



LESSON PLAN

YARA'S SPRING

by Jamal Saeed & Sharon E. McKay

Genre: Fiction

Themes: conflict, emigration, refugee experience, war, family, coming of age

Setting: Syria, the Middle East

Suitable for: Grades 6–9, Ages 10–14

Guided Reading Level: Fountas and Pinnell Z+

Lexile: 620L

Common Core standards: RL.9-10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10

W.9-10.1, 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 3, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

SL.9-10.1, 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

L.9-10.1, 2, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3, 3a, 4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 5, 5a, 5b, 6

Summary:

Growing up in Aleppo, Yara's childhood has long been shadowed by the coming revolution. But when the Arab Spring finally arrives at Yara's doorstep, it is worse than even her nana imagined: sudden, violent, and deadly. When rescuers dig Yara out from under the rubble that was once her family's home, she emerges to a changed world. Her parents and Nana are gone, and her brother, Saad, can't speak—struck silent by everything he's seen. Now, with her friend Shireen and Shireen's charismatic brother, Ali, Yara must try to find a way to safety. With danger around every corner, Yara is pushed to her limits as she discovers how far she'll go for her loved ones—and for a chance for freedom.

BEFORE READING THE BOOK

These activities build the context, introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest.

Look at the cover of the book. What elements on the cover give you clues as to what this book might be about?

It is important to have some understanding of the topic before reading historical fiction. Look at the chart below and think about the questions. You may wish to do some research before starting the book. When you are researching about a country, remember to keep in mind the following aspects: the people, the culture, the location, the climate, the history, etc.

What do you know about Syria?	What do you want to know about Syria?
What do you know about the war in Syria?	What do you want to know about the war in Syria?

UNDERSTANDING SYRIA

The Arab Spring was a movement in favor of democracy in the Arab world. The movement began in Tunisia in 2010. It soon spread to other countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

Many people joined the movement because they believed their governments were unfair and corrupt, or dishonest. Several of the countries had strong rulers who had controlled the countries for many years. People also protested because they were poor and needed jobs.

(Britannica School Database)

Using a reliable news source or recommended database (ask your teacher and/or teacher-librarian), research the history of Syria.

- Why has there been turmoil?
- How many people have fled Syria?
- What did Syria look like before the war? Look at the cities that Yara travels through to see before and after photos.
- How has the war erased the history of the land and its people?
- How does Canada and the United States support Syrian refugees?
- Why is it important to know this story?

For more information about Syria and the war in Syria, check out the following sites:

<https://kids.kiddle.co/Syria>

<https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/syrian-crisis>

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Syria/345796>

CIVIL WAR

This is a term you may be familiar with from the movies and from history class. Merriam-Webster defines a civil war as being a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country. A civil war began in Syria in 2011.

- What do you think would be the reasons for a civil war?
- What did you discover were the main reasons for the civil war erupting in Syria?

EPIGRAPH

Authors take great care when they choose quotes for the beginning of their books.

Yara's Spring begins with:

"There is hope after despair and many suns after darkness" (Rumi)

- What does this quote mean to you?
- Why do you think the authors chose this quote?

MAPS

Maps give readers an understanding of where the story takes place in the world.

- What do you know about the places on the map?

Take a close look at Yara's journey.

Predicting is a reading comprehension strategy.

Make some predictions based on looking at the map.

- How long do you think this journey will take?
- Why does she choose this route?

As you read the book, you will learn more about the route.

Compare your original predictions with what you discover about the route once you've read the book.



WHILE READING THE BOOK

These activities check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Yara

The story starts with Yara separated from her family. As the story goes back in time, readers meet members of her family.

- How would you characterize Yara's relationship with:
 - ~ Her parents
 - ~ Her brother (Saad)
 - ~ Her best friend (Shireen)
 - ~ Her best friend's brother (Ali)
 - ~ Her grandmother (Nana)
- How do these relationships help the reader understand Yara?
- How would you describe each of these characters?

Yara encounters many people throughout the story.

- What are their roles in Yara's story?
- How does Yara's character change in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story?

Nana

At one point in the story, Yara's grandmother shares her personal story of being a young woman and mother in Syria.

- Why does Yara's grandmother think it is important to share her personal story with Yara?
- How does her story help you understand Syria's history?

Saad

Yara's brother has selective mutism, meaning he has chosen not to talk.

- Why would Saad stop talking?
- What is the importance of the words he says at the end of the story?

