

Changing the Conversation: Book Recommendations For All Ages

Thousands of books have been written about this topic, and we couldn't possibly include them all. We recommend these selected titles as accessible entry points to challenging but necessary conversations.

Note: These recommendations do not constitute wholesale endorsement of the authors' perspectives, language choices, or politics.

Reminders:

- *Read the book yourself before you read it with the group.*
- *Be prepared for what emotions or questions may arise for participants as they read.*
- *Choose a book that you think will challenge participants appropriately.*
- *Prepare participants for what to expect when they read the book.*
- *Remember: Negative or reactive feedback is not the same thing as failure. Changing the conversation is challenging and may feel like two steps forward, one step back.*

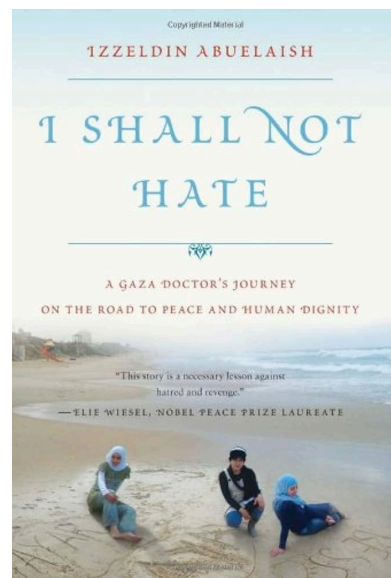
Narrative, Memoir and Personal Narratives

“I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor’s Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity”

by Izzeldin Abuelaish (2011)

Summary: After losing his daughters to an Israeli airstrike, Dr. Abuelaish chooses the path of peace and reconciliation. This memoir is a testament to human dignity and bridges political divides while humanizing Gazans.

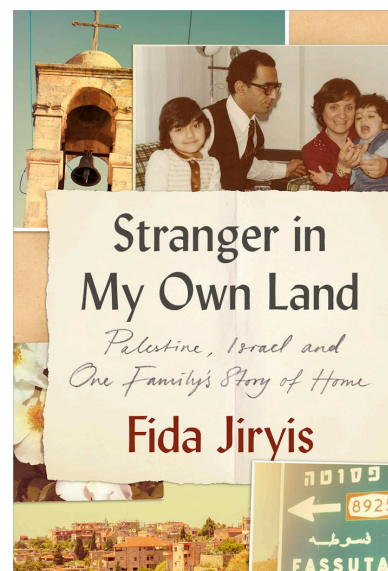
Best for: Communities and people across the political spectrum seeking to better understand the people in Gaza through a story of hope.



“Stranger in My Own Land” by Fida Jiryis (2022)

Summary: This memoir, written by Washington Post bestselling author Fida Jiryis, chronicles the alienation of a Palestinian citizen of Israel, navigating identity, history, and dispossession. It offers a poignant, personal lens into what it means to feel exiled in one’s own homeland.

Best for: Communities and people across the political spectrum seeking to better understand the experiences of the Palestinian people in Israel/Palestine. This is a good introduction to the occupation.

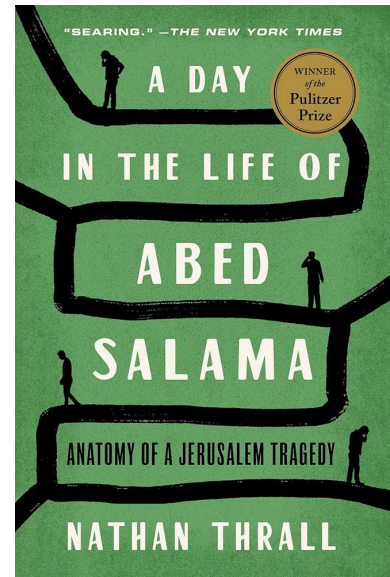


Narrative, Memoir and Personal Narratives

“A Day in the Life of Abed Salama: Anatomy of a Jerusalem Tragedy” by Nathan Thrall (2024)

Summary: This narrative by an American author and essayist follows a Palestinian father searching for his son after a tragic accident, exposing the human toll of the occupation’s bureaucracy. It is grounded in the present-day reality, not focusing on 1948 or Gaza, and offers an urgent, emotional reading experience.

