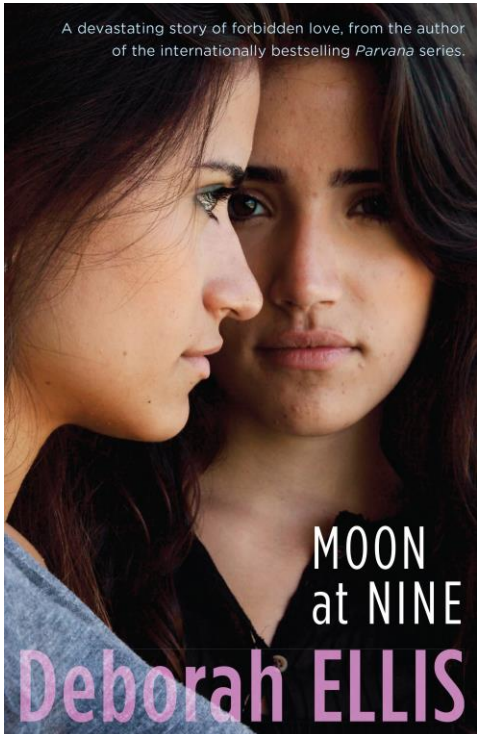


Teachers' Notes
by Esther O'Rourke-deGraaf

Moon at Nine
by
Deborah Ellis

ISBN 9781760111977
Recommended for ages 14-16 yrs

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83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218

info@allenandunwin.com
www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
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INTRODUCTION

Set against the conflict and turmoil of Iran in the late 1980s, *Moon at Nine* is a story of secrets, courage, love, and loss.

Fifteen year old Farrin is a wealthy only child, who attends a school for gifted girls. She keeps her family's secrets, tolerates the harassment of the class bully, and tries to live as quiet and unremarkable a life as possible. But when Sadira joins her class, everything changes. Courageous, kind, and clever, Sadira brings out the best in Farrin, and soon their friendship grows into something more.

But the love that Farrin and Sadira share is dangerous in Iran, where homosexuality is against the law. The two young women try to keep their love a secret, but when they are discovered, they face paying a grave price for it.

LITERARY STYLE

Creative nonfiction

Moon at Nine is a true story.

The genre of creative nonfiction is a comparatively new one, and thus still somewhat open to interpretation. Attention to detail, exhaustive research, a vivid description of context and place, and a literary style are all considered hallmarks of this genre, and are all features of *Moon at Nine*.

How does the knowledge that *Moon at Nine* is a true story colour the reader's experience?

A writer telling a story as sensitive as Farrin's has ethical responsibilities. Discuss what these might be, and the impact that these might have on:

- the choices she makes as a writer
- the life of the real Farrin
- the shape of the story and the reader's experience

What is the difference between reading a story like this one and watching a documentary about this period in modern history?

Further information on creative nonfiction as a genre can be found at "Beautiful 'truths': a creative nonfiction resource list for Australians":

<http://www.ozcrown-crystal.com/beautifultruths.htm>

Nested narratives

Farrin's story of a demon hunter is threaded throughout the novel. The characters in the novel shape those in her story, and the events in her life are reflected in the tale she tells.

What is the function of this literary technique? How does it help us understand and relate to Farrin herself?

SETTING

Moon at Nine is set in Iran in the late 1980s.

The revolution of 1979 saw the overthrow of the monarch Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was forced into exile in Egypt. Shortly after his exile, Iran's monarchy was officially dissolved, and the country became an Islamic republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The

Ayatollah's rule was characterised by religious fervour, and a degree of state-sanctioned brutality that *Moon At Nine* explores the human face of on a number of levels.



Image: <http://origins.osu.edu/sites/origins.osu.edu/files/4-8-img1306.jpeg>

The Iran-Iraq war, which began in 1980, also shapes the setting of *Moon at Nine*. After a long history of border disputes between the two nations, Iraq hoped to take advantage of the political unrest in Iran following the revolution and attacked without warning. This sparked what became the longest conventional war of the 20th century, and resulted in great suffering and loss of life. The novel gives an insight into the reality of living in a warzone.

This video (created by a high school student) provides an excellent thumbnail sketch of the revolution, and how it precipitated the Iran-Iraq war:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2eDkOaeEbA>

Ellis makes a point of emphasising the diversity of the Iranian landscape, showing that Iran is more than simply the desert nation that Westerners might imagine it to be. In this way the novel provides an insight into a nation that may be unfamiliar to many Australian readers.

