



2016

Jerusalem: A Family Portrait

Carlie Smith

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Smith, Carlie (2016) "Jerusalem: A Family Portrait," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 10 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol37/iss10/20>

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Book Review

Title: Jerusalem: A Family Portrait

Author: Boaz Yakin

Illustrator: Nick Bertozzi

Reviewer: Carlie Smith

Publisher: First Second

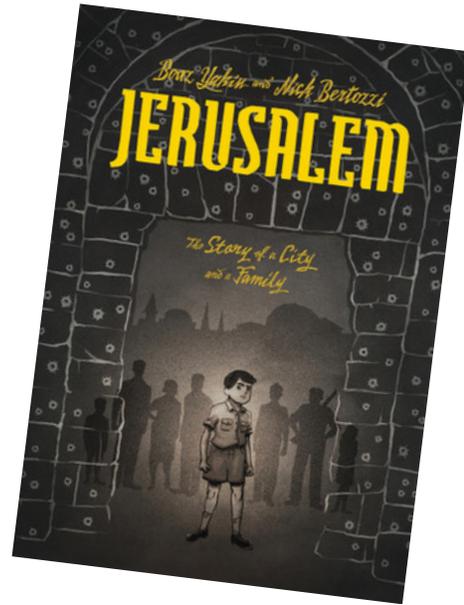
Publication Year: 2013

ISBN: 9781596435759

Number of Pages: 381

Interest Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent



Review

The Halaby family is as dysfunctional as the city they live in – 1940s Jerusalem. Each brother fights in his own way against colonizers: Mozzi, the youngest, rebels against his European teachers; Ezra joins a radical Jewish nationalist group; David fights in World War II; and Avraham becomes a communist. When the UN approves two-states in Palestine, the tensions between Arabs, Jews, Europeans, radicals, and moderates explode. The family is divided along these factions as well, and Ezra and Avraham become enemies. Simmering beneath the political tension is family strife: David goes missing but his unborn child and wife come to live with the Halabys, and the clan is locked in an economic battle with their cousins. Violence, bloodshed, and anger become the norm. The despair is solidified when, even after he makes an attempt at reconciliation, Mozzi's efforts result in tragedy.

Jerusalem: A Family Portrait is summarized by two adjectives: honest and shocking. The graphic novel is honest in the way that historical events can affect and traumatize common people; it is shocking to see cartoonish-looking characters surrounded by battlefield gore. It is honest to see that conflicts often lack heroes; it is shocking to see family members use their noble ideals to harm one another. The story fits the graphic novel medium exceptionally well. The detailed illustrations are entirely in black and white, though the far most common color is, appropriately, gray. The story is presented through vignettes that are anchored into historical context that is only really explained in the short introduction. Consequently, readers are required to pay closer attention to plot. The horror, heartbreak, and narrative style produce a gripping and provocative novel.

*Contains moderate language, moderate sexual content, and severe violence.