



Samir and Yonatan

Daniella Carmi, Yael Lotan (Translator)

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Winner of the Mildred Batchelder Award, this very human novel of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is both touching and timely

Nothing could be more frightening to Samir, a Palestinian boy, than to be where he is now: an Israeli hospital ward, trapped among the very people he blames for his brother's death. Amid this explosive atmosphere, Samir begins to learn about the Israeli kids around him. He discovers their hurts and conflicts - and hesitantly begins to share his own.

This is a story of violence and healing - the story of a boy facing the enemy he has been taught to fear.

Samir and Yonatan Details

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Author : Daniella Carmi , Yael Lotan (Translator)

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From Reader Review Samir and Yonatan for online ebook

Rian says

Summary: Samir injures his knee and is sent to a Jewish hospital for surgery. While there, he meets the other kids in Room 6, all of whom are Jewish and all of whom he gets to know.

Response: This is a quiet and thoughtful novel, expressing the memories, hopes, and fears of a young Palestinian boy, and it is not a voice I have ever read before. The writing is respectful and honest, and it feels different from other young adult novels I have read, perhaps because it is not only about a life so different from mine, but because it is also translated into English. I feel like I really got to know Samir as he really got to know Yonatan, and I feel like I was privileged to be let in on their growing friendship.

CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION

Chrissy Erwin says

A good way to introduce the situation in Palestine without it being too hard hitting. Carmi manages to insert information about Samir's life and situation in a subtle but compelling way. His connections with the other children in the hospital ward is believable and I really like how Yonatan and him develop a strong bond.

Avan says

Very good book about how the modern war on terrorism in the Middle East has ravaged the lives of those living within the target countries. A amazing emotional story about how a boy, heartbroken by the war, must learn to live surrounded with people who he knows nothing about and possibly the very relatives of those who killed his brother. Later on into his recovery, he begins to learn more about the characters and personalities of the very people who occupy the hospital room. Throughout the story, he begins to trust one of them, a smart and distorted boy named Yonatan. The ending sees these two be transported via technology to a paradise where there is no war and peace prevails. Overall, a gripping and heart-wrenching book that is certain to make one realize how dreadful humanity is.

Deb says

Maybe the translation is my stumbling block? Reading the book as an adult, I saw through the children, the theme of understanding and the developing discovery that all people have the same physical make-up. I found it well written. The voice of Samir was honest and heart rending.

However, the relationships between the children seemed forced.

I have no idea how a young child might perceive this book. Understanding the author's lean writing requires background knowledge that most children might not have? I don't know. For a child to even begin to understand the message one needs to give the child reader some prep. Great book for discussion and as a first peek at how a book invites personal interpretations.

Abbey Richardson says

i really liked this book because it was my style.

the special part i liked was when Yonatan showed Samir the video game to mars and they made a lake and Samir prayed for his brother Fadi.

Rebecca Owen says

This book takes place before that relative peace during the Clinton administration, representing a world very similar to the one of the conflict today. It also won the honorable mention for the UNESCO prize for Children's Literature in the Service of Tolerance. The main character, a Palestinian named Samir, broke his knee falling off of a bike and has to stay in an Israeli hospital to await a specialist from America. The story is told in the first person and is also filled with remembrances of events from the past. At the beginning, Samir feels uncomfortable in the hospital, as the only Israelis he knows are the soldiers. This becomes evident when he meets his first male nurse and is surprised that he doesn't look like a soldier, perhaps because he is smiling and nice. He remembers once asking his grandfather when watching news about battles in Yugoslavia which side was right, to which his grandfather replies, "you can be sure of one thing—everybody thinks he's right." Though referring to a different battle, it can definitely be applied to the one in which he is surrounded. His father works as a barber, only his business doesn't do well during the constant curfews; everyone has begun to cut their own hair, since none can work during curfews they don't have the money for what is seen as a luxury. His acceptance with the other children in his room is jarred by one of the boys, Tzahi, who taunts him over his being Arabic, grinning at Samir's fear when he learns that Tzahi's brother is a soldier. It is Yonatan who is always trying to befriend him, talking to him about the stars when the lights have turned out. He is reminded of the trouble he normally lives in when his mother can't come to visit him because the territories have been sealed off. He looks at his stay at the hospital as paradise—he has three meals a day, there are no raids, and when he hears a siren going by, it's not a direct threat to him as it would be at home. In his moments of peace he wonders if this is how it always is for Jewish children and feels a sense of community with the other children. Here they are just kids, it doesn't matter if they are Jewish or Arabic. However, it's sad to hear a child say that you, "never know anymore where the bullet will find you... and you don't know if it's the soldiers, or the avengers, or soldiers pretending to be Arabs." We find out later that this is how his brother Fadi died, being shot by the soldiers when he couldn't get away.