Key quotes and events related to setting:

- "Iran is only thirty percent desert. It is also mountains and marshes and lakes and fertile regions and cities." (p6)
- "In Iran it was important to always be prepared with answers. It was best if the answers were true. At the very least the answers had to be believable, and on the right side of politics." (p6)
- "On the streets, the spies could be anywhere..." (p11)
- "Music itself was not against the law in Iran. Songs about the revolution were encouraged..." (p14)
- "Only in Iran would it be an insult to be called rich." (p24)

- Basij rallies are common "to get the boys ready to go off to the front to fight the Iraqi army." (p32)
- "People died last night and more would die tonight as well, unless Saddam Hussein, the Ayatollah, and all their combined forces decided they were done fighting and were ready to go home and be still." (p43-4)
- "The bombs falling, the young boys rushing into the battlefield, the widows crying, the homes being smashed, the long, sad marches to the graveyards..." (p44)
- "[Tehran] started as a village that grew pomegranates. Now it covers all this land." (p94)
- "They ate bread baked on hot stones, and stew with goat meat and chickpeas." (p96)
- "On top of the little hill, Farrin could see across into the valleys, where tiny villages and nomad camps sparkled with lanterns and cook fires." (p98)

Activities

☺ An ideal complimentary text for *Moon at Nine* is *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. An autobiographical graphic novel (later adapted into an animated film), it is set in Iran during and after the revolution, and gives further insight into the experience of women in this unique cultural and historical context. Investigate this text as a class.

☺ Create a map of Iran showing key cities and landmarks, arid and fertile regions, and other important features. Display this in the classroom while studying the novel.

☺ In order to deepen understanding of the cultural and political context of the novel, make a timeline of Iran from 1977 to 1988, noting key political events such as the dissolution of the monarchy, and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war.

☺ Investigate the broad range of different ethnic and cultural groups that call Iran home. Are there more than you imagined? How do they differ? Do you think these differences can create tensions? If so, how?

☺ Imagine you have found yourself transported to Farrin's Iran. Write a journal for a week in your life. Report on:

- What you eat
- How you travel
- Who you talk to
- How you dress
- The landscape around you
- The kind of home you sleep in
- What is going on around you. What do everyday people do? Are there bombings? Rallies? Meetings of secret resistance groups?
- How you feel about everything you are experiencing

Now reflect on how a week in Farrin's Iran differs from your own life at home.

☺ Read another novel about a child or young person living in a warzone. What are the common features of a child's experience of war? Suggested texts:

- *Zlata's Diary* by Zlata Filipović
- *Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak

- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne
- *Shahana, Naveed, Amina, Emilio, Malini, Zahir* – six titles in the Through My Eyes series, Allen & Unwin 2013-2015.

Discussion questions related to setting

☾ Many of the freedoms that Australian young people take for granted were forbidden to Farrin. She wasn't able to dress or move around in public spaces as she pleased, or even openly listen to her own choice of music. Why do you think a government would curtail such freedoms?

☾ There is a strong culture of fear and suspicion in the Iran of the novel. People are encouraged to watch and report on each other, and punishment for outlawed behaviour is extreme. How does this fear and suspicion play out in the individual lives of the characters? How does it influence their choices?

☾ Just like Australia, Iran is home to traditional cultures that find themselves forced to share their land with other groups. They are often persecuted and discriminated against (as Farrin's father alludes to). Research the similarities and differences between the nomadic tribes of Iran, and the Indigenous cultures of Australia. Why do you think traditional cultures are so often marginalised, and treated as inferior?

☾ The everyday reality of living in a warzone sets the scene for *Moon At Nine*. How do you think living with the reality of death influences the way that the characters live their lives?

THEMES

Secrets and lies

Key quotes and events

- Farrin's relationship with her parents is characterised by lies. "No need to tell your mother..." (p29)
- Even their home has a facade "Farrin's house had a formal front room, where her father saw business colleagues, and where the family's public image matched the spirit of the revolution." (p35)
- Sadira doesn't ask Farrin to keep secrets for her: "... Don't carry the burden of a secret because of me" (p16). This is new and refreshing to Farrin, and foreshadows what is to come later in their story.
- The driver, Ahmad, is secretly distributing food to Afghan refugees.
- Sadira and Farrin bond over sharing secrets (p81-83). Secrets make you vulnerable, and to share them is an act of trust.
- Sadira has a santour that belonged to her mother. Playing music is frowned upon, so she hides it in her room (p70).
- Farrin's mother has affairs: "She was probably going to spend the day with one of her boyfriends. [She] didn't know that he knew, and neither of them suspected that Farrin knew. Secrets, secrets everywhere." (p93)
- The girls are forced to communicate in secret when their relationship is discovered. They pass letters to each other, and rail against the injustice of being forced to do this simply because they love each other. (chapter 15, p124-132)

Activities

☾ Everyone in the novel seems to have at least one secret. Create a table of characters, the secrets they are keeping, and the consequences (actual or potential) of each of these secrets

coming to light. How much do each of these characters have to lose? [See BLM 1 at the end of these notes. Print as A3.]

☾ Have you ever had a really big secret? How did it make you feel? Excited? Important? Fearful? Frustrated? Confused? Write a short poem about these feelings, without revealing anything about the secret itself.

Discussion questions

☾ What do you think the prevalence of secrets in *Moon at Nine* does to the overall tone of the novel? How does it make you feel when you are reading it?

☾ What do lies and secrets do to relationships? Discuss with relation to Farrin's parents, and contrast this with Farrin and Sadira's relationship.