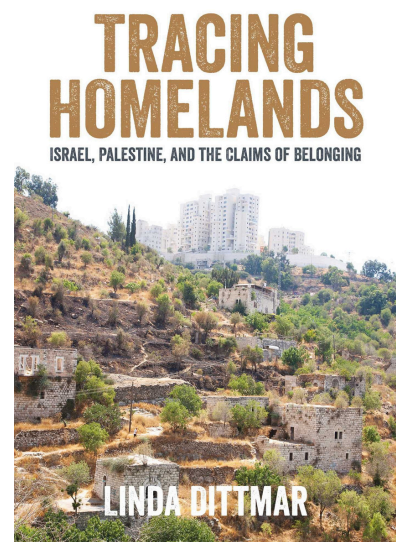
Best for: Communities with some familiarity with the occupation who want to add a more human element to their understanding.



“Tracing Homelands: Israel, Palestine, and the Claims of Belonging” by Linda Dittmar (2023)

Summary: In this memoir, Linda Dittmar, an Israeli Jewish woman and child of Israeli peace-builders, explores the complex history and reality in Israel and Palestine in 1948. She grapples with the narratives of her upbringing through a personal journey into depopulated Palestinian villages later in life.

Best for: Jewish communities who are connected to Israel and want to learn more about Palestinians.

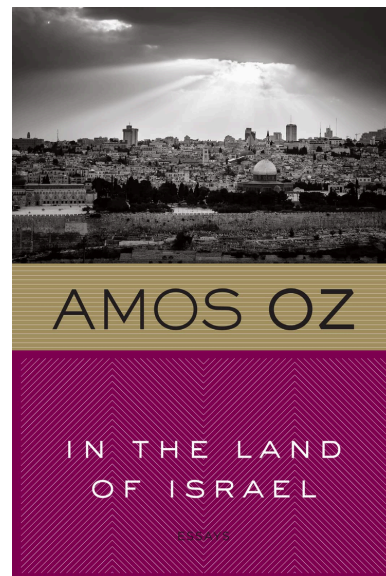


History and Political Analysis

“In the Land of Israel” by Amos Oz (1993)

Summary: In this book, Israeli writer Amos Oz travels across Israel to capture diverse voices of Israelis, offering a textured portrait of Israel’s people and ideologies.

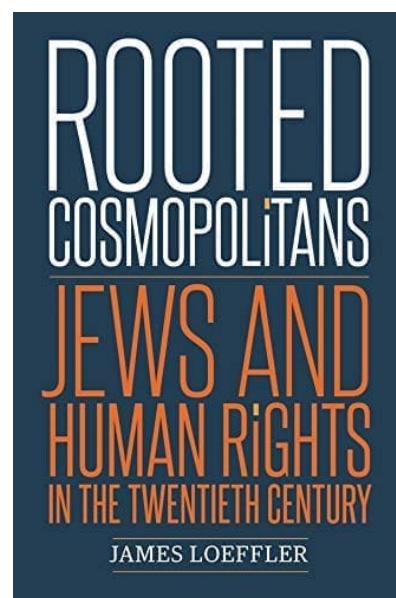
Best for: The book’s empathetic tone makes it a good option for communities that are deeply connected to Israel and are also curious about the complexity of the country’s people and communities. A good starting point for communities that are new to this kind of conversation and not ready for a book that tackles the occupation head on.



“Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century” by James Loeffler (2018)

Summary: This book, written by American historian James Loeffler, explores how Jews were central to the formation of the modern human rights movement, connecting Jewish history to global justice work. The book discusses Jews, Israel, and human rights through the perspectives of a rabbi, lawyer, activist, diplomat, and philanthropist.

