



Three Wishes

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In a rehabilitation center for disabled children, twelve-year-old Nora says she loves the color pink and chewing gum and explains that the wheels of her wheelchair are like her legs. Eleven-year-old Mohammad describes how his house was demolished by soldiers. And we meet twelve-year-old Salam, whose older sister walked into a store in Jerusalem and blew herself up, killing herself and two people, and injuring twenty others. All these children live both ordinary and extraordinary lives. They argue with their siblings. They dream about their wishes for the future. They have also seen their homes destroyed, their families killed, and they live in the midst of constant upheaval and violence.

This simple and telling book allows children everywhere to see those caught in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as children just like themselves, but who are living far more difficult, dangerous lives.

Three Wishes Details

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Holly Lewis says

Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak is a book by Deborah Ellis fulfilling my "world" lit category. It's a book written based off of mostly spontaneous interviews she did with young kids in Palestine and Israel about their lives, their aspirations, and their ideas about the future. There are a lot of characters, as she talks to many children. She talks about the children she meets in a sort of biography, and then writes a short excerpt. Sometimes they are stories from the child's life, sometimes they are just quotes from the children taken from the interviews. She talks a lot about religion and how it contributes to some kids' dreams and how others know that their religion affects what their futures are going to contain. Another large focus of the book is how the war in the Middle East shapes their lives at a young age and how they perceive war, having grown up with it so close.

I liked the book mostly, but sometimes I found it to be a little slow; it doesn't help that it's a political system, religion, and government very different from ones I am accustomed to, so there's a lot of side-learning involved with reading the text. I find the story hard to get into, as a whole piece anyway, because it's so disjointed and has so many kids' stories melded into one book. It's nicer in shorter pieces or excerpts. Also, it's very historically based and theoretically non-fiction, and that's not something I usually pick up of my own accord.

I'd say that children aged 11-14 would probably find this an engaging text, suitable for their reading level. Students interested in politics, the Middle East, current events, or social causes might be drawn to this book, as well as children that enjoy non-fiction. I would recommend this book to any child, girl or boy. Also, I think this book could be a strong teaching tool; America is involved in the Middle East, but the culture and even the war aren't taught that often in our history books. I think that pieces of the story would be enlightening cross subject tools to give children in America a view of how kids are living on the other side of the world.

Hannah says

I felt like the interviews in the beginning of the book were a bit trite, but as I read through and discovered more and more variations of experiences and opinions of Palestinian and Israeli children, I appreciated the slow roll towards some of the more intense experiences at the end of the book (that of the boy who'd been shot by Israeli soldiers, the girl whose sister became a suicide bomber, the high schoolers whose friends had been killed in bombings, etc). It did give a sense of how stunted and difficult life must be for Palestinians, and for the complexity of Israelis - particularly Jews - who are fleeing persecution in other areas of the world, and yet recognizing the unfair actions that their own soldiers are committing, and weighing their own choice to join the military or face harsh censure when they grow up. I appreciated the diversity of ages, genders, religions, and opinions that Ellis was able to present here, along with some of the powerful raw emotions, and the glimpses into how these children might act as adults based on their feelings now. Overall, the spectrum of opinions was encouraging; it was good to see that many of the children *aren't* completely polarized, though it is scary to see that some of them are (particularly at young ages).

In terms of the writing, I did feel at times the the narratives themselves were a bit scattered and unorganized, like Ellis had great quotes from the interviews but didn't quite know how to fit them together, and I also noticed that the prose seemed unnaturally simple. This could be a translation issue, but I feel like this might just be Ellis' style from another recent read by her. This simplicity works nicely for the younger kids, but for

the teens, it felt like it hampered their expression and unnecessarily reduced their feelings into broader, less potent terms.

