



### **Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood**

Written by Ibtisam Barakat

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007

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*In writing Tasting the Sky I give my story to the world in the hope that no others ever lose their home, and that the world would lend them a hand if they fell.*

This moving memoir provides an intimate, first-person look into the lives of a Palestinian family during the Six-Day War of 1967. A message of hope prevails throughout: Hope of a young girl who

discovers refuge in letters and language; hope of a nation struggling for peace and justice; and hope that the rest of the world can understand the human element represented in this ongoing global struggle.

Filled with sensory images, rich in metaphors that resonate with the reader long after the book is complete, *Tasting the Sky* provides an authentic insider's perspective of the lives of those affected by war as well as the daily life of Palestinian people in 1967. While most people have heard of the struggles involved over the past century regarding the "Holy Land," understanding the relationships among the people who inhabit these struggling countries is not frequently presented in such an insightful way. This memoir serves literature's role of helping to humanize global events. As the author revisits her childhood, her wisdom as an adult helps readers understand the actions and emotions of the young child we befriend in the book and why her story is important to readers today.

Alef, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, represents the power of language throughout the book to sustain her when she is separated from family, friends, in an orphanage and in a refugee camp. In a concluding chapter set in 1981, Barakat states, "Written on my heart, is all that I lost — my shoes, a donkey friend, a city, the skin of my feet, a goat, my home, my childhood — shattered at the hands of history. But my eternal friend Alef helps me find the splinters of my life ... and piece them back together." Growing up in Ramallah and obtaining a degree from Birzeit University in the West Bank, Ibtisam Barakat is a bilingual author, poet, and college teacher who has shared these splinters of her life in a powerful story that speaks of hope, healing, and global understanding.

Several resources mentioned at the conclusion of this memoir that can be paired for classroom use are *The Flag of Childhood: Poems from the Middle East* (Naomi Shihab Nye, 2002), *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East* (Stephanie Tolan, 2006); and *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* (Deborah Ellis, 2004).

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