TIMELINE

As you read the story, note the dates when Yara is on her journey. You may wish to flip back to the map at the beginning of the book to see where she is at the time. Create a timeline to help you chart the events of the story.

WOMEN AND FAMILY

- What are the roles of women in the story?
- What is the role of family in the story?
- How do men's roles differ from those of the women portrayed?
- Why do you think there is a difference between their roles and how they are treated in Syria?

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

- How would you describe where you live?

At one point in the story, Yara imagines the world based on what she sees on television.

- How fair a description is it?
- Do the movies, television, and books describe where you live accurately?

How Yara imagines the world	How you would really describe your world
<p><i>She saw it on television —huge shopping centers, hamburgers as big as plates. Everyone and everything seemed big. Maybe big people needed big houses and big cars. And there were stories about drugs, drinking, and sex!</i></p> <p>(p. 81)</p>	

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Similes make comparisons using the words “like” or “as.” On page 14, the family likes to have fun creating the best similes to describe a hug between Yara and her mother:

“You are as close as a rind on a lemon.”

“We are all as close as the skin on an olive.”

“We are as close as crust on bread.”

- What do these visualizations create in your mind and how are they reflective of the quality of the relationships they describe?
- What do you notice about the food depicted? The food represents items that are popular in Syria. What food is familiar to you? How can you use that food in a simile? What comparison are you trying to draw?

QUOTES AND EXPRESSIONS

The authors like to use expressions and quotes throughout the story. Quotes help develop the reader’s understanding of a character and show the way a character may think.

As you look closely at the following quotes, try to answer these questions:

- What is the meaning of the quote?
- Which character said the quote and what does it reveal about the character?
- Why did the character use the quote?

~ “The monkey in his mother’s eye is a gazelle.” (p. 20)

~ “You can only trust family. Neighbors betray neighbors.” (p. 31)

~ “Syrians did not use maps. The shape of their country was imprinted on their minds, maybe even stamped on their souls.” (p. 112)

~ “It takes as long as it takes to drink a river or a glass of water.” (p. 114)

~ “Male or female, a lion remains a lion.” (p. 131)

UNDERSTANDING SYRIA

As you read the book, note how *Yara’s Spring* was like the Arab Spring and how it was different.

Use the chart below to organize your ideas.

How was it the same?	How was it different?
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AFTER READING THE BOOK

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this text, and stimulate further extensions.

Flip back to the quote at the beginning of the book. Take another look at the quote: “There is hope after despair and many suns after darkness.” (Rumi)

- How has your understanding of the quote changed as a result of reading this novel?
Have your initial thoughts about why the authors chose this quote changed? How?

THEMES: FAMILY, HOPE, RESILIENCE

- What is the importance of family in the story? How do the roles within Yara’s family shift and change throughout the story?
- Where did Yara find hope throughout the story?
- How did the characters in the story show their resilience?

WRITING THE BOOK

- Why is it important to know the author’s story after reading this book?
- Why do you think the authors chose to fictionalize this story?

DEFINITIONS OF UNFAMILIAR WORDS

<i>abaya</i>	An abaya is a loose-fitting full-length robe worn by some Muslim women (Merriam-Webster)
democracy	The word democracy describes a form of government. The word comes from two Greek words that mean “rule by the people.” In a democracy the people have a say in how the government is run. They do this by voting, though there are usually rules about who can vote. (Britannica School Database)
Hezbollah	Hezbollah is a political party and armed group in Lebanon. In Arabic, the name Hezbollah means “Party of God.” The group was formed in 1982, after the neighboring country of Israel invaded Lebanon. (Britannica School Database)
ISIS	The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is an extremist Islamic militant group. It operates out of western Iraq and eastern Syria. The followers of of ISIS are members of the Sunni branch of Islam. The group established a strict version of Shari’ah, or Islamic law, in the areas it controlled. It used extreme violence and terrorism to make people follow its laws. (Britannica School Database)
oppression	Oppression is the unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power (Merriam-Webster)
revolution	A revolution is a sudden change in government. It is usually violent and begins with a rebellion of the people. Revolution occurs when large masses of people decide to take power from a government that treats its people unfairly. Revolution, which means “turning around,” changes a government’s social, economic, and political policies. (Britannica School Database)
The UN	The United Nations (UN) is an organization that includes almost all the world’s countries, or nations. By the 21st century the United Nations had more than 190 members. The main goal of the United Nations is world peace. The United Nations also works to reduce poverty and suffering and to improve people’s lives in other ways. (Britannica School Database)