Best for: Communities across the political spectrum. It could be particularly useful for communities who have a strong love for Israel and are ready to learn more about the Jewish imperative to protect human rights. Note: This book is not about the Palestinian experience.

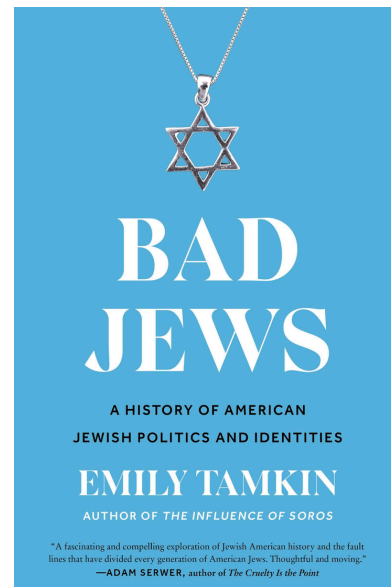


History and Political Analysis

“Bad Jews: A History of American Jewish Politics and Identities” by Emily Tamkin (2022)

Summary: Tamkin, an American journalist, offers a wide-ranging examination of the intra-Jewish debate about identity, belonging, and who gets to define Jewishness in America. This book articulates why different sub sects of Jews may feel the way they do and hold particular political positions.

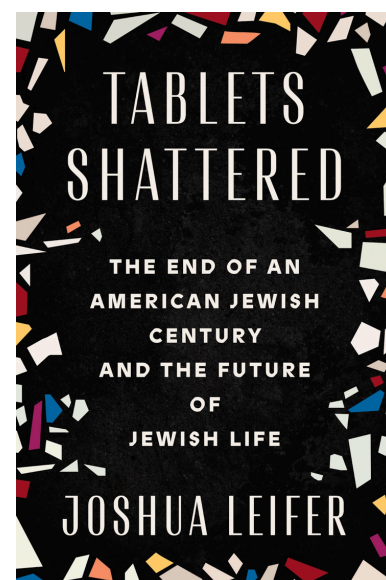
Best for: A wide range of communities, particularly those seeking to understand why others within the Jewish community feel the way they do.



“Tablets Shattered: The End of an American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life” by Joshua Leifer (2024)

Summary: American writer and activist Leifer’s book centers on the unraveling of the once-stable relationship between American Jews and Israel, arguing that unquestioning support for Israel has fractured as new generations grapple with issues of justice, identity, and belonging. The author, a progressive Zionist who lives in Israel, calls for a reimagined Jewish future rooted in pluralism, moral responsibility, and a more honest, critical engagement with Israel.

Best for: Communities that have already begun to talk about or explore the occupation. Particularly helpful for communities navigating the complexities of Jewish identity in a time of political and generational divides.



History and Political Analysis

“What Does Israel Fear From Palestine?” by Raja Shehadeh (2024)

Summary: A concise and easy-to-read historical account by a Palestinian lawyer and writer. Shehadeh explores some of the roots of Israeli fear and mistrust that have culminated in the current situation.

Best for: Communities in which people oppose the occupation and seek a deeper dive that may challenge them. Note: It doesn’t explicitly refer to Israel as an apartheid state, but does make comparisons to South African apartheid.

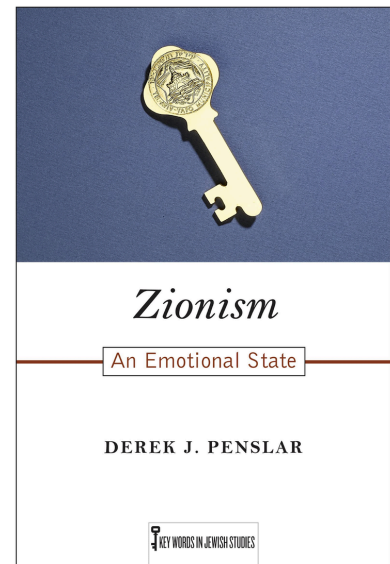


Theological and Ethical Reflection

“Zionism: An Emotional State” by Derek Penslar (2023)

Summary: Canadian historian Derek Penslar’s book explores the role that emotion plays in the Zionist movement.