I could easily see using this whole book or even just selecting chapters from it to compliment a multi-faceted study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Leane says

“Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak” is a very informative book for young adults as well as adults. I love reading real life memoirs of people who have experienced things that I have never experienced and seen things that I have never seen or heard of in my lifetime. These kinds of books can really touch your heart and make you want to understand what is going on in the world, and I think that is important for people of all ages to understand. I honestly have never read a book about children living in Israel and I’m very glad that I finally did because I now realize that I was just so ignorant. These stories have very similar themes and experiences throughout, and I was glad that author Deborah Ellis shared stories from Israeli and Palestinian children back-to-back so that I could compare their experiences.

I was amazed that the mindsets of the children differed so greatly. Some of the children seemed very open minded and willing to meet children from the opposite culture, but others really seemed to dislike the other children, even if they hadn’t met any. Talia, on page 33, says, “It would be good for me to meet some Palestinians. Kids are the same everywhere.” She seems to be more open minded and has hope for peace between the two peoples. Mahmood on page 50 says, “I don’t know any Israeli children. I don’t want to know any. They hate me and I hate them.” The most memorable and shocking part of the book for me was the story of Hakim, a twelve-year-old boy who was shot in the legs fifteen times. He says that he doesn’t want to get to know any Israelis because they are different than him. He says, “I have only one wish. To get well soon so that I can get back to fighting the Israelis.” That quote pretty much speaks for itself; not even a near death experience can change this boy’s mindset about war. It seems to me that Palestinian children have a more difficult time accepting Israeli children or people in general because their situation is more hostile. The stories that the Palestinian children shared seemed more violent and the Israeli soldiers so cruel. However all of these children are growing up in an environment full of hate, and that is going to affect them when they become adults. So is there really any hope of peace in this country in the future?

Lisa Shamchuk says

A moving book of children's thoughts about a troubled area in a troubled time.

Rebecca Owen says

This book would make the perfect introduction into the war in the middle east. Billed as a YA/teen book, this still is a powerful book for all reading ages. As the title suggests, it tells the true stories of children on both sides of this struggle. Each child’s letter about themselves and their lives are introduced by the author with facts related to how that particular child lives. The book begins with a general introduction of the history of the war, then is followed by the 429 names of children killed between September of 2000 and March of 2003, each name followed by the age of the child. The stories told by the children are at once hopeful and

heartbreaking. Most of the Israeli children have never met any Palestinian children and vice versa. On top of that, most of the Palestinian children's only contacts with Israelis are the soldiers who are a constant and terrifying presence. At the same time, the only Palestinians the Israeli children ever hear about are the suicide bombers who kill not only themselves, but also any innocent people who may be near them. On top of this, there are also the propaganda themes and anti-Arab images that make their way down to the children, as when one eighteen-year-old states "We, the Israelis have been trying, but how much can we give? After all, this is our land. I wish all the Jews in the world would come to Israel, and that all the Palestinians would leave and go live in some other Arab country" (Ellis 76). These stories speak with the poignancy of a child's eye, asserting that, "setting off bombs in shopping centers... is not a good idea. It makes Palestinians look bad. We should be terrorizing the Israeli soldiers, not the Israeli people" (Ellis 62). Some are sadly already filled with the hate of the other side that comes from living under these situations. And many Palestinian children suffer from post-traumatic stress, something that is almost ignored (Moughrabi). But most wish only for peace, for war to end. One of the last stories is that of Asif, a fifteen-year-old Israeli with a wise point of view. He promises that when he becomes a soldier, he will do everything he can to protect the Palestinian people from the abuse of soldiers. He then says that, "some people use God as an easy way to explain things. They say, 'This is what God wants us to do,' like 'God wants us to fight this war,' 'God wants us to kill these people,' and 'God is on our side.' It's an easy way to say, 'I'm not responsible for what I do'" (Ellis 97). Though not a book that I believe teens might choose to read if given an option of others, this would make a great required reading at the beginning of opening up this issue, inviting a rich discussion among a class and could be used with any age, since all ages are included in the children speaking.

Sarah says

At my synagogue(s) I had often heard about the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, especially during the rabbis' sermons. I realized that the destructive fighting had escalated as the years went on. However, I had often tuned some of it out, not fully grasping the horrors that were going on over there. After all, I live in America. I do not live in the vicinity of this conflict. Don't get me wrong, I was aware of the situation, and I did care about the violence and bloodshed, however, until reading this book, I did not realize the extent of the situation, especially when it came to the lives of the children living there.