☾ Sadira is the first person to tell Farrin, "... don't carry the burden of a secret because of me" (p16). How does this early injunction set the course of their relationship?

First Love

Farrin's feelings for Sadira unfold with all the magic and intensity of any story of first love.

Key quotes and events

- "There, in letters big and small, in Persian letters and in English, in pictographs dripping from the point of a moon, Farrin had written over and over - Sadira." (p63)
- "Farrin felt her stomach flip." (p61)
- "Let's look at the moon every night at nine, and that way, if we are not physically together, we will be together in spirit." (p74)
- "'You'll like it', Farrin said, 'It's beautiful.' Like you, she almost added." (p94)
- "The moon rose over the trees... Its rays stroked Sadira's face, making it glow. The sight took Farrin's breath away." (p97)
- "Her arms were around Sadira, and Sadira's arms were around her. There was no better place in the world." (p99)
- "In the days following the Shiraz trip, something had become very clear to Farrin. She was in love with Sadira." (p109)
- Farrin wants to show Sadira how she feels by reading a poem in front of the school. "She was going to do it in front of everyone, in a way that would make it absolutely clear how she felt and how happy she was about it." (p110)
- "Nothing she could write described the ache and joy of what she felt for Sadira." (p110)
- "I will risk anything to see you." (p130)

Activities

☾ Farrin reflects that "nothing she could write described the ache and joy of what she felt for Sadira" (p110). Can you help her? Find a poem, or a song with words that you think are reflective of Farrin's love for Sadira, and share it with the class. You may wish to investigate Shakespeare's sonnets, Rumi's love poetry, or something more contemporary. You could even compile your class's suggestions into a book or a classroom display.

☾ Farrin's poetry reading to Sadira is interrupted by a raid by the revolutionary guard. Had she been able to proceed, the poem would have been an eerie foreshadowing of the way their love story progressed. Look at the poem, and map the progression of Farrin and Sadira's relationship onto it. [See BLM 2 and BLM 3 at the end of these notes.]

Discussion

☾ 'Love is the driving force in this narrative'.

Discuss with reference to Farrin and Sadira, Farrin's parents, and the key events in the narrative.

Homosexuality and homophobia

Key quotes and events

- "It was disgusting, what I saw... They are freaks" (p118)
- "It would be better for us if you were dead," (p122)
- The girls are hounded by their classmates. "Their questions make me feel shame, as though I've done wrong." (p126)
- Being gay in this context is isolating and disempowering. "Who has the power to keep us together without hating us for loving each other? There is no one who will help us." (p127)
- "You have been arrested for deviancy." (p146)
- "Normally deviants like you are given a warning, and that warning is backed up by lashes so that the message gets into your brain through your blood." (p146)
- "[...] mimicking the indecency of the West." (p154)
- "Treason against the established order." (p154)
- "In violation of the laws and morals of the state" (p162)
- Homosexuality is punishable by hanging (p162-163)
- "It is against God and it is against nature." (p154)

Activities

☾ Homosexuality is framed as an act that violates the values and the security of the state, and as such can be punished by law. Research Australia's laws (past and present) regarding the legality of homosexuality. How have they changed over time?

☾ Examine the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human rights (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>). Which of these rights were denied to Farrin and Sadira on the basis of their sexuality?

☾ Homosexuals are widely persecuted around the world even today. In countries such as Russia and Uganda governments actively prosecute their gay citizens. Choose a country of the world, and research the rights and restrictions that are placed on the gay community there. Present your findings to the class. When everyone has done so, give each nation a rating out of ten for the quality of life gay people can expect to experience in each nation. In the course of your research, ask questions such as:

- Is it legal to be gay? If not, what punishments are meted out to gay people?
- Are there laws in place to actively protect gay people from discrimination?
- Can gay people adopt?
- Can gay people marry?
- Can gay people serve in the military?

Discussion questions

- ☾ Should the state have the right to determine the morality of its citizens? Where is it reasonable to draw the line?
- ☾ Should religious beliefs have a bearing on lawmaking? Why/why not?
- ☾ Do nations have a responsibility to act when human rights are being violated in other countries? Do individuals? *This question could be researched and explored in the form of a formal class debate.*

Feminism

Key quotes and events

- Sadira is passionate about the importance of educating women "Men have run this world for long enough, and they have made a mess of it." (p54) She convinces an anxious mother to keep her daughters in school, even volunteering to take care of them and keep them safe.
- Principal Kobra is a symbol of female strength, though not always a particularly likeable one. She values education, loyalty, order, and justice. She was a fighter in the revolution, she cares about her students. (p8, p164-8)
- Strictly enforced rules regarding how women can dress: "Women had to cover their heads - not a single strand of hair could show, or the Revolutionary Guards would harass them right on the street." (p10)
- "To be out in the world with a man who was not a relative could mean serious trouble for a girl." (p33)
- When planning their escape, Farrin and Sadira know that as two unaccompanied women "It would be hard to find a taxi driver willing to give them a ride." (p139)
- "Your father gave me money and he gave me you. The paper is real. You are my wife." (p184)

Activities

☾ Sadira is passionate about the education of women. Educating women is one of the foundations of the feminist movement because it is key to their intellectual, social and financial freedoms. It also has follow-on effects on the wellbeing of the communities and nations in which they live. Spend some time as a class looking at some of the following resources and videos on educating girls:

<http://www.girleffect.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3YUn3FcjMA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwEhKu3T51Q>

☾ As a class, organise a fundraising event for an organisation such as The Girl Effect, Oxfam or UNICEF, who actively promote the education of girls.

