A Little Piece of Ground

By Elizabeth Laird

Ideas for teachers

This pack aims to encourage the reading and discussion of this powerful and insightful book set in Ramallah, Palestine and can be freely adapted to suit different contexts.

Download pack & photos from www.towerhamlets-sls.org.uk

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UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2009
INCLUDING 25 PHOTOS
TAKEN IN THE WEST BANK,
JUNE 09
Foreword

Today Palestine is one of the big questions and it’s a question our students are asking whether we cover the topic in class or not. It’s certainly an issue that has had, and continues to have, a huge impact on the world stage and on all of our lives.

The government has said it wants us to tackle controversial topics so that we engage with young people on these ‘big issues’ and I think that’s absolutely right. If young people can’t ask their teachers the difficult questions then what are we doing in schools?

So why don’t people tackle Palestine in schools? Perhaps people are worried they don’t know enough; maybe they are worried they will be accused of being partisan; that by teaching about Palestine they are somehow being anti-Jewish. This simply isn’t true. Further, by trying to skirt around the issue we do Palestinians and Israelis a great disservice.

This book is a way in. It’s a book set in Palestine. It’s a book about Palestine; but it’s also about a 12 year-old boy growing up trying to make sense of his world. It’s a book that doesn’t preach, it doesn’t offer solutions. In fact, it raises more questions than it answers.

And to those who say you shouldn’t teach it, I would turn the question round: It’s a fabulous book: well written, empathetic & educational. Why wouldn’t you teach it?

So, to our pack: I’d like to say first of all what it isn’t

It isn’t a complete history or guide to the situation in Palestine. There are plenty of places where teachers can access statistics, guides, histories and so on written by people far more qualified than me.

It isn’t a scheme of work with clear links to National Curriculum levels or National Strategies.

It isn’t a teaching pack about Palestine.

It is a series of activities designed around the book, its story and its characters. It is aimed at developing empathy. I hope it will develop understanding.

It is a pack of suggested activities linked to and organised round different chapters. It is a mixture of ideas for teachers to pick and mix.

It is a genuine attempt to encourage teachers to take this book up in schools and to feel confident about teaching it, about getting others to teach it. It is a work in progress and one that I hope you will add to and share.

Kiri Tunks (East London Teachers Association) kiritunks@googlemail.com
**A Little Piece of Ground: Some Suggested Activities**

The following activities are a mixture of reading, writing, speaking, listening, drama & design tasks. Teachers should pick and mix as they see fit. At the end of the pack are some suggestions for physical games & starters that would complement the themes and events of the book.

The photos referred to below are all available to download from [www.towerhamlets-sls.org.uk](http://www.towerhamlets-sls.org.uk) as is this document.

**Pre-Reading**

*Photo (1): Football in Ramallah*

*Look at the photo of the abandoned football in Ramallah. Ask the students to brainstorm the following questions:*

- Whose ball is it?
- Where are they?
- Why aren’t they playing?

**Write**

Ask students to write a 10 part list entitled “The ten best things I want to do (or be) in my life”.

**Feedback**

Ask some/all students to share their ideas if they are willing.

**Write**

Ask students to write a second list entitled “The ten things I don’t want to do (or be) in my life”.

**Feedback**

Ask some/all students to share.

**Discuss**

Commonalities: Can students recognize any similar themes or wishes? Are there any differences?

**Read**

*Chapter 1*

**Discuss**

Commonalities: Can students identify any similar themes or wishes to the ideas their classmates had? Any differences? How is Karim like them? How is he or his life different?

**Imagine**

You are locked inside your house for 3 days. What activities would you not be able to do that you could do if you were free to leave the house?
Still Image  Ask students to create individual frozen or still images showing them doing this activity.

Present  Split the class. See one half and then the other.

**Extension Activity:** Thought-track students while they are frozen to find out what they are thinking or feeling.

**Alternative**  *This could be done as a storyboard with students drawing an ideal or typical free afternoon.*

Still Image  Now ask the students to create individual still images that show what activities they would be doing if they were inside the house.

Present  Split the class. See one half and then the other.

