Recommended Books for Elementary School
* = a Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) book award winner

Literature: Fiction, Personal Account, Poetry

* Time to Pray by Maha Addasi.
This story provides a clear explanation of Muslim prayers and aspects of Islamic practice in a story that revolves around a loving relationship between a girl and her grandmother.

* The Butter Man by Elizabeth Alalou and Ali Alalou
This story provides an introduction to the culture of the Berbers of Morocco.

Nadia the Willful by Sue Alexander
An Arab sheikh and his daughter learn to cope with the death of a family member.

* Mirror by Jeannie Baker
This quiet, inventive, mostly wordless picture book follows two boys on opposite sides of the world through a single day, highlighting the differences and universalities in their lives. Meant to be read simultaneously, the stories appear side by side as separate mini-books bound within the same covers, while brief, introductory lines of text in English and Arabic introduce the boys, one in urban Australia and one in rural Morocco.

* Mystery Bottle by Kristen Balouch
Mystery Bottle is a tale of fantasy and imagination as a little boy in New York blows into a bottle and is carried to Iran where his father was born.

The Little Black Fish by Samad Behrangi
This Iranian short story is made to be read aloud to older elementary school children through adults. It has many different levels of meaning - about breaking out of one’s narrow environment and learning about the wider world. Even more interesting is the fact that the author, a school teacher might have been murdered in 1968 at the age of 29 by the shah’s secret police because of the way he encouraged his elementary school students to think freely and look at the social problems of their country. This small book also is written half in Persian, so kids can see what the language looks like and how the cover of a Middle Eastern book is the back of an American one (since they write from right to left).

Nasreddin Hodja by Mehmet Ali Birant
This is a collection of short (often humorous) anecdotes about an early 13th century Turkish figure. It’s as interesting for its beautiful Ottoman-style illustrations as for the stories. (Note:
Nasreddin Hodja is called Goha in the Arab world and Mullah Nasreddin in the Persian world. The stories are beloved classics in the entire region.)

One Green Apple by Eve Bunting
It’s hard to be the new kid in school, especially when you look different and don’t speak English, but on a school field trip to pick apples and make cider, Farah begins to feel she can fit in.

Amina and Muhammad's Special Visitor by Diane Turnage Burgoyne and Penny Williams Yaqub
This children's book describes family life in Saudi Arabia. It also includes background information for teachers.

A Stone in My Hand by Cathryn Clinton
A story of an 11-year-old Palestinian girl who has to deal with her father’s disappearance in Israel and her 12-year-old brother’s desire for revenge.

* Extra Credit by Andrew Clements
Abby Carson is a sixth grade student in rural Illinois whose head is everywhere but her schoolwork. In order to be spared the embarrassment of being left behind a grade, she agrees to an extra credit assignment involving writing to a pen pal in another country and so she meets Sadeed Bayat and his sister Meriem in rural Afghanistan. As their friendship flourishes, problems arise on both sides.

Snow in Jerusalem by Deborah Da Costa
An Israeli and a Palestinian boy must work together to save a stray cat that both have befriended.

The Legend of the Persian Carpet by Tomie Da Paola and Claire Stewart
This is a Persian folktale retold by the author of Strega Nona.

The Day of Ahmed’s Secret by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland
This nicely written story is about a young Egyptian boy who is learning to read.

* The House of Wisdom by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland
A young boy in 9th century Baghdad (the golden age of Islamic civilization) is inspired by his scholar father to go on a search for knowledge and wisdom.

Sami and the Time of the Troubles by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland
This haunting and beautifully illustrated story tells of a 10-year-old boy during the fighting in Beirut, Lebanon.

* Lugalbanda, The Boy Who Got Caught Up in a War by Kathy Henderson, illustrated by Jane Ray
This five thousand-year-old story from the land of ancient Sumer, now Iraq, focuses on the boy Lugalbanda who assists his father, the king, during a military campaign.
* **The Secret Message** by Mina Javaherbin  
*This book retells a story taken from an ancient Persian poem, “Parrot and the Merchant,” by Jalaledin Rumi. It is the tale of a wealthy merchant who keeps a parrot in his shop whose colorful feathers, singing, and talking attract many customers. When the merchant travels to India on a shopping trip, he promises to bring something home for each family member, including the parrot, whose unusual request leads to his own freedom.*