As the title suggests, in this book children from both sides of the conflict tell about their experiences living in this war-zone. The children, ranging in ages from 8 to 18, are frank about what is happening around them. The author gives us background before each child's own words, helping us to understand more about their situation and the specific foci of the child's story. It hardly seems fair to call them children, though, after reading these, as they have seen and dealt with so many adult issues and such violence. Many know people who have been killed or seriously injured in the destructive practices there.

There are many themes that are brought numerous times in the interviews; violence, hatred, and fear being top among these. Violence is seen or heard about everywhere. The children are accustomed to seeing soldiers with guns. Bombs and killing can occur anywhere, often seemingly without cause. Many talk about the fear that goes along with this and that they do not feel safe. People can get shot or bombed no matter if the victims are good or bad people. There is no escape from the war and children essentially live with PTSD (post-traumatic shock disorder).

Anger, resentment, animosity, and isolation were typical mentions by the children. Much of the hatred is directed at the soldiers, though animosity is projected at the opposite side as well. Many of the children have not even had contact with other children of the opposite side, due to the strict isolation of the Palestinians and Israelis. It sounded like Israelis had more freedom to move about and that there were many more restrictions for the Palestinians as to where they could go. To go to school (or anywhere), these children

often had to wake up extremely early so that they could wait in line for hours just to get through a checkpoint. Soldiers had all the control as to how long they let people wait, no matter if the civilians were ill or elderly. Typically, even though children got up very early for school, they were still late. Curfews were imposed on Palestinians, as well, causing people to have to stay in their houses, and children to forgo school for those days, impeding their education and their freedom. If they went out, they could be shot. It is no wonder that there is much resentment and animosity.

A final common theme was the wish for peace. Although there were strong feelings toward from one side to the other, most children did not necessarily wish harm to the other side's civilians, nor did they want this war to continue. The freedom of each side has been greatly hindered by this conflict and the children would like to see an end to the oppression and violence so that they can live normal lives.

So, how do we teach our students over here in North America (the author is actually Canadian) about the raging war between cultures occurring in Palestine and Israel? This book can serve as means for this. Teachers can use this book with 6th graders and up to guide them through an understanding of this ongoing conflict through the eyes of other children. This is an important element to the book. Often books and the news tell the information in terms of grown-ups and a third person view. This book allows children to learn that it is not just adults that are affected, but children as well. This makes the information much more accessible. There are also times where they can see that despite all of the seriousness of these experiences, children are still children, which our students here can relate to. For example when two 8 year olds were interviewed, they each said some things that made me chuckle. First was Danielle's statement on page 41, when she mentions what she would wish for: "My three wishes? I have four: to have more wishes, to be a queen, to get whatever I want when I want it, and to see some TV stars for real." I loved this because this exactly how a child her age might respond to that question here! Likewise, her friend, Gili, shows the contrast of an eight-year-old's capacity to make a profound statement in one part and then make a very kid-like statement in the next. She talks about how a guard from her school had been killed (not when he was at the school). "Guards are supposed to protect us, but he couldn't protect himself. If a bomb can kill a guard, it can also kill me or my family." After this she continues an earlier discussion of how much she loves horses. "I keep asking my mother if I could keep one in my bedroom, and she always says no!" Students can compare this highly unrealistic request her earlier statement, to see how children living in the conditions there differ yet are similar to their own situations here. This could be especially poignant if the students live in an area threatened by gang violence. This book would be a wonderful resource for a 6th grade and higher classroom or school library.

My only criticism for the book is that the language seems a bit stunted. I realized that this is due to a lack of transition words connecting the sentences. I am not sure if this is because of the nature of the languages spoken by the children, or if it is simply the style of the author. I was also curious as to whether or not these children's words were translated by an interpreter or the author, herself. It does not say. Nor does it say if these stories were prompted by questions and pieced together into one cohesive piece of writing, or if this is how the child spoke—in one solid, uninterrupted story.