☾ Using the information you have gleaned from the above resources, and from your own research, design a poster or a short film promoting the education of girls.



www.fouman.com Iranian Photographs Gallery

Image: <http://shsiranwebquest.weebly.com/iranian-revolution.html>

☾ Oppressive regimes often create powerful counter movements. In the novel we see evidence of the activity of women's rights groups when a pamphlet is discovered and Rabia is taken away. Iran has produced some powerful, articulate and influential feminists. In groups, choose one of the following women, and make a short presentation to the class about her life and political work:

- Roya Toloui
- Zahra Eshraghi
- Shahla Sherkat
- Bahareh Hedayat
- Mahnaz Afkhami
- Shirin Neshat

What do these women have in common?

Discussion questions

☾ Discuss the effect of educating girls. Do you think we take education for granted in Australia because it is compulsory and free?

☾ What is feminism? What might feminism mean to women in Australia, compared to women in Iran? Do you think there are important differences?

☾ How might Farrin's story have turned out if she had had rights and freedoms equal to those of a young man?

For further information about feminism in Iran, visit

<http://rahacollective.org/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_rights_movement_in_Iran

CHARACTERS

Ahmad

An Afghan refugee, Ahmad is chauffeur and servant to Farrin's family. He works for food and a mat to sleep on. He secretly steals and distributes food to refugee workers.

- "A thin, hollow-eyed, middle-aged man." (p22)
- "He worked hard for his plate of rice and his hard bed." (p24)
- "'Have you been to prison Ahmad?' 'It's nothing to joke about,' was all he would say." (p26)
- "Ahmad was with her, but he was a servant. He didn't count." (p31)
- "For a few years I was a refugee in India, before being a refugee in Pakistan, and now a refugee in Iran." (p67)

☾ What does Ahmad's story tell us about the experience of refugees?

☾ What does Farrin and her family's treatment of Ahmad and their other servants tell us about class in Iran?

Farrin

Moon at Nine is Farrin's story.

- "You are strong willed, and you are smart." (p8)
- "Her whole life was about living with lies." (p10)
- "Farrin grew up wearing two faces – one face she wore when she was out in the world, and another face she wore when she was in private." (p11)
- "She had no experience of easily hanging out with anyone." (p19)
- "Of course she'd keep Ahmad's secret... But how could she use this information to her advantage?" (p31)
- "A closed door ... it's the best thing." (p36)

☾ How does Farrin's relationship with Sadira change her? Describe her characteristics and attitudes before Sadira came into her life, and then after.

☾ Is Farrin a victim of her circumstances? At what points in the story does she have the power to make choices to determine her own future?

Farrin's father

An ex-soldier, and a man from one of the nomadic tribes of Iran, Farrin's father married a woman with greater social status than himself. He has learned to deal with his dissatisfied wife, and they coexist grudgingly but reasonably successfully. He is now in property development, and makes his money by exploiting the cheap labour of refugees. Farrin's father is fond of her and she knows that if she wants anything, he is the parent that she should go to.

- "Her father built his construction empire with nearly free Afghan labour." (p22)
- "I don't want them thinking about their children, I want them thinking about my buildings." (p30)
- "Although he built modern houses and his style of living was modern, he thought of himself as a traditional man." (p94)

☾ Do you think Farrin's father truly loves her? Why/why not?

Farrin's grandparents

Farrin's father's parents live traditionally, and differently to Farrin and her parents.

- "Go ahead and be proud. If your mother was thinking clearly she would be proud too." (p96)
- "There are more important things than comfort ... There are more important things than safety." (p97)

☾ What are the things that Farrin's grandfather values above comfort and safety?

Farrin's mother

An unhappy, dissatisfied woman, Farrin's mother feels very strongly that she has married beneath her. She is not particularly fond of her daughter or her husband. Her primary concern is for social status, and the return of the Shah.

- "We're trying to put the Shah back in power. Nothing is more important than that." (p7)
- "There is no value in distinguishing yourself amongst a pack of dirt-dwellers." (p10)
- "All the things that need fixing in this country, and they worry about hair." (p10)
- "[Farrin] never argued with her mother... Doing so would be like slipping down a black hole of shrill, shrieking tirades." (p24)
- "Farrin's mother never let her father forget what she had given up for him." (p27)
- "Tall and striking, with the sort of ageless beauty and grace usually reserved for Hollywood stars and royal families." (p39)
- "... hosted the Bring Back the Shah Tea for Ladies of Culture." (p58)
- "She did some charity work, but only when others were looking." (p78)
- "A medical marvel of a headache that only showed up once a year when it was time to visit the in-laws." (p93)

☾ In spite of her declarations, do we see Farrin's mother actively doing anything to return the Shah to power? What do her actions tell us about her personality?