**Folk Tales of Egypt** by Denys Johnson-Davies and Tarek Mossad  
*This is a book of folk tales from Egypt.*

**Goha** by Denys Johnson-Davies  
*This is a brief, illustrated book of Arab folk tales. (Note: Goha is called Nasreddin Hodja in the Turkish world. The stories are beloved classics in the entire region.)*

**Goha, the Wise Fool** by Denys Johnson-Davies and Hag Hamdy Hany  
*This is a brief, illustrated book of Arab folk tales. (Note: Goha is called Nasreddin Hodja in the Turkish world. The stories are beloved classics in the entire region.)*

* **Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors** by Hena Khan (Author) and Mehrdokht Amini (illustrator)  
*This is a book about Islam for early elementary students. The beautiful pictures and simple rhyming prose make it interesting to young children, while the glossary at the end assists teachers in introducing Muslim culture and practices.*

* **A Little Piece of Ground** by Elizabeth Laird  
*A 12-year-old Palestinian boy tries to find a place to play soccer.*

* **The Storytellers** by Ted Lewin  
*This is a gentle story with beautiful illustrations, telling of a young boy and his grandfather who carry on the tradition of storytelling in the market place of Fez, Morocco.*

**Magid Fasts for Ramadan** by Mary Mathews and E.B. Lewis  
*An 8-year-old Egyptian boy wants to fast like the grown-ups during the Muslim month of Ramadan.*

* **How Many Donkeys? An Arabic Counting Tale** by Margaret Read McDonald, Nadia Jameel Taibah (authors) and Carol Liddiment (Illustrator)  
*This humorous tale offers a great introduction to Arabic numbers for younger readers, as well as introducing the Joha/Goha/Hoca character known throughout the region.*

* **The Wooden Sword: A Jewish Folktale from Afghanistan** by Ann Redisch Stampler, illustrated by Carol Liddiment  
*This is a charming story with “vibrant illustrations with rich, sensuous colors that epitomize the beauty of the Middle East.” Reviewers also loved the repetition of the phrase “I have faith that everything will turn out just as it should,” which is reassuring to children. It is well written, engaging, and colorful.*
* The Best Eid Ever by Asma Mobin-Uddin, illustrated by Laura Jacobsen.  
The Eid al-Adha is the biggest holiday in the Islamic calendar, but this year Aneesa hardly feels like celebrating because her parents are in far away Saudi Arabia making the pilgrimage to Mecca. Then, Aneesa meets two young refugees who have just arrived in the U.S., and she decides to help the girls celebrate and make it the best Eid ever.

* The Rich Man and the Parrot retold by Suzan Nadimi, illustrated by Ande Cook  
This story is a retelling of a story of a 13th century tale by the Persian poet Rumi.

Sitti’s Secrets by Naomi Shihab Nye  
A girl raised in the US goes to visit her grandmother in a Palestinian village.

* Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad written and illustrated by James Rumford  
This celebration of writing and art involves a young Iraqi boy in contemporary Baghdad and the story of a master calligrapher, who lived eight hundred years before, also during a time of war.

* One City, Two Brothers by Chris Smith, illustrated by Aurélia Fronty  
Written by a former worker with UNICEF and Oxfam in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, this re-telling of a traditional story from the time of King Solomon serves as a metaphor for the “wish for the people of Israel and Palestine to find peace.”

The Seagull of Galata Tower ZEYNEP by Julia Townsend  
This book offers a birds-eye view (LITERALLY) of Istanbul.

* Folktales from Turkey: From Agri to Zelve by Serpil Ural, illustrated by Dilara Arin  
This book is a wonderful combination of folktales and stories in combination with historic, geographic, and cultural content. Evaluators especially enjoyed the format: short stories with side panels that offer information on a wide variety of topics. The book is well-written, nicely illustrated, and offers teachers many opportunities for follow-up research or art projects. Overall, “it is an unusual book and reflects tremendous research and creativity on the part of the author and illustrator.”

Watermelons, Walnuts and the Wisdom of Allah and Other Tales of the Hoca by Barbara Walker  
This book is collection of Turkish tales about the legendary Nasreddin Hoca (called Goha in Arabic). The book has short, humorous stories with illustrations.

* Four Feet, Two Sandals by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, illustrated by Doug Chayka.  
This lovely story, set in a refugee camp, tells of two Afghani girls who share one pair of sandals.
Non-Fiction

* **Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt’s Treasured Books** by Karen Leggett Abouraya (author) and Susan L. Roth (illustrator)
  This children’s picture book tells the true story that took place during the Egyptian uprising (during the Arab Spring) when demonstrators joined together to protect the library of Alexandria. It’s a story that helps young children to think about current events – and the importance of books and libraries in society.