Esther says

Interest Level: 5th-8th Grade

This book chronicles the experiences of many Israeli and Palestinian children of various ages living in various areas in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. Each account focuses mainly on what the children do daily, how they view the opposite side (Israel vs. Palestine), and what they wish they could change about their life. The various points of view along with the real-life experiences that each child goes through touch on many

subjects and themes, such as death, religion, family, faith, duty, honor as well as others. Each chapter opens with a short description of the historical context that the child is living in, their picture, name and age.

What I found profound about this text was how honest each child was about their political and religious point of view. Most children were well aware what they were living through yet also did not want to focus on it. Most of the younger children expressed sentiments that they wanted to meet the other children while older children were much more hostile towards children from the other nation. I watched the PBS film "Promises" a few years ago and that seemed to be the inclination of the children in the documentary as they grew older and participated in army service or experienced loss. (Here is the URL to the film's page: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/promises/>)

I think that children that are living through this warzone, especially in the settlements, are experiencing a life that not many others can connect to so this book is a great way to introduce children to other children. This is not a long, detailed text but rather a concise, clear text that covers most of the major parts of the Israel-Palestine conflict. I think that these accounts are authentic and could bridge understandings between students that live in the United States and those that live in areas of political conflict. I only wish that these accounts were longer or that several of the children were serialized so that we could get to know them in more depth. It seems as if many of the accounts are episodic and fit perfectly with the context introduction at the beginning of each chapter. I also wish that there was a clearer way to differentiate between the Israeli children and Palestinian children in the book. I am not sure if this was by design, but it seemed difficult at times to tell which side each child was from, since switching from one point of view to another was also difficult as I went through the book.

Mia Westfere says

It's not a hard book to read because of the words, but because of the way it makes you wonder. Realizing that your childhood and theirs could have been just as sweet and simple if it weren't for the conflict. There are some incredibly wise children here, some that I wish would talk some sense into their people... but, like most things, it's not that easy. It's comforting to know that some of them will be shaping their countries futures, and frightening to think some of their prejudices will grow into violences yet to come. I hope the best of them stick to their ideals and don't allow themselves to become more narrow minded as they get older.

Gavin Cote says

A very powerful story. The author Deborah Ellis spent time in Israel and Palestine and interviewed multiple children from both countries. She asked them each what their three wishes were. Some said some normal things like what jobs they wanted. But some said sad stuff like, they just wanted peace in their country.

Marija says

I loved that this book was written from the perspective of children from both sides of the Israeli conflict. I thought it was interesting to see the very many perspectives on the war, especially through the eyes of children. The Israeli conflict has been going on for several generations, however, here in the U.S. we don't hear much about how this conflict afflicts the people of Israel and their everyday lives.

I was very surprised to see that the stories carried a common thread throughout. Most of the Palestinian children spoke of unfair treatment, and being bullied by the Israeli army. The Israeli children spoke of their fears of being in public places. All throughout the book, you get a sense that the treatment of the Palestinians is brutal and wrong. Although I do understand the Israeli point of view, it seems that they are not as deprived of their lives as the Palestinians are. It almost seems that the Palestinian people have been stripped of their civil liberties. I feel that I definitely need to read more about this conflict, so that I can gain a better sense of what my opinion is.

This would be a great book to add to my library collection so that my students can learn about current history through the stories of their peers in Israel.

Chris says

One of the most enlightening books I have ever read.

With out hammering anyone over the head with who is wrong and who is right, Ellis lets the stories speak for themselves.

My entire outlook on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has been completely destroyed.

What hurt the most when reading these stories were the ones where the children empathized and sympathised with suicide bombers. For someone so young to understand how someone else's life could sink so low that their only hope was to be remembered as the person who blew up other people, was heartbreaking.

Rahmadiyah says

Tanyakan tiga hal yang sangat diinginkan pada anak-anak pada umumnya. Bisa jadi mereka menjawab: ingin sekolah, ingin jadi artis atau seleb, dan—mungkin kalau anak Indonesia—ingin punya handphone. Bagaimana dengan anak-anak Palestina dan Israel?

