

**Nye Shihab, Naomi. *Habibi*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
Review by: Dr. Sandra Alfonsi**

The Palestinian point of view is accurately given and as unpleasant as it may be to accept, it cannot be changed. The author, Naomi Shihab Nye, has correctly described two mentalities: that of Palestinian-Americans who are easily drawn into the psychology of the conflict; that of the Palestinian people who live in the midst of the conflict. What makes her book difficult to refute is the fact that the psychology of hatred is learned in "Palestine" by a Palestinian-American teenager who, until living in the midst of her "people" identified with Americans and not Palestinians. Shihab-Nye has created the character of Liyana for one purpose - to show how American eyes need to be opened to "Israeli brutality" - including confiscation of land and homes, use of guns against an "innocent" population, etc. Liyana represents the naive American who comes face-to-face with "history" only when in the "stolen" land of Palestine. For the author, Liyana's eyes are to become the road to building anti-Israel sentiment in new generations of naive American youngsters and adults. Omer - the "only sympathetic" Jew in the book, is a realistic character and his new found "vision" of the conflict, learned by association with this charming Palestinian-American girl, is exactly what many young Israelis learn through integration into modern society. It is the vision and propaganda of the current young leftist generation that wants an end to war and conflict; that does not know the history of the Region and of the conflict - the legacy of the Left-wing Israeli government that has eliminated most of this history from their own textbooks. The book portrays an accurate Palestinian "perspective" but teaches inaccurate history. While the book seems to "promote" coexistence between Palestinians and Jews, it "talks" a better game than it teaches. The "other side" - whether Jew or Christian, does not have a character to present its history or philosophy. That is the weak point of the book. This book can only be properly used in the classroom if the following criteria are met. Unfortunately, these criteria are basically non-existent in today's classroom.

- The teacher knows the history of the Region and can include explanations for any stereotypical description and/or diatribe.**
- The teacher can provide students with accurate handouts - including maps, that correct and/or explain the history given in the book.**
- The teacher has knowledge, sensitivity and understanding when leading any discussion on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict described in *Habibi*. These qualities need to be applied to all dealings with Jewish, Christian and Arab-Americans in the classroom.**
- The teacher is knowledgeable in the literary technique of analysis of themes, characters and style.**