**Islamic Spain** by Rosalie F. Baker and Charles F. Baker
This book has articles for kids on the history of medieval Spain.

**The Genius of Islam: How Muslims Made the Modern World** by Bryn Barnard
This is a wonderfully readable book about medieval achievements in the Muslim world. It is divided into short sections on topics such as paper, math, band music, etc.

* **The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Arabia** by Mary Beardwood
This detailed encyclopedia entry focuses on the geography, cultures, and, especially, the flora and fauna of the Arabian Peninsula. With many photographs, charts, maps, figures, asides, this exhaustive and beautifully illustrated text will answer every question you never knew that you had about Arabia on subjects from pearling to fossils, migratory birds to the many uses of the date palm. The sheer breadth of information will eliminate the narrow geographic and social stereotypes so many students have about the Middle East.

* **Lebanon A-B-C: A Middle Eastern Mosaic** by Marijean Boueri, Jill Boutros, and Joanne Sayad, illustrated by Tatiana Sabbagh
  Kareem, an eleven year-old Lebanese boy, and his friends of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, proudly introduce readers to the history, culture, and daily life of their country.

**Judaism** by Douglas Charing
This book provides an introduction to Jewish beliefs and traditions.

* **Kings and Carpenters: One Hundred Bible Land jobs You Might Have Praised or Panned** by Laurie Coulter and Mary Newbigging
  This is a great introduction to archeology and an overview of jobs that existed during biblical times.

**Muhammad** by Vedat Dalokay
This beautifully illustrated book describes the beliefs of the Muslim religion.

**Sister Shako and Kolo the Goat: Memories of My Childhood in Turkey** by Vedat Dalokay
The author writes of his childhood in eastern Turkey.

* **Muhammad** written and illustrated by Demi
  Demi portrays the Prophet Muhammad’s life in a richly colorful, two-dimensional Persian style, respecting Islamic tradition by omitting depictions of the Prophet and his family.
Judaism by DK Eyewitness Books
Discover the history, faith, and culture that have shaped the modern Jewish world. With over 50 million copies sold in 88 countries and in 36 languages, Eyewitness Books are truly the ultimate visual information encyclopedias for the 21st Century. Carrying on the tradition of integrating words and pictures, these three new titles in the Eyewitness series are timely editions to any library.

Neve Shalom Wahat Al-Salam: Oasis of Peace by Laurie Dolphin
Despite its ponderous title, it is a good book with vivid photographs. It describes the lives of two ten-year-old boys living in a community in Israel in which Jews and Palestinians live together.

Customs of the Arabian Gulf: Drawings and Paintings by School Children in Bahrain and Dubai by Bahia Fakhro and Ann Walcro
The book contains artwork by Arab children and descriptions of their content.

Iran: The People by April Fast
This book describes and shows lifestyles in Iran.

Iraq: The Culture by April Fast
This book describes and shows the culture of Iraq.

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Ramadan by Suhaib Hamid Ghazi and Omar Rayyan
The book describes the Muslim holiday of Ramadan.

* Count Your Way through Iran by Jim Haskins and Kathleen Benson, illustrated by Farida Zaman
This is an excellent, non-political, introduction to Iran’s culture.

Celebrate Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr with Praying Fasting, and Charity (National Geographic, “Holidays Around the World” series) by Deborah Heiligman
Although it is at a low reading level, this book vividly describes the customs and beliefs surrounding the Muslim month of fasting.

Sound the Shofar!: A Story for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur by Leslie Himmelman and John Himmelman
This book focuses on the high holy days of Judaism and how one family celebrates those together and by helping out the less fortunate.

* Celebrating Ramadan by Diane Hoyt Goldsmith, with photographs by Lawrence Migdale
This photo-essay follows a fourth-grade Muslim boy living in New Jersey as he celebrates the holy month of Ramadan.
* The Arab World Thought of It: Inventions, Innovations, and Amazing Facts by Saima Hussain
This is a compelling book with “sufficient text to explain the beautiful photography.” Students in intermediate grades, middle school, and even high school will love learning about developments in the medieval Islamic world that affect our lives today. They will be intrigued by stories – and photos – showing how soap was invented, how the scalpel was developed for use in surgery, how wind was first harnessed for power, and many others. Teachers will love the accompanying map, timeline, and index, which make the book useful and informative as well as fun.

