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Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad

Marsha D. Broadway

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Reviewer: Marsha D. Broadway
Reading level: Primary
Rating: Excellent
Genre: Picture books
Subject: Calligraphy, Arabic--Juvenile fiction; Iraq War, 2003--Juvenile fiction; Baghdad (Iraq)--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

A young Iraqi boy, Ali, lives with his family, plays soccer, and studies in Baghdad. His passion is learning to write beautiful Arabic letters. Their gliding, sweeping, leaping movements allow him to hear the silent music in his head and remind him of watching a soccer game in slow motion. He leaves messages for his father on the bathroom mirror, and his mother compares his to the famous calligrapher Yakut. During the 2003 night bombings of Baghdad, Ali writes all night to soothe himself and continues to write to bring peace to his mind.

Rumford’s use of Ali’s point of view allows readers insights into the often unseen lives children who must learn to cope with war as they are growing up. The focus is on daily life and not on the politics of war. Photographs posted on the Internet inspired the computer-enhanced pencil and charcoal illustrations. Rumford also penned much of the calligraphy.