☾ The character of Farrin's mother can be considered a literary device that Ellis uses to highlight the tensions and ideological differences between loyalists and the new post-revolutionary regime. What are these tensions and differences? Do you think this is an effective literary technique?

Haj Nadir

Sadira's father. A cleric, and a scholar, who was imprisoned and tortured by the Shah. Lost all his family save Sadira in a bombing, and has been deeply scarred by the experience.

- "He was too sad to look after himself." (p20)
- "A calm, quiet, almost soothing voice." (p64)
- "An older man, with smiling eyes and a long beard." (p64)
- "We are all the same in the eyes of God." (p65)
- "You will enter my home and be my guest for however long we are honoured to have you with us." (p65)

- "It does him good to see me happy." (p68)
- "A cleric and a very holy man." (p73)
- "If anything is gained by war, it should be given back, because something gained by violence is a form of theft." (p81)
- "He won't even eat with me." (p131)

☾ In spite of his compassionate nature, and the fact that he has lost all other family, Haj Nadir completely cuts Sadira off when he learns of her relationship with Farrin. What does this tell us about the status of homosexuality in Iranian culture?

Pargol

Class monitor, and one of the most powerful students in the school. Pargol is manipulative and cruel, and dislikes Farrin. She and her family are very loyal to the revolution.

- "The biggest rat." (p4)
- "Yelling at smaller people to make herself look bigger." (p19)
- "Pargol was particularly verbose when it came to revolutionary lingo. The thicker it was the more she thought it made her look tough." (p49)
- "Mean, and not afraid to make others afraid." (p49)
- "Pargol is fearless, and she's bossy. She could make men listen to her." (p51)

☾ Pargol can be seen as a personification of the spirit of post-revolutionary Iran. What qualities and behaviours make her an avatar for her government?

Principal Kobra

Strict, nationalistic, and tough, Principal Kobra runs the school for gifted girls that Farrin attends. She is deeply committed to the revolution, and actively fought to bring it about. She seems cold and uncompromising, but we see another side to her nature as the story develops.

- "There was a rumour around school that in her free time, just for fun, Principal Kobra was an interrogator at Evin prison." (p5)
- "She showed you her pistol? ... She's never shot anybody. No students, anyway." (p19)
- "She's tough ... Really tough, not just yelling-tough like Pargol." (p20)
- "Kobra's got an advanced degree from the university in Qom, and she was with the students who took over the American Embassy just after the revolution." (p20)
- "Principal Kobra was all hard edges and stern looks." (p38)
- "I am glad you were a student at my school. I came to tell you this, and to give you what comfort I could." (p166)
- "I brought you a blanket... I know these cells are cold." (p166)
- "In my revolution, we do not execute children." (p167)
- "Truth is always the most important thing. Even when it leads us into dark places." (p168)

☾ Contrast the actions of Principal Kobra and Farrin's mother with regard to their political allegiances. Who is more principled? More committed? How do they show this?

☾ How does Principal Kobra know the cells in Evin prison are cold?

Rabia

The head girl at Farrin's school, Rabia, is taken away by the Revolutionary Guard for allegedly distributing feminist pamphlets.

- "This tall, calm girl held power by being smart and kind." (p49)

☾ Do you think Rabia really was distributing the pamphlets? Why might Ellis have left this question unanswered?

Sadira

Sadira is the new girl at school. Smart, kind, brave, and beautiful, she captures Farrin's attention immediately, and they soon fall in love. Sadira lost most of her family to bombings in the war, but she still has her father, who she lives with and cares for. Sadira is hard working, good at her schoolwork, and also a talented musician.

- "Don't carry the burden of a secret because of me." (p16)
- "I've been out of school for a while... looking after my father." (p20)
- "The rest of my family was killed in a bombing a few years ago." (p20)
- "I think of it as a story that happened to someone else. Then I don't really feel it." (p20)
- "She'd make a good demon hunter." (p21)
- "Are those little girls crying? ... Let's see if we can help." (p52)
- "Men have run this world for long enough and they have made a mess of it." (p54)
- "A good friend is beyond price." (p80)
- "We have to live while we can. For me, that means doing everything the best I can." (p85)
- "If you are proud of what you are doing, if you think what is going to happen to us is right... why bind our eyes?" (p145)

☾ What does Farrin mean when she says that Sadira would make a good demon hunter? What does this tell us about how she sees her new friend?

FURTHER READING

In most cases, the descriptions below are from 'The Source', the *Magpies* magazine on-line subject guide to children's literature.

Novels about living in revolutionary Iran

***Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi**

Jonathan Cape, London, 2003

Graphic novel; Reading age 14 to Adult

Growing up in Iran, Marjane witnessed the overthrow of the Shah, the introduction of Sharia law and the war with Iraq. In *Persepolis*, Marji, a self-centred narrator, changes perspectives on life as she grows up but is constant in her belief in honesty and openness – a virtue often unacceptable to adults who, unlike her own modern parents, seek validation and importance in their tunnel vision of Islam. It would be hard to read this book without experiencing moments of shock but read it you should.