Hakim, anak Palestina berusia 12 tahun, hanya punya satu keinginan: secepatnya sembuh dan kembali melawan Israel. Saat sedang melakukan aksi intifadhah bersama teman-temannya, kedua kaki Hakim ditembak oleh tentara Israel. Simak tuturan Hakim tentang penembakan tersebut:

I was in the street with my friends. We were hiding from the soldiers, and when we could, we were throwing rocks at them. The soldiers were angry and they were looking for us.... I started running. In the middle of the road I heard many shots. I stopped feeling anything in my right leg... I heard more bullets. My legs stopped working. I fell down in the street. Some of my friends came and carried me off the road, but they were pushed away by the soldiers. I can remember the soldiers standing all around me. I was on the ground staring up at them, and they were all around me, with their guns pointed at me. There was a lot of yelling and screaming.

Dokter yang memeriksa Hakim mengatakan, ia ditembak 15 kali. Hari itu ada 5 orang Palestina yang tewas, termasuk Tareq, teman Hakim. Hakim menderita luka serius dan harus terbaring di rumah sakit karena luka tersebut, juga malnutrisi yang dideritanya sejak kecil.

Salam, adik Aayat al Akhras, gadis 17 tahun yang melakukan aksi bom syahid pada tahun 2002, punya

keinginan mengikuti jejak sang kakak. Anak Palestina berusia 12 tahun ini telah menyaksikan begitu banyak anak-anak seusianya, bahkan lebih muda, yang dianiaya dan dibunuh oleh tentara Israel. “You don’t have to be doing anything bad to be hurt by the soldiers. You could just be walking down the street. I was walking down the street with my friends one day when there was no curfew, and there were some boys nearby, and the Israelis shot one of them.”

Wafa, gadis Palestina berusia 12 tahun, telah berulang kali menyaksikan rumahnya dihancurkan oleh tentara Israel. Ia berusia 8 tahun saat pertama melihat rumahnya dihancurkan. Malam itu seseorang mengetuk pintu rumah keluarga Wafa. Ayahnya membuka dan ada beberapa tentara di hadapan sang ayah yang berkata, “This is not your house anymore. This is our house now.”

Ayah Wafa berusaha melawan, namun tentara Israel memukul kepala ayahnya dengan senapan. Kemudian mereka merangsek dan menghancurkan isi rumah. Juga menembakkan gas airmata, yang membuat Wafa dan saudara-saudaranya tak dapat bernapas dan keluar dari rumah. Tentara sendiri menggunakan masker sehingga Wafa tak dapat mengenali wajah-wajah mereka. Tapi, coba simak pendapat Wafa tentang orang Israel. “The thing I hate most are the Israelis. Not the Israelis who try to be friends with the Palestinians, but the ones who try to hurt us.”

Elisheva, gadis Israel berusia 18 tahun, punya keinginan agar orang-orang Israel dari penjuru dunia datang sehingga orang-orang Palestina terusir dan tinggal di negara Arab. Ia menyaksikan temannya ditembak oleh seorang laki-laki Palestina. “I feel a lot of anger toward the Palestinians. When I walk through the Old City of Jerusalem and see the Arabs there, I don’t want to see them. I don’t want them to be there. They make me angry.”

Danielle, anak Israel 8 tahun, tak mengerti mengapa perang terjadi dan mengapa orang-orang Palestina marah kepada bangsanya. Pendapat hampir sama yang diungkap Artov, 15 tahun, yang datang ke Israel dari Rusia. Ia tak pernah bertemu dengan orang Palestina dan bingung mengapa orang Palestina membenci Israel.

Buku yang merekam kisah 20 anak Palestina dan Israel ini sangat jujur dan terbuka. Deborah Ellis, sang penulis, langsung datang ke Palestina dan Israel untuk mewawancarai anak-anak tersebut. Penulis asal Canada ini juga berusaha netral, menggali kehidupan sehari-hari anak-anak tersebut, dampak perang bagi mereka, serta keinginan anak-anak tersebut dalam hidup.