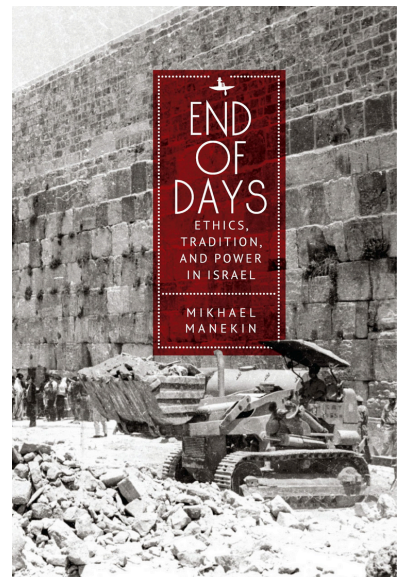
Best for: Mainstream or conservative-leaning communities. The book opens up new ways of understanding emotional attachment to Zionism and Israel.



“The End of Days: Ethics, Tradition, and Power in Israel” by Mikhael Manekin (2023)

Summary: This book is Manekin’s moral reckoning with power, occupation, and the ethical costs of statehood through the lens of Jewish tradition and identity. Manekin, an observant Israeli, shares insights into his experiences and journey as an anti-occupation Jew grappling with serving in the IDF through the lens of halakhah.

Best for: Communities across the political spectrum. The introduction is particularly powerful and can also be read and discussed on its own. The rest of the book dives into the halakhah of war. Communities with a deep relationship to text and tradition, including traditionally observant communities, will find this particularly meaningful.



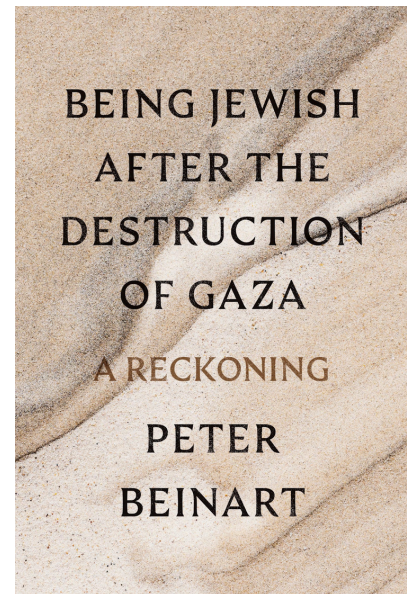
Theological and Ethical Reflection

“Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza”

by Peter Beinart (2024)

Summary: Author, journalist, and observant Jew Peter Beinart’s book reflects on Jewish identity in the aftermath of Gaza’s devastation, offering a moral and theological reckoning that can be a powerful tool for making sense of the aftermath of October 7th. He uses Jewish text and tradition as a jumping off point throughout the book.

Best for: This book may be the most challenging for mainstream American Jewish communities. Beinart characterizes Israel’s actions in Gaza as reprehensible and challenges many common narratives about Israel. He draws on his experiences in apartheid South Africa and makes comparisons to Israel and Palestine. For communities who actively oppose the occupation and are struggling to process the devastation in Gaza, this book offers an opportunity to grapple with the ethical dilemmas facing Jews today.

