Recommended Books for Elementary School - Early Grades

* = a Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) book award winner

Literature: Fiction, Poetry

* Hands around the Library: Protecting Egypt’s Treasured Books by Karen Leggett Abouraya, illustrated by Susan L. Roth
This remarkable picture book makes the Egyptian uprising accessible to young children through the lens of the library and offers useful background information and possible extensions across the curriculum.

* Time to Pray by Maha Addasi, illustrated by Ned Gannon

* 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.

The Girl Who Lost Her Smile by Karim Alrawi and Stefan Czemecki
This Arab tale tells about a girl who lost her smile and the people of Baghdad who help her find it.

* Mirror by Jeannie Baker
This lovely picture book compares life in two cities: one in Morocco, one in Australia.

* 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.

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.

Tales Told in Tents by Sally Pomme Claxton and Sophie Herxheimer
This is a collection of short stories from Central Asia.
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 Secret Message by Mina Javaherbin
Based on a poem by the famous Persian author Rumi, this story explores the value of freedom.

Ramadhan and Eid ul-Fitr by Azra Jessa
Azra celebrates Ramadan.

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.)

* Never Say A Mean Word Again: A Tale from Medieval Spain by Jacqueline Jules, illustrated by Durga Yael Bernhard
Based on a true story, this book tells the story of a friendship between a Jewish boy and a Muslim boy in medieval Spain.

One Night: A Story from the Desert by Cristina Kessler and Ian Schoenherr
A Tuareg boy in the Sahara desert waits for a goat to give birth.

Night of the Moon: A Muslim Holiday Story by Hena Khan and Julie Paschkis
A seven-year-old Pakistani-American girl celebrates Ramadan.

Sound the Shofar!: A Story for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur by Leslie Kimmelman 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.

What’s the Matter, Habibi? by Betsy Lewin
This warm and funny story concerns a boy and his pet camel.
* 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.

* 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.

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.

Caravan by Lawrence McKay Jr. and Daryl Ligason
A 10-year-old Uzbek boy makes his first caravan trip through the mountains of Afghanistan.

* 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 and Nancy Carpenter
A girl raised in the U.S. goes to visit her grandmother in a Palestinian village.

* The Camel in the Sun by Griffin Ondaatje, illustrated by Linda Wolfsgruber
The story is based on a hadith told about the Prophet Muhammad, who rebukes a man for mistreating his camel. The story deals with the issue of cruelty to animals.

The Hundredth Name by Shulamith Levey Oppenheim and Michael Hays
This nicely illustrated story tells of friendship and Muslim faith set in a village in Egypt.

* 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.

Nesma Buys the Beans by Andy Smart and Walid Taher
A little girl in Egypt struggles to buy beans for breakfast.

* 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 Wooden Sword: A Jewish Folktale from Afghanistan* by Ann Redisch Stampler  
_This is a retelling of a classic Afghani Jewish folktale._

*The Story of Hurry* by Jean Stein  
_This is a story of a zookeeper during the war in Gaza. In order to give children hope, he paints stripes on two white donkeys to turn them into “zebras.”_

*Razia’s Ray of Hope: One Girl’s Dream of Education* by Elizabeth Suneby, illustrated by Suana Verelst  
_Based on a true story, this book describes a young girl’s hopes and challenges as a school for girls opens in her part of Afghanistan._

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

*Watermelons, Walnuts and the Wisdom of Allah and Other Tales of the Hoca* by Barbara Walker  
_This book is a 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._

**Personal Account or Biography**

*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._

*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._

*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._

*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._
**Non-Fiction/Reference**

*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 to Z: 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 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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*Count Your Way through the Arab World* by Jim Haskins and Dana Gustafson
This book gives an introduction to Arab life and beliefs

*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 Norouz (Persian New Year) by Yassaman Jalali and Marjan Zamanian
*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.*

* Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns: A Muslim Book of Colors by Hena Khan, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini
*This beautifully illustrated and easy-to-read yet engaging book introduces younger students to the religion and culture of Islam.*

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

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

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.*

* New Month, New Moon by Alison Ofanansky
*This book is a photo essay about the changing phases of the moon in Israel and their relationship to the Jewish calendar.*

* What’s the Buzz: Honey for a Sweet New Year by Alison Ofanansky
*This book explains how bees create honey and highlights how Israelis celebrate Rosh Hashanah.*

* 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.*