***Kiss the Dust* by Elizabeth Laird**

Methuen, London, 1988

Reading age 11 to 14

Tara's life in Iraq becomes increasingly difficult as her father's involvement with the Kurdish Resistance Movement becomes more obvious. Forced to flee, first into the mountains, and then across them into Iran, Tara learns to do without all the amenities she has been used to as a wealthy man's daughter in the city. In the refugee camp in Iran she must, in addition, learn to adopt another culture's mores. In a final desperate act her father gets the family onto a plane to England where they claim refugee status.

***Under a Starless Sky, a family's escape from Iran* by Banafsheh Serov**

Hachette Livre Australia, Sydney 2008

Reading age 12 to Adult

Banafsheh's parents – well-off western-educated professionals – supported the revolution in Iran thinking they would achieve democracy for the country. When they found that they instead had helped foster a rigid religious regime which was soon at war with Iraq they began to plan to escape. This is the story of that escape from Khomeini's regime but also a wonderful picture of a rich and loving lifestyle in a country now much changed. The book concludes with the family landing at Sydney airport.

Novels about young people living in war zones or violent societies.

***Shahana, Naveed, Amina, Emilio, Malini, Zahir* – six titles in the *Through My Eyes* series**

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2013-2015.

A fiction series with strong, character-driven story lines but related to real times, places and military conflicts in the modern world. *Through My Eyes* invites young readers to enter the fragile worlds of children living in contemporary war zones. Every day in an increasing number of countries, children are desperately trying to survive as their families and their whole way of life are destroyed by war. This series is a tribute to such children and the themes of courage, determination, triumph and perseverance will inspire and engage young readers, creating greater cross-cultural understanding and informed empathy. Teachers notes available at www.allenandunwin.com

***Zlata's Diary* by Zlata Filipović**

Penguin UK 1995; Penguin US 2006

Reading age 10 to Adult

Zlata was a young girl living in Sarajevo while it was under siege during the Bosnian war. She began writing her diary in 1991, just after she began fifth grade. The war began just before her eleventh birthday. Zlata's diary chronicles her daily life and the war's increasing impact on her home town of Sarajevo. Like *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Zlata's diary contains many descriptions of the horrors of war as viewed from the innocence of a child. Furthermore, both diaries take place during conflicts at least partially motivated by racism and ethnic differences.

***The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank**

Multiple editions

(Also known as *The Diary of Anne Frank*.) A book of the writings from the diary kept by Anne Frank while she was in hiding for two years with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. The family was apprehended in 1944, and Anne Frank died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The diary was retrieved by Miep Gies, who gave it to Anne's father, Otto Frank, the family's only known survivor. The diary has since been published in more than 60 different languages.

***Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry**

Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1989

Reading age 10 to 14

Winner Newbery Award 1990

Fictionalised story of how the Danes rescued their Jewish population during the Nazi occupation of their country in World War II. Annemarie and her family help their Jewish neighbours escape to neutral Sweden at great risk to themselves.

***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak**

Pan Macmillan Australia, Sydney, 2005

Reading age 14 to Adult

2007 Honour Book Michael L. Printz Award

Not originally intended for children but likely to engage readers who enjoy a challenging text. Liesel's father is taken by the Nazis, accused of being a Communist, and her mother flees with Liesel and her brother to find sanctuary for the children with another family. On the way the young brother dies but in burying him Liesel finds her first book, and this is her salvation. A remarkable tale which although telling of horrific acts has an almost light-hearted air. The narrator, Death, looks at humanity and sees 'beauty and brutality'. Has been produced as a film.

***The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne**

David Fickling Books, London, 2006

Reading age 12 to Adult

2007 Bisto Book of the Year

Set in a Nazi concentration camp. Bruno's father has been sent as commandant to a strange place called 'Out With' by a frightening man called 'The Fury'. It is a very different life to what he was used to in Berlin. Isolated in the country and cut off from friends, Bruno explores his surroundings in the hope of finding another boy to play with. When he does, the boy is on the other side of a long, seemingly endless, wire fence. The story moves in its short 200 odd pages inexorably towards an ending the reader will have suspected but which, when it comes, still has the power to shock and be immensely sad.

***Thura's Diary: a Young Girl's Life in War-Torn Baghdad* by Thura Al-Windawi**

Puffin, London, 2004

Non-fiction; Reading age 9 to Adult

The diary begins as the Iraqi people wait in fear before the imminent American attack and ends when schools and colleges are open once more. Thura's parents value education for their three daughters, and Thura (19) is studying pharmacology. The family is fairly well-off, though years of trade restrictions have made all Iraqis suffer some hardships. Thura's father's career is not secure during or after the war. Luckily for Thura and her family, the publication of this diary led to the family being able to migrate to the USA. However, the reader can well imagine the ongoing struggle for young people who did not share the special circumstances that made a good outcome possible for Thura.