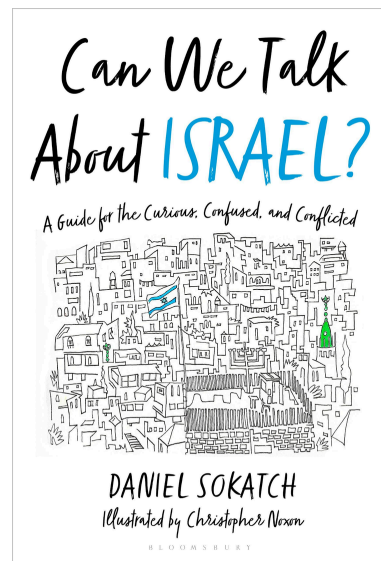


Introductions / Accessible Guides

“Can We Talk About Israel? A Guide for the Curious, Confused, and Conflicted” by Daniel Sokatch (2022)

Summary: The CEO of the New Israel Fund, Daniel Sokatch, provides an accessible guide to the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The book provides helpful history and context and invites difficult yet essential conversations.

Best for: This book is perfect for communities unsure where to begin and discussion groups who want more basic history. Communities who are completely new to considering Palestinian narratives alongside Jewish Israeli ones may find this a good starting point.

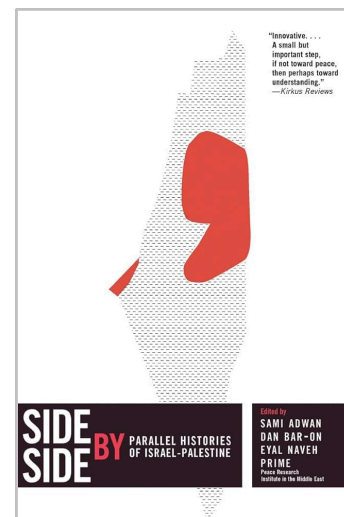


“Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine”

by Sami Adwan, Eyal Naveh, Dan Bar-on (2012)

Summary: Compiled by a group of Israeli and Palestinian educators, this book presents Israeli and Palestinian historical narratives in a dual format, placing each side's account of key events next to the other. The book's goal is to encourage mutual understanding by highlighting how differently the two peoples perceive their shared past. It includes many helpful maps and primary sources.

Best for: Communities ready for conversation about the competing histories of Israel and Palestine. Communities should be prepared to read history that may be new to them and from the perspective of Palestinians. This book is also a helpful resource from which to pull specific content — for example, competing narratives of a single historical event.

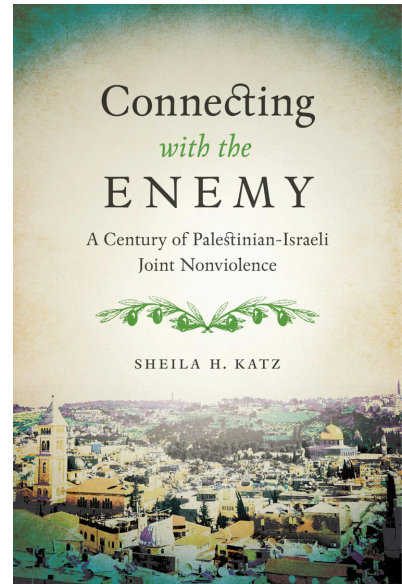


Visionary / Future-Oriented

“Connecting with the Enemy: A Century of Palestinian-Israeli Joint Nonviolence” by Sheila H. Katz (2016)

Summary: American professor Sheila Katz’s uplifting history book chronicles a century of joint nonviolent resistance, showing that coexistence and solidarity have long been a part of Israel and Palestine. It offers a counter-narrative to the inevitability of violence while emphasizing the challenges of that future.

Best For: Communities across the political spectrum interested in learning about and exploring alternative solutions to continuous war and violence.

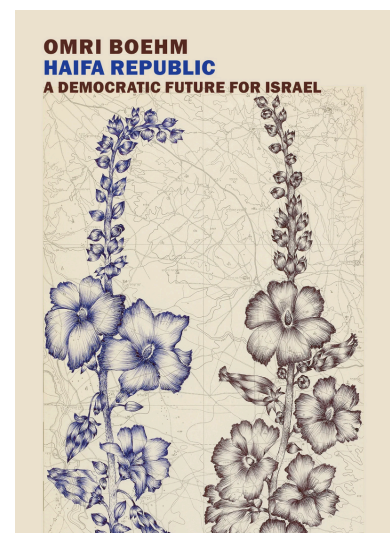


“Haifa Republic: A Democratic Future for Israel”

by Omri Boehm (2021)

Summary: This provocative yet hopeful book written by an Israeli journalist imagines a future in which Jews and Palestinians share equal rights, using Haifa as a symbolic model.