Senetral itu saja sudah mengundang protes dari Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). CJC mengirim surat ke Ontario Library Association yang berisi keberatan buku tersebut menjadi buku rekomendasi dalam sebuah program klub buku di sekolah-sekolah. Menurut CJC, penulis buku telah memberikan informasi “cacat” mengenai konflik Israel-Palestina. CJC juga menyebutkan bahwa beberapa anak dalam buku tersebut menggambarkan tentara Israel brutal (bukankah memang brutal?). Padahal Deborah Ellis hanya menyampaikan penuturan anak-anak yang merasakan sendiri kondisi tersebut.

Sebenarnya Deborah mewawancarai lebih banyak anak, namun beberapa anak Palestina menolak kisahnya dimuat, saat mereka mengetahui bahwa Deborah juga mewawancarai anak-anak Israel. Sayang, padahal saat membaca buku ini saya rasanya tak ingin berhenti, ingin lebih banyak menyimak kisah-kisah mereka.

Michelle Pegram says

This book consists of the stories of children living in Palestine and Israel as told during interviews with the author. Each story is introduced by the author with some information about the particular area in which the child lives and some explanation of the political climate that they must cope with. The stories are told in first

person from the perspective of each child and address a variety of topics including the dangers of war, the loss of family, the difficulties they face getting to school or work and their ideas and hopes for the future.

While these stories are powerful, I did find that they became a bit repetitive when read back to back. In addition they touched on intense experiences - one was told by a girl whose sister had chosen to be a suicide bomber. As a teacher, I recognized that most students would need a great deal of background knowledge in order to make sense of the geography and politics that they discuss. Appropriate for middle to high school level students, I think that this book would be best used in excerpts where you paired the story of a Palestinian child with that of an Israeli child who were sharing parallel stories.

I read this story in digital format. This did impact the quality as the photographs were too small to see well.

Molly says

Wow! I thought Ellis' approach to telling this story was so powerful. Having children tell us through their eyes what is happening in the middle east makes sitting by and doing nothing near impossible. You can see the hate and disheartening beliefs develop and become more prevalent within the children as they get older. You can also see what a struggle it is to grow up in a war zone.

I thought about other ways I might want to see the results of her interview. Like for instance having one question then seeing all the Israeli responses then the Palestinian responses. In this way it would be more easy to contrast the two situations. However, I think Ellis wrote this book for children to highlight how we are all the same people to some extent. Her goal, unlike so much that is out there on this conflict, was not to highlight the differences.

Casey Strauss says

In November and December of 2002 Deborah Ellis spent time in Israel and Palestinian territories interviewing youth from numerous backgrounds. Ellis' book is filled with different perspectives and voices Israeli and Palestinian, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish ranging in range from eight to eighteen. The stories are told from the children's perspectives, in first person narration. In some ways, they sound like typical kids, speaking of video games, annoying siblings, and school. When they speak about their lives, a varying range of emotions come through, anger, frustration, hatred, and hope. One girl reflects, "You never know when a bomb will explode...It doesn't help to lead a good life. Well, it's important to lead a good life, but being good doesn't protect you from the bombs." Their voices are honest, and their stories give a glimpse into what life is like for children growing up in this part of the world.

Ellis has created a book that is both engaging and informative. At the front of the book is a map and introduction by the author which gives the reader background information before starting the book. Students need to be aware and conscious of the world that is around them. After the introduction by Ellis is four pages filled with the names and ages of the 429 children under the age of eighteen that have died between September 29, 2000 and March 7, 2003. This section of the book alone could be used to start a discussion in a middle school classroom. Historical information and a picture of the child accompany each story. The voices are straightforward and honest in discussing what their lives are like, what their fears are, as well as what they want in the future. This book could be used in a Middle East unit, or to give students a perspective on what youth around the world are dealing with. One or two stories can be shared at a time; the entire book

doesn't have to be read in one sitting. This book could be partnered with *A Little Piece of Ground*, by Elizabeth Laird, which tells the story of a young boy living under military occupation in Palestine.
