

“IDA IN THE MIDDLE” EDUCATOR’S GUIDE FOR USE BY BOOK CLUBS AND IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Winner of the 2023 Arab American Book Award
Winner of the 2024 Middle East Book Award
Finalist for the 2024 Jane Addams Peace Association Children’s Book Award
2023 Skipping Stones Honor Award Selection

OVERVIEW

Ida is a first-generation Palestinian American eighth-grader who is bullied and ridiculed at school. Ida is frustrated and angry when some peers and teachers hold her personally responsible for current events in the Middle East. The novel explores how she deals with feeling both invisible as a person and hyper-visible as a scapegoat and stereotype. After violence erupts in Jerusalem, some of Ida’s Christian and Jewish classmates start a pro-Israel club that misrepresents Palestinians and their desire for safety and freedom.





Even after she transfers to a new school, thinking that she has found a place where she can stay under the radar, it happens again. And what will Ida write about for her Passion Project, a major assignment that requires her to talk about herself in front of the whole school? Stressed about her social life and the presentation, Ida snacks on olives sent from Palestine by her relatives and is magically transported to the life she would have lived if her parents had not emigrated to the United States. Now in her daily life Ida experiences the humility and inconvenience of Israeli military check-points and the fear of encroaching home demolitions. Family and neighbors discuss how to cope and defend themselves and Ida learns that freedom is worth struggling for. Ida returns to her life in the US more informed and inspired to take action for her own dignity and to support the struggles of others.

Ida in the Middle is a coming-of-age story all readers 12 and up can relate to, especially those who are trying to figure out what impact they want to have on the world. This book is also a great way to learn more about Palestinian history and culture.

THINKING ROUTINES AND READING ANALYSIS

- Provide time for students to synthesize their understanding of the reading utilizing the following Core Thinking Routines from [Harvard Project Zero](#):
 - [Connect-Extend-Challenge](#)
 - [I Used to Think...Now I Think](#)
 - [Think, Puzzle, Explore](#)
 - [Step In-Step Out-Step Back](#)
- Have students analyze the idea of [POWER](#) to help them analyze the power dynamics in the story.

Expressions of Power

POWER OVER (Typical Experience of Power)	POWER TO.
<p>Power is a one way relationship. One side has power and acts in ways to maintain that power.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does one show power over another? How does one group limit power over another group? <p>Example: An empire has control over their citizens. Or a parent’s control over their children.</p> 	<p>Every person or group has the potential to make change. This can open up possibilities for individuals and groups to unite.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What other ways can you show power outside the group in charge? What does power look like with smaller groups or individuals? <p>Example: A person refused to work under unsafe conditions. A group organizes a strike for a fair wage.</p> 
POWER WITH	POWER WITHIN
<p>A group of people with a common goal. All support and work together to make it happen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does a common goal bring people together? How is working together more powerful than individual actions? <p>Example: A student finds peers that have the same grievances and they go to the principal together.</p> 	<p>A person’s belief in themselves to imagine that change can happen, and seeing yourself as part of the solution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you show your inner power and dignity to the world? How can you find the strength to play a role in creating change? <p>Example: Someone sees the power they have to act draws on their inner strength to act.</p> 
POWER FOR	
<p>Power impacts our world. It should move us toward a more just society.</p> <p>Example: A group organizes to expand access to voting access in Black and Brown communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the goals and consequences of expressions of power? How can we assess and influence its impact? <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">Adapted from VeneKlasen & Miller (2002). <i>A New Weave of Power, People & Politics</i>. Oklahoma: World Neighbors.</p>	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for CHAPTERS 1-3

1. What does Ida mean when she says "...And even though they talked alot about the 'real world' it all seemed fake." (p. 13)
2. Ida gets tired of always explaining how to pronounce her name and being made fun of because of her name. How important is your name to you and your family or heritage? How does Ida's family respond when she tells them about the bullying?
3. What happens to Ida when other students realize she is Palestinian? How do you think students are influenced by the ideas they hear about certain kinds of people?
4. How does Ida's school principal respond when she feels othered by the club that targets her identity?
5. Is Ida excited about the passion project? Explain how Ida's perception of the project changes throughout the book.
6. What is a *terrorist*? Why is Ida called a terrorist?
7. Why does Ida consider it a blessing that she can pass as "anything?" What is passing? Can passing be helpful? How can passing be dangerous?
8. Have you ever felt embarrassed about your culture or being heard speaking a language other than English? How did you overcome your embarrassment?
9. What does the author mean when, on p. 14, she writes: "Everyone treated Ida as if she were a troublemaker just for existing, as if she should just stop being Palestinian so everyone else could feel comfortable?"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for CHAPTERS 4-7

10. How does the olive transport Ida back in time? Why do you think the author chooses an olive?
11. How are Ida's school friendships different in Busala than they are in Oldbridge? Why do you think that might be so?
12. How does Ida's perception of Siddo (her grandfather) change? Why is it important to remember oral histories of family elders? What can we learn from our elders?
13. How did Busala change after the state of Israel was established in 1948? What parallels are there with the history of Indigenous nations in North America and elsewhere?
14. Why is Siddo so proud of being a farmer? Do you know any farmers? Do you think farmers in the United States are proud? Why or why not?
15. Ida's home in Busala is at risk of being demolished (p. 82). Do you think there are reasons why a family's home should be demolished? What is a government's responsibility to provide and protect housing?
16. On page 85, Ida wonders "Could I tell people the truth? And if I did, would they even listen?" Do you think that young people can make a difference in the world? Why do you think so?