Best for: Communities interested in having a conversation about possible just and creative futures in addition to the two-state solution.

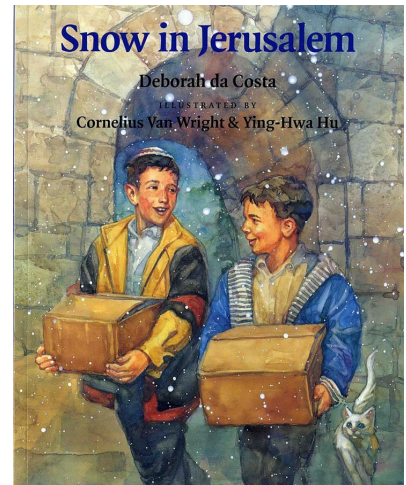


Children's Books

"Snow in Jerusalem" by Deborah da Costa (2001)

Summary: This book by an American author tells the story of a Jewish boy and an Arab boy in Jerusalem who discover they are both secretly caring for the same stray cat during a rare snowfall, leading to an unexpected friendship.

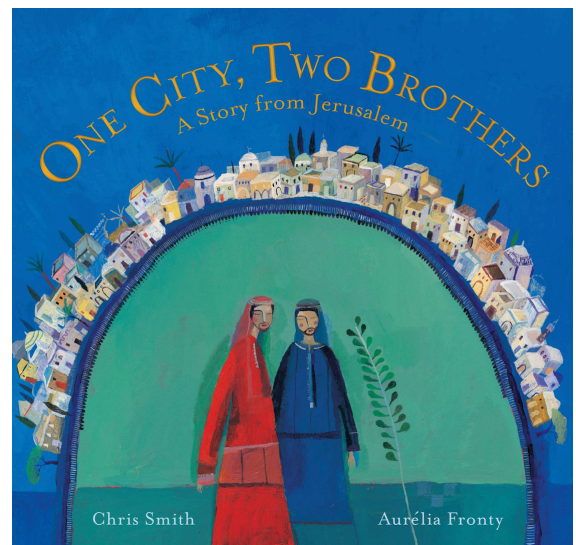
Best For: Young readers (age 4-8) learning about coexistence and shared humanity. Good for communities across the political spectrum.



"One City, Two Brothers" by Chris Smith (2007)

Summary: Based on a folktale, this story by American author Chris Smith follows two brothers from different villages who unknowingly care for each other and are said to have inspired the founding of Jerusalem.

Best For: Elementary-aged kids (age 6-9) in communities across the political spectrum. For younger kids, the book can be used to teach values of generosity and shared heritage. For slightly older children, this can be the beginning of a conversation about Israel and shared land.

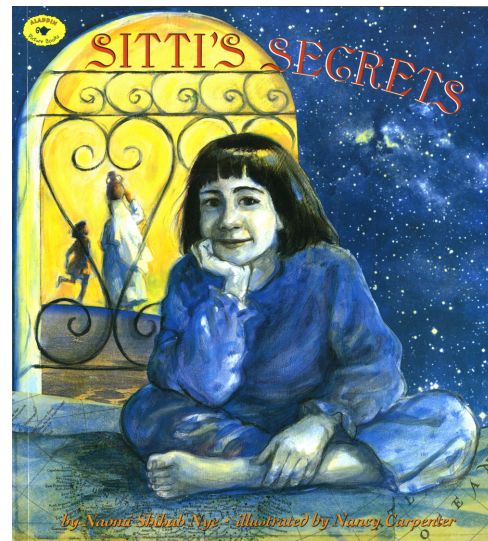


Children's Books

"Sitti's Secrets" by Naomi Shihab Nye (1994)