The story, though, is most about Samir's coming to the realization that despite the war, and despite all of the tragic reminders of how difficult life is back home, they are all really the same. Yonatan tells him this scientifically at one point, "all of us here on earth are made of the same materials. We all contain water, carbon, calcium, iron, protein, and some other stuff." This is a story of hope for the next generation, as well as pointing to the necessity of Palestinians and Israelis coming into contact in everyday situations to encourage friendship as well as an understanding of the other's point of view. This would be most appropriate for children from about third grade to middle school age.

Karin says

Carmi, Daniella. Samir and Yonatan. New York: Scholastic Signature, 2000 (translation copyright).

Samir, a Palestinian boy from the Occupied Territories has fractured his knee so badly that he is taken to the “Jews hospital” for a much needed surgery to repair it. His family is poor and unable to stay with him while he awaits the arrival of the American doctor who will operate on him. It will be weeks till he finally gets his operation, and in the meantime he is unsure of where he fits among the other four Jewish children in his ward: beautiful Ludmilla who refuses to eat, Razia who refuses to see her father for fear that he will strike her again, spoiled and hyperactive Tzahi whose brother is an Israeli Paratrooper, and Yonatan who is wiser beyond his years and always looking to the stars. Lonely and sad, Samir goes back in time in his thoughts and reminisces about his family. He thinks often about his dead younger brother Fadi who was killed by an Israeli soldier, his overworked mother, his blind grandfather, and his father who has stopped talking after Fadi’s death. More alone than ever, and surrounded by people he’s been raised to fear Samir aches for a human connection. So he is a bit surprised yet delighted when Yonatan begins talking to him late one night while the other children sleep and introduces him to the world of stars, imagination, and video games. But can it ever be possible, in the West Bank, for a poor Palestinian boy to truly become friends with a Jew?

In an understated tone, Carmi lets us in to the painful and violent world of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through Samir’s eyes. We learn of the hardships, deaths, violence, hunger, fear, anger and pain that Samir’s family and neighbors have endured. The story is simple and readers are easily filled in on the events leading up to Samir’s stay in the hospital through flashbacks of his thoughts. The hospital, and the settings in Samir’s memories are richly described so readers can clearly envision the story as it unfolds. The characters are well developed and full of life, from quiet Yonatan who comes alive in the dark when the stars are out, to ill-behaved and snooty Tzahi who at the very end will surely surprise readers by the way in which he finally reaches out to Samir. Readers will connect with themes of family, friendship, loss, acceptance, healing, and belonging, especially upper elementary and middle school readers. Sincere, and in a voice seldom heard, some of the political and historical content in the text may not be fully understood by some readers. Carmi does touch on sensitive topics (conquered territories, Israeli raids, the woman who soldiers “visit at night”) and sprinkles the text with Hebrew, Arabic, and political terms. However, this adds authenticity to the narrative and helps drive the story, yet it is not such a big piece of the story that readers not mature enough to grasp the meaning of such details will get lost. Especially helpful in the back of the book is a glossary of terms. All in all, this is a very good read that serves to remind us that we all share much more in common than meets the eye: “All of us here on earth are made of the same materials...All of us, Indians and French people, Africans and Russians, Jews and Arabs, Eskimos and Japanese—anyone you can think of!”

Target Audience: Ages 10-14

Awards: Batchelder Award (2001)

Jen says

2 1/2 stars. Not terrible, but slow-moving and slightly confusing at times. Perhaps a translation issue? I loved the idea of it, but not the execution.

Tatiana says

Samir and Yonatan left something in translation.

Israeli-born author, Daniella Carmi, produces a middle-grade story about a Palestinian boy, Samir, facing who he sees as the enemy--the Jews--while in an Israeli hospital on the West Bank. From that blurb, it sounds like a live wire of conflict and interest, but it falls flat on delivery.