Celebrating Norouz (Persian New Year) by Yassaman Jalali
Description of the most popular Iranian holiday, Persian New Year, celebrated March 21st, the first day of Spring.

The Most Magnificent Mosque by Ann Jungman and Shelley Fowles
A beautifully illustrated book about medieval Spain and its Muslim heritage

Middle Eastern Migration by Deborah Kent
This upper elementary book has wonderful photos and descriptions of displaced people in the Middle East. It also has ideas for what children can do to help.

Muslim Child: Understanding Islam through Stories and Poems by Rukhsana Khan
A collection of Muslim stories with sidebars explaining important terms and issues.

* Mosque by David Macaulay.
Macauley’s book provides step-by-step details and diagrams of the construction of a fictional sixteenth century Ottoman mosque. As the author walks the reader through the engineering and artistry of the structure, he reveals the mosque’s diverse functions in the community.

A 16th Century Mosque by Fiona MacDonald and Mark Bergin
This book describes medieval architecture, culture, and religion in the 16th century Ottoman Empire.

Passover by David F. Marx
This book gives religious and historical information about the Jewish Passover holiday.

Foods of Iran by Lawrence McKay Jr.
Beautiful photographs and clear prose show a lot about Iranian culture through a description of the food. There are recipes, cultural descriptions, and details about how the food is grown and sold.

Wonders of Persia by Nazli Irani Monahan
The book describes the history of Iran from ancient times to the present.

Egypt: The Culture by Arlene Muskovitch
This book describes and shows the culture of Egypt.
* What’s the Buzz? Honey for a Sweet New Year by Alison Ofanansky, photographs by Eliyahu Alpern
This book provides information on the Jewish celebration of Rosh Hashanah traditions, the bee industry, and life in Israel. Written for young children, it fills a huge hole in non-fiction for early grade levels. Reviewers especially loved the photographs showing real Israeli children in everyday life.

* Islam by Sue Penney
From the “Introducing Religions” series, this gives an overview of the Muslim faith.

Judaism by Sue Penney
Discover the rich cultural background behind this major world religion. Find out where Judaism originated, trace its history, and explore the meanings.

When the Nazis occupied Paris, no Jew was safe from arrest and deportation. Few Parisians were willing to risk their own lives to help. Yet during that perilous time, many Jews found refuge in an unlikely place—the sprawling complex of the Grand Mosque of Paris. Not just a place of worship but a community center, this hive of activity was an ideal temporary hiding place for escaped prisoners of war and Jews of all ages, especially children. Beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched.

* Traveling Man: The Journey of Ibn Battuta, 1325-1354 by James Rumford
The true story of the travels of 14th century Arab explorer Ibn Battuta.

Foods of Iran by Barbara Sheen
Beautiful photographs and clear prose show a lot about Iranian culture through a description of the food. There are recipes, cultural descriptions, and details about how the food is grown and sold.

* The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela by Uri Shulevitz
This book is a true account of the twelfth-century journeys of a Jewish traveler throughout the then-known world, including Constantinople, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Persia, and Egypt.

Israel: The Culture by Debbie Smith
This book describes and shows the culture of Israel.

Lands, Peoples, and Communities of the Middle East by Juanita Will Soghikian and Penny Williams Yaqub
This is an introductory work-study text.

* Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq by Mark Alan Stamaty
A graphic novel telling the true story of a woman's struggle to save the books in the Basra library during the 2003 war in Iraq. It's a simple story, but the graphic novel style would appeal to some upper elementary and middle school readers.
**Islamic Design: A Genius for Geometry** by Daud Sutton  
*Focusing on Islamic geometric patterns, simple and complex, man-made and in nature, this book offers unique insight into Islamic culture.*

**The Camel Family** by John Bonnett Wexo  
*A book about camels from the Zoo Book series.*

* **The Librarian of Basra** by Jeanette Winter  
*This picture book tells the true story of a woman’s struggle to save the books in the Basra library during the 2003 war in Iraq.*

**Seven Wonders of the Ancient Middle East** by Michael Woods and Mary B. Woods  
*A nicely illustrated book about the ancient Middle East. It provides history of the societies of the time.*

**The Tomb of King Tutankhamen: Unearthing Ancient Worlds** by Michael Woods and Mary B. Woods  
*Nicely illustrated and contains great photographs, this book gives a lot of history about King Tutankhamen as well as ancient Egypt in general.*