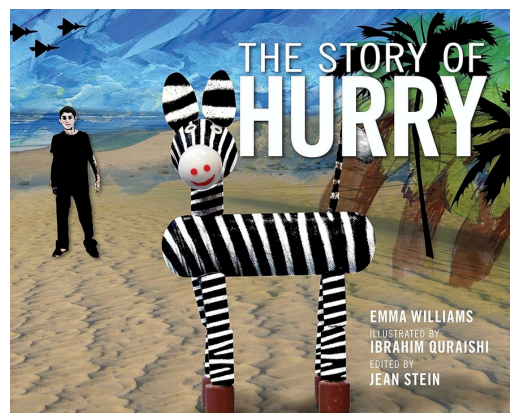
Summary: In this book by Palestinian poet and novelist Naomi Shihab Nye, a young girl visits her Palestinian grandmother. Despite not speaking the same language, they form a deep bond through love and shared experience.

Best For: Elementary school students (age 5-8) in communities open to discussing the humanity of Palestinians in an apolitical way. A starting point for discussing empathy, intergenerational relationships, and cultural bridges.



"The Story of Hurry" by Emma Williams (2014)

Summary: Author Emma Williams, a doctor and journalist, offers a window into the challenges of life in Gaza — and the resilience of its residents — through this story about a child's friendship with Hurry, a donkey in the Gaza zoo. Gorgeous illustrations by Berlin-based artist Ibrahim Quraishi bring the story to life.



Best For: Though the publisher recommends this book for ages 3-7, the difficult topics covered (including the deaths of animals) may be challenging for younger readers. For those on the older end of that age range, however, the book is an introduction to the difficulties of life in Gaza (even before the current war) and the humanity and dreams of the people who live there.

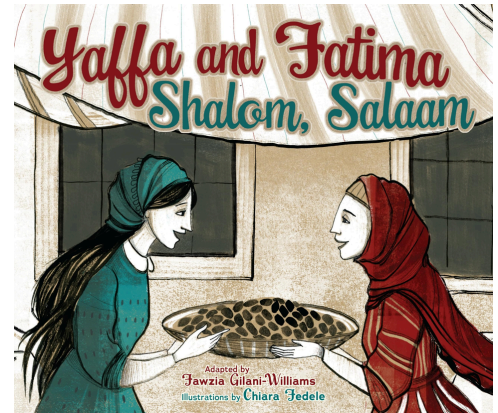
Children's Books

"Yaffa and Fatima, Shalom, Salaam"

by Fawzia Gilani-Williams (2017)

Summary: In this story by a British Muslim author based on both Jewish and Arab folktales, a Jewish woman and a Muslim woman show kindness and unity through acts of generosity, illustrating peaceful coexistence.

Best For: Pre-k through elementary school students (age 4-9). Great for communities across the political spectrum to explore shared values and the power of acts of kindness.



"Shared Lands: A Comprehensive Kid's Guide to Israel and Palestine" by Artee Oppenheimer (2023)

Summary: A clear, accessible guide introducing children to the geography, cultures, and current realities of Israel and Palestine and covering history from 1300 BCE to today. The author is an American Jewish therapist.

Best For: Children as young as first grade (with educator support) through middle school (age 6-14). Ideal for religious school classrooms introducing the region. Have the teacher read it in advance and be prepared for questions and scaffolding.



Children's Books

"Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine"

by Hannah Moushabeck (2023)

Summary: A Palestinian-American tells the story of three sisters listening as their father recounts tender stories of his Palestinian childhood, helping them connect to their cultural roots.

Best For: Communities aware of the occupation and interested in introducing Palestinian perspectives about the land. A great book for elementary school children (age 4-8) to explore memory, longing, and cultural identity.

