

Purpose: junior high school book club, guided study and discussions
Text: *Homes: A Refugee Story* by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah and Winnie Yeung

Pre-reading background info:

- Google images of Homs
- Bashar al-Assad
- Map of Syria / Iraq
- ISIS
- Islamic schools & branches (Sunni / Shia)

Questions: black bullet points

Important details/plot: white bullet points

- Discuss book discussion, non-fiction / narrative? (p. 1)
- Describe the setting in chapter 1-2
 - Syria (p. 17)
 - Assad and civil war (p. 19)
 - Iraq, Saddam, Gulf War (p. 24)
 - Sects of Islam: Sunni and Shi'a (p. 25) Sunni = predominant
- How does Winnie Yeung work Arabic language into the story?
- What does Bakr find on the roof of the chicken coop (p. 21)
- What kind of business does Bakr's father start in Homs, Syria
 - Egypt and the Arab Spring (p. 39)
- What kind of tactics do Assad's army use?
 - Sniper at mosque (p. 42) blocking cell phone signals / wifi
 - Who are the *Shabiha*?
- Why does Bakr collect bullet casings? (p. 58 "This is not who we are" - father)
- What is the "strange lullaby" (p. 62)?
- Why does Bakr have to escort his sisters shopping (p. 69)?
- Why are the phone and internet services down? (p. 73)

- “My first massacre” (p. 76) - what happened?
 - Al Shammass - rebel neighborhood / lots of protests happen there
- Move to Damascus (p. 91)
 - Checkpoint while moving to Damascus - soldier (p. 95)
 - Move back to Homs (p. 106)
- What could the kites symbolize for Bakr? (p. 99) - freedom and escape
- Why is it ironic that they play so much Counterstrike (video game)?
 - Bakr can identify the “Dragunov” rifle (p. 107)
- Bakr’s faith is very important to him. How does the violence in the Syria and Iraq cause him to question his faith? (p. 121)
 - “Live together, die together” - father quote (p. 121)
 - Bakr’s faith and father’s example (p. 131)
- How does living in a war zone change / affect Bakr and his sisters? (p. 148)
 - News about gaining refugee status and immigration to Canada (p. 154)
 - Bakr’s friends ask him to tell the world the story of Syrians (p. 164)
- What happens during the last Shabiha “squeeze” before UN departure? (p. 173)
 - Culture shock: Naser putting on layers of clothing on the plane - imagine moving from Syria (average winter temp. 7 deg) to Edmonton in December (-14 average)
- What is Bakr’s first impression of Highlands? How does a Canadian school differ from his previous schools? (p. 192)
- Why is it important for Bakr to be able to have a space to pray and halal food options at school? (p. 201)
- How does Bakr communicate with his teacher, Ms. Maggie?
- Why is the soccer game vs. teachers at Highlands so important to Bakr? (p. 208)

Themes to discuss:

- Bakr's relationship and love for his father is a major theme in the book. How and why does Bakr look up to his father? Describe his father's character traits as part of your answer.
- How does the story, told through Bakr's (a child/teens) perspective, differ from a news report or documentary? What does the 'narrative' style add to our understanding of the war in Syria?
- How could this book help Canadians that are afraid of refugees/against immigration?
- How does the book juxtapose Bakr's "normal" childhood with life in a war zone?
- How does Ms. Yeung stay true to Bakr's "voice" in her writing? (p. 215)
- Has reading this book changed - or added to - your understanding of Islam/Middle Eastern culture?