Novels about girls and Islam

***Marrying Aameera* by Rosanne Hawke**

HarperCollins Publishers Australia, Pymble, NSW, 2010

Reading age 13 to 16

Ameera has been seen talking to a boy at a mixed party. That is enough for her father, Hassan, to work quickly to get her away from the temptations of Australian life and into an arranged marriage in Pakistan. However he doesn't tell seventeen year old Ameera this is why she is going to visit family in Pakistan. A forced marriage is something even usually docile Ameera is shocked about and won't stomach. As much a thriller as a family story.

***Jameela* by Rukhsana Khan**

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, 2010

Reading age 11 to Adult

On the death of her mother, Jameela is taken by her father to Kabul. He hopes to live the high-life after contracting marriage with a widow. But she does not want Jameela and convinces him to abandon her on the streets of Kabul. The fate of the poor and vulnerable, especially that of girls and women, is laid out as Jameela is fortunate to be taken in by a kind man who takes her to an orphanage where she is taught to read and write and her cleft palate is fixed. It is a short easy read that stays above sentimentality and tries not to make judgements. Interestingly, Jameela, as an independent young woman, takes to wearing the chadri. Based on a true incident. Glossary included. Teachers notes available at www.allenandunwin.com

Non-Fiction

***I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai See with Christina Lamb**

In 2009 Malala Yousafzai began writing a blog on BBC Urdu about life in the Swat Valley as the Taliban gained control, at times banning girls from attending school. When her identity was discovered, Malala began to appear in both Pakistani and international media, advocating the freedom to pursue education for all. In October 2012, gunmen boarded Malala's school bus and shot her in the face. Remarkably, Malala survived the shooting. At a very young age, Malala Yousafzai has become a worldwide symbol of courage and hope. Her shooting sparked a wave of solidarity across Pakistan, not to mention globally, for the right to education, freedom from terror, and female emancipation.

***Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Changed the World* by Malala Yousafzai, with Patricia McCormick (Young Reader's Edition)**

Indigo (an Imprint of Orion Children's), London, 2014

Reading age 10 - 16

In 2014 Malala become the youngest ever person to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala tells her story - from her childhood in the Swat Valley to the shooting, her recovery and new life in England. She's a girl who loves cricket and gossips with her best friends. A girl who saw women suddenly banned from public, schools blown up, the Taliban seize control, and her homeland descend into a state of fear and repression. This is the story of her life, and also of her passionate belief in every child's right to education; her determination to make that a reality throughout the world; and her hope to inspire others.

Two novels set in schools—about poetry, secrets, lies and betrayal

***Cloud Busting* by Malorie Blackman**

Doubleday, London, 2004

Verse Novel; Reading age 9 to 12

A class poetry exercise sets off a cathartic tale of beauty, betrayal and loss by Sam as he writes of his lost friend Dave. From the moment the new boy Dave arrives at school, Sam holds himself aloof, not wanting to be seen as a friend of a dork, even one who only lives two houses down in the same street. Gradually he comes to appreciate Dave's way of seeing the beauty of

the world but still can't bring himself to publicly acknowledge their friendship, and it is that cowardice that brings about the betrayal and loss. In the Note From the Author, Blackman tells of a life-long enjoyment and engagement with poetry and describes the various forms of poetry she has used in this short verse novel.

***Walking Naked* by Alyssa Brugman**

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2002

Reading age 12 to 16

2003 Honour Book - Australian Children's Book of the Year (Older Readers)

2003 Shortlist - The Victorian Premier's Literary Award - Young Adult Fiction

Pretty, indulged Megan is one of the top dogs in an exclusive group of school girls. They have all sorts of ritual and rules and the unravelling of Megan's life starts with her being sent out of class, a new experience: 'I wasn't familiar with thrown-out-of-class protocol'. This leads to detention and the start of a relationship with Perdita, 'the Freak', a girl as distant from 'the group' as could be found in the school. The pace of the novel is brilliant. A series of small events, chances overlooked, bad decisions and insights accumulate – then the awful climax. Like poetry (which is a strong theme) this is short but dense with meaning and incident.

Young lesbian novels

***Dare, Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock**

Longacre Press, Dunedin, NZ, 1997

Reading age 14 to Adult

1998 Winner New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year

It is almost love at first sight when Louie and Willa meet in the unromantic kitchens of Burger Giant. Of course, as in all love stories, the course does not run smooth but, with the further complication of a gay relationship, all nearly ends tragically. Likeable heroines and a cast of interesting extras make this a good read, and for some, a daring read.

***Beyond Evie* by Rebecca Burton**

HarperCollins Publishers Australia, Pymble, NSW, 2010

Reading age 12 to 16

Charlotte meets Evie through a part-time job at a bakery. There are lots of rules at work which Charlotte follows to the letter – but Evie is a rule breaker. At first it is a series of mild shocks that intrigue Charlotte but the surprises get bigger, especially the realisation that she is falling in love with this girl so very different to herself.