**Extension Activity:** Thought-track students while they are frozen to find out what they are thinking or feeling.

**Alternative**  *This could be done as a storyboard with students drawing an ideal or typical free afternoon.*

Discuss  Ask students to compare and contrast the different situations.

Ask questions like:

- What do you notice about the activities in each section?
- What kind of emotions did you see?
- How did the still images look different physically?

Brainstorm: What problems might arise if you were stuck inside your house with your family?

Small Group: Agree on an idea and create a role-play which shows what might happen. Each person needs to take on a role of one member of the family.

- How will you change your voice to portray this character?
- How will you move to portray this character?
- How does this character relate to other characters?

Presenting  Each group shows their drama.

Evaluating  Which students created believable characters? Praise & model.

Information  There is a two hour break in the curfew.
A Little Piece of Ground

Teaching Ideas

Discussion

In small groups, discuss what individual family members would do in the 2 hours they were able to go outside the house. Allocate a generic character to each group so Group 1: Dads, Group 2: Mums, Group 3: Teenage boy, Group 4: Younger sister etc...

Feedback

Hear & Record ideas for groups of characters – all Mums, all Dads, etc

Individual

Create an individual mime of the activity your character chose to do.

Alternative

Draw a picture/matchstick person illustrating your ideas, add notes & images to represent the activity (child, football, kit, goal, trainers, scarf, crowd, flag, whistle etc)

Presenting

See all Mum mimes. Then all Dad mimes etc etc.

Discussion

What do the students notice about what different types of character chose to do? Explore ideas & issues.

Read

Chapter 2 & 3

Photo (2): Street scene in Ramallah: break in curfew?

Look at the picture: what can you see?

Now close your eyes: what can you hear?

What can you smell? Taste?

What does it feel like?

Imagery

There are several examples of imagery to describe Karim’s feeling of release in these chapters. This is the first on p11:

“The last few minutes before six o’clock came seemed to Karim like the longest since the curfew had begun. He felt like a can of Pepsi that had been shaken up and was full of fizz, just bursting to shoot out in a wild, frothing spray.”

Imagery

This second example is in Chapter 3, on p17:

“Karim felt as if a stone had been pressing down on his head and it had been eased off for a moment, as if he’d been a fly buzzing against a glass pane and the window had suddenly opened, as if he’s been an animal caught in a trap and the door had been left ajar so that he could squeeze out, at last into the open air.”
Draw  Ask students to select their favourite piece of imagery and draw it as if it were real.

Evaluation  Ask students to circulate, looking at all the images and to choose their favourite one. They could each have a sticker/post-it note with their initials which they have to stick on their choice.

Discussion  Hold up the favoured/best images and call on the students who chose the image to justify their selection with a reason. Encourage others to develop the ideas.

Discussion  Talk about feeling of release. Compare to feeling of curfew.

Small Group  Think of a situation in which the whole of your family gets together. Brainstorm ideas.

Still Image  Create a family photo of this occasion. Tell the students they will be Thought-tracked for emotions or feelings

Teacher to write emotions on board.

Small Group  Pick one emotion for your character. Develop one movement or gesture for this emotion.

Add noise or sound or single word for each emotion.

Choreograph the movements as a machine – repeating movements/sounds.

Present  Each group shows mime machine.

Discuss  Class to comment on different kinds of feelings shown.

Photo (3): Two boys in Nablus

Who could these boys be in the book?
**Photo (4): Woman and Boy carrying shopping across road closure near Hebron**

*Page 15 – Karim helps his mum with the shopping*

In this photo (taken in 2009), notice the concrete blocks across the road and the parked car. Palestinians are prevented from driving/using over 634 roads in the West Bank by the use of checkpoints, permits, road blocks, earth mounds or blocking as in this photo.

**Read**

**Read Chapters 4 & 5**

**Discuss**

Why is Karim nervous around Hopper? Why is Hopper different to Karim? What do they have in common?

Other Peoples’ Views: Why can’t Karim play football near his flat? Why might it be annoying for the neighbour?

**Photo (5): Aida Refugee Camp.**

Originally, refugees set up tents. As their exile became more permanent the tents became concrete shelters. Planning was minimal; infrastructure poor. New generations simply build another story on top; space is very restricted.

