can still care about each other and still want to make a difference. Over all rating.\*\*\* 3 out of 5 stars Cover art: I like hoe it has a drawing for the cover art. Obtained: I won a copy from the publisher via good reads. Thank you

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