Non-Fiction

***Closets are for Clothes a history of queer Australia* by Rachel Cook**

2010 Fitzroy, VIC, Black Dog Books

Non-fiction; Reading age 13 to Adult

Possibly the only book for teenagers about gay and lesbian history in Australia. Chapters open with fictionalised first person accounts. This works particularly well in this volume, tied so closely to individual fears and experience. Contains glossary; timeline from 1533; index; list of references.

GLOSSARY

Ayatollah - Generally a high-ranking Islamic cleric, who is considered an expert in Islam, ethics, and philosophy. In Iran, after the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini became the head of state.

Basij - "The Organisation for Mobilisation of the Oppressed". A militia group, established by Ayatollah Khomeini. They take orders from the Revolutionary Guards. At the time in which the novel is set, the Basiji were being recruited to fight in the Iran-Iraq war.

Chador - A full body cloak. Made of a large semicircle of fabric wrapped around the body and over the head. It has no hand openings, nor clasps, but is held closed with the hands or under the arms.

Djin - In Islamic myth, a kind of spirit that can take human or animal form and influence people for good or evil.

Faal-e Hafez - The divination of Hafez. Consulting the Hafez poetry for guidance on a particular question.

Hafez - A Persian poet from the 12th century. His works focussed largely on love, faith, and truth, and are hugely important in Iranian culture.

Haj - Title of respect given to those who have undertaken the Haj - the pilgrimage to Mecca that is one of the responsibilities of a Muslim.

Hijab - A veil covering the head and chest, worn by Muslim women.

Manteau - A long sleeved coat that goes down below the knee. Worn with an accompanying head scarf.

Santour - A box-shaped stringed instrument of Persian origin, played with light mallets.

Shah - A king or emperor.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Deborah Ellis

A Canadian citizen, Deborah Ellis has achieved international acclaim with her courageous and dramatic books that give Western readers a glimpse into the plight of children in developing countries. She has won the Canadian Governor General's Award, Sweden's Peter Pan Prize, the Ruth Schwartz Award, the University of California's Middle East Book Award, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, the Vicky Metcalf Award and the Children's Africana Book Award Honor Book for Older Readers. In 2006, Deb was named to the Order of Ontario.

Deb describes herself as an author and political activist. A lot of her books develop from her travels to zones of conflict and interviews with adults and young people there. She also writes about social issues within Canadian society. Deb donates a lot of the royalties earned by her books to such organizations as "Women for Women" and UNICEF. She is best known for the Parvana books, which have been published around the world in seventeen languages, with more than a million dollars in royalties donated to Street Kids International and to Women for Women, an organization that supports health and education projects in Afghanistan.

See this interview with Deborah Ellis - <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/authors/experts/dellis.asp>

Deborah Ellis books published in Australia by Allen & Unwin include:

Parvana's Promise, 2012

The Best Day of My Life, 2012

No Safe Place, 2011

Children of War: Iraqi Children Speak, 2009

Off to War: Soldiers' Children Speak, 2009

Diego's pride!, 2008

Diego, run!, 2007

Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak, 2005

The Heaven Shop, 2005

A Company of Fools, 2004

Shauzia, 2003

Looking for X, 2003

Parvana's Journey, 2002

Parvana, 2001

Esther O'Rourke-deGraaf

Esther O'Rourke-deGraaf has been a fully qualified secondary teacher for ten years but at present is a part-time blogger and freelancer, and a full-time mother. Her work for the Distance Education Centre of Victoria prepared her well for writing teachers' notes: the DECV teaches students with a staggering range of backgrounds and abilities, and all coursework is prepared in advance for dissemination via printed course books, and online. Esther likes to approach texts in a thorough and holistic fashion, looking not only at plot, character, and style, but also embedding them in their cultural context. Her aim is always to encourage students to be critical and inquisitive. Children's and YA fiction has always been a special interest and was why she became an English teacher, and why she still reads children's and YA books for pleasure, as much as for professional reasons.

LOVE POEM BY RUMI

Exquisite love, what exquisite love we have
How fine, how good, how beautiful,
How warm, how warm this sun-like love keeps us
How hidden, hidden, yet how manifest,
The moon, the exquisite moon, and exquisite wine - both here with us
Adorning the spirit and the material world,
What ferment, what exquisite ferment the world stirs up
What exquisite works, what exquisite fruits they have there,
The king of knights has had a great fall, had a great fall,
Kicking up an exquisite dust, what exquisite dust
We've fallen, how we have fallen - never to get up again
We don't know, don't know what all this commotion is,
From every lane, each and every lane: a smoke of different colours
Once more, and again once more, what mad passion is this
Neither trap nor fetter, so why are we in this bind?
What bonds, what fetters chain our feet
What plans, and oh what plans in the sizzling of these hearts?
It's strange, it's so strange, coming from above
Silent, you are silent, that it may not be revealed
For unknown persons hem us in left and right.

- Rumi

Map the progress of Farrin and Sadira's relationship against the poem by Rumi

Exquisite love, what exquisite love we have
How fine, how good, how beautiful,
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How hidden, hidden, yet how manifest,

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