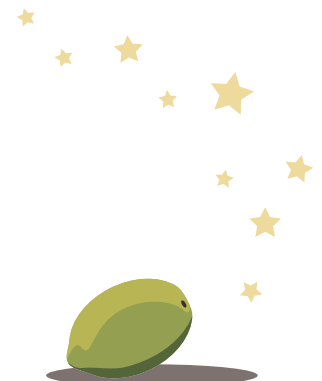
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for CHAPTERS 8-12

17. How does Aunt Malayka die? Could her death have been prevented? Why does Ida's mom say that Aunt Malayka shouldn't have died? (p. 101). Do you agree?
18. Ida and Carolina are followed in a store in Oldbridge (pp. 107-108). Why do you think they decided to handle the situation the way they did? Was it effective?
19. What is *maqluba*? (p. 117) Describe a dish that is traditional in your family. What are the traditions around it? How do you feel when you eat it together?

20. Why does Ida's family leave Palestine and move to the United States? How is their story similar to the story of other Palestinians? Explain what Baba means when he says, "It's the Palestinian story." (p. 120)
21. What is Aunt Malayka's profession? How does her profession impact her freedom of movement?
22. Do you think Ida is like Aunt Malayka? Explain.
23. Ida notices that her sisters Danya and Salwa are different in Palestine than they are in the United States. Why do you think this is so? Are you different in different places and groups? Why?
24. How does the topic of migration relate to the theme of the story (pp. 126-129)?
25. How is Ida's family similar to Carolina's family? How were they different? Why?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for CHAPTERS 13-18

26. How do Ida's family and friends define resistance? What famous resistance movements have you studied (e.g., civil rights; Irish resistance; South African anti-apartheid movement) and what were their outcomes?
27. Do you think the United States news media help or hinder the Palestinian cause right now? Explain.
28. Describe what happens to Ida and Malayka's at the checkpoint (pp. 160-162). How would you feel if you experienced something like that?
29. Ida realizes what Aunt Malayka means when she says, "It is better if we learn to understand them (p. 183)." What is Aunt Malayka referring to and why is it important?
30. Do you consider Ida a hero for saving Faris? Explain. What do the names *Ida* and *Faris* mean (pp. 186-187)? How are their names symbolic to the story?
31. How do Ida's experiences in Palestine help her with her passion project? Describe how Ida's classmates reacted to her passion project. Were you surprised?
32. After learning what you have from the story, why do you think the author chose to name the school in Oldbridge after Andrew Jackson?
33. After reading the story, explain why the title of the book is *Ida in the Middle*.



For in-depth teaching resources, see the *Ida in the Middle* [Unit Guide for Educators](#). This free Unit Guide serves as a comprehensive resource tailored for educators incorporating *Ida in the Middle* as a novel within Grades 6 through 9 English, Social Studies, or related courses. Additionally, it provides stand alone activities and lessons on Palestine that do not require reading the entire book. Designed to align with state and national standards, the guide is structured into nine lesson sequences, each comprising pre-, during-, and post-reading activities alongside student materials provided in editable Google Docs.

Expertly crafted by educators/curriculum developers Luma Hasan and Sana Ben Nacef from Teach for Liberation, the lessons and activities within this guide are deeply rooted in anti-racist and anti-bias methodologies. Central to these practices is the imperative of centering the lived experiences and perspectives of Palestinians. Students delve into Palestinian narratives through the perspectives of Palestinian organizers, artists, filmmakers, and more. Alongside these explorations, students engage in self-reflection regarding their own identities and the interconnectedness of various groups' experiences with oppression and their quests for justice. Ultimately, students will conclude the unit with a profound understanding of the significance of community in the pursuit of liberation.

Nora Lester Murad has also collected and developed a range of pedagogical and advocacy materials to support the teaching of Palestine in schools. In addition to the Unit Guide, they include:

- 3-minute video discussion starter about belonging
- curated spreadsheet of vetted K-12 lesson plans and activities
- updated list of recommended Palestinian children's books
- Gaza 2023 guidance document for K-12 teachers
- Nora's published research and opinion articles for librarians and educators
- set of high quality slides to help schools and universities resist pressure to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism

These materials are available on this frequently [updated page](#).

Read more about Nora Lester Murad and contact her for author visits at www.IdaInTheMiddle.com.

This discussion guide was prepared by Altair Education Consulting



Abeer Ramadan-Shinnawi, MEd., Founder and CEO

abeer@altaireducationconsulting.com

www.altairedconsulting.com