The narrative mainly takes place in a hospital ward occupied by Samir and four Jewish children. This grows tedious with the daily activities of each kid. I wish the setting had been fleshed out more, especially the time. Was this during the Intifada? The Yugoslavian civil war is mentioned and Samir's brother is fighting in Kuwait, but unless you know those "sign posts," as I doubt many American middle schoolers do, you'd be lost.

I think much of these issues come down to the cultural divide, more than a translation issue. While the author didn't come out for a particular side, she also didn't drive home the message of peace. Saying "everyone is made of the same stuff" is sort of a cop-out when Samir is still blaming the Jews for his brother's death. The resolution is too simple.

With all that said, I was pleased that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was shown from the latter perspective. I just wish that the narrative had gone further to show both sides outside the hospital walls.

Nadsajee Parnujed says

I think there's a hidden agenda in this book.

Abarbaree says

A slow, comfortable read that takes you through a day by day hospital stay that results in the forming of friendships that transcend cultural barriers.

Becky Ankeny says

Daniella Carmi's narrator in this novel is about 12 with a broken knee that needs surgery. He is also from Palestine, and his surgery will have to be in a Jewish hospital. She takes this setting to explore the history and losses of his family, his fear of the Israeli military, his homesickness for parents who cannot come to visit, and his growing understanding of the other kids in his room. The theme of the oneness of human beings--and of the universe--is articulated by Yonatan, another patient whose dad teaches astronomy: "All of us here on earth are made of the same materials. We all contain water, carbon, calcium, iron, protein, and some other stuff....All the other living things on earth, they're also made up of the same materials, only arranged differently....Yes, you and me, Samir, we're made of stardust." This shows up in an earthier way at the end as two boys, one from Palestine and one from Israel, pee together in a sandbox, side by side. I thought this novel was well imagined and the narrative voice was believable, and the peace work that went on in the hospital room was not overly idealized. If we knew we were all patients in the same cosmic hospital, perhaps we would care for each other differently and better.

Jean Ryan says

This book which is for people (kids) much younger than me does a great of humanizing the issues in the Gaza Strip while putting a face on the children that are living through it. The writing is simple and eloquent. The friendship that develops between Samir and Yonatan is precious despite the inevitable end to it.

Sandy Carmichael says

YA story about children in a hospital who become friends tho' from different cultures.

Rebecca says

This tale--of a child growing up in a Palestinian village in Israel who must endure a stay in the "Jewish hospital" for surgery to his knee--was definitely written with an agenda. But it's an agenda that is admirable.

At times fanciful to the point of magical realism, and at other times harrowing, the book is targeted for children 11 and up to send a message of peace. I have been very, very disappointed by the books I have read on the Israel-Palestinian conflict (especially for that age range) in the past. This is definitely an improvement.

Samir and Yonatan differs from most books about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in notable ways:

- 1) While written by an Israeli, it is told from the viewpoint of a Palestinian boy. His viewpoint is very limited by both his age and location. Yet, the book acknowledges his lack of experience and this is what expands over the course of the novel.
- 2) There's no attempt to say which side is right or wrong. Samir lives in terror of "Israeli Occupiers"--Jewish soldiers--but also fears "avengers"--Palestinians who are willing to punish other Palestinians who are rumored to have cooperated with the Israelis. The only Jewish people Samir has encountered are the soldiers who have invaded his privacy, and whom he blames for the death of his brother and numerous other family tragedies. When he meets other Jews, he is first afraid, then in shock to discover they are friendly. The book only describes the experience of children like Samir, as well as to convey the eventual message that children everywhere can live together in peace and affection if removed from their political entanglements.
- 3) The setting of the novel removes the children from their natural environment, allowing them to become distinct from their national attachments. The children aren't invested in news broadcasts, messages from teachers, or the anger vented by parents. They are only invested in each others' healing.

The pacing was too slow and meandering for my taste, but the translation from the original Hebrew maintains Samir's voice beautifully. I'm not so enthusiastic about the book as to recommend it strongly, but I don't recommend you stay away from it with a 9 foot pole either. In a book about this topic, that's saying a lot.