**Read**

**Read Chapter 6**

**Discuss**

The attack by Israeli Settlers/Checkpoint Incident (pp 36-41)

**Brainstorm**

Empathy exercise: what fears do the different characters/parties have?

Small groups to study the description of the events described here in detail but with the focus of one of the following characters:

Israeli Solider/Lamia (mother)/Hassan (father)/Karim/Farah/

Are any of the fears the same? Are any different? What other emotions does this incident stir up for any of the characters?

**Still Image**

Break the events of this incident down into 3-6 still images with each student taking on a character. Make sure someone is the Israeli soldier. Encourage students to think about body language & position, status, and facial expression.
Share
See the groups’ images in turn.

Thought-Track
Tap the actors on the shoulder and ask them what the character is thinking. Encourage them to say things that deepen ideas or aren’t obvious from the image

Evaluate
Ask the students watching to observe if anything changes in the still images as the story progresses.

Who portrayed a character’s feelings well? How?

Extension
Get the groups to link the still images in slow motion so we scene the scene unravel slowly.

Modify the still images so that it becomes a scene in real-time.

Evaluate
Ask students to discuss the relative merits of still image/slow motion/real time – what does the audience get from each? Which do they prefer? Why?

Photos (7-9): Checkpoints (2009)

Photo (7): Pedestrians at Hawara Checkpoint, Nablus

Photo (8): Traffic Jam at Hawara Checkpoint, Nablus

Photo (9): Pedestrian Checkpoint at Bethlehem
Note graffiti & ‘humanitarian lane’ which runs to the side

Footage of Palestinians crossing checkpoints like this on YouTube

Read
Chapter 7, 8

Photo (10): Israeli Settlement

Despite being against international law, there are 500,000 illegal settlers living on occupied land in the West Bank.
Photo (11): Cut down olive trees

P48. Israelis have cut down thousands of ancient olive trees as a way of taking control of Palestinian land.

Discuss

Compare/contrast the incident in Chapter 6 with that in Chapter 7 with the olive groves & settlers: what fears were felt here?

Re-Read

Re-read the reportage paragraph on p53:

“A suicide bomber detonated a massive bomb outside a café in Jerusalem this afternoon. Eleven Israelis were killed. Four of them were secondary-school students, relaxing after their exams. The bomber has not been named.” (p53)

Discuss

the change in language: what do the students notice about the style?

Small Groups

Other People’s Views:

Allocate a different character to different groups (Karim, Lamia, Hassan, Brother-In-Law) and ask them to discuss how they reacted to the news of the suicide bomb (pp53-54). Why do you think Karim reacts the way he does?

Feedback

What concerns or interests the different characters? Write ideas on board.

Small Groups

Now ask all groups to focus on the reaction of Abu Feisal (pp55-57). What is his reaction? What concerns him? What does Karim make of his viewpoint?

Feedback

Hear ideas from class. Encourage discussion. Write ideas on the board. What does Abu Feisal mean when he says ‘It’s not simple at all’?

Read

Chapters 9 & 10

Role-play

Students in groups of 3. Two of you are friends (A & B). A new person (C) comes to the area/school and wants to make friends. A wants to. B doesn’t.

Explore what happens.
Presenting Groups to show their role-plays.

Hot-seating Hot-seat one of each of the characters - choose confident performers. They don’t all have to be from the same group.

Class asks questions of the character to try and find out how they feel about the situation, what feelings they have etc.

Forum Tell the class that we want to try and solve the problems the group of characters faces. Students should think about what the hot-seated characters said and how they felt.

What advice could we give them?

Nominate one group. Ask them to run their scene again, exactly as they did the first time. This time, whenever someone in the audience thinks that a character could do or say something differently they shout out ‘STOP’ and put their hand up.

Teacher takes suggestion. Actors try and implement the advice.

Repeat until there is a resolution – or not! Explore the issues.

Compare Students could compare the descriptions of the demolished school football Pitch (p 68) with the description of ‘Hopper’s Ground’ on p22. This could be done as a chart or pictorially.

Contrast Students to contrast the characters of Joni (pp13, 69,) & Hopper (pp19, 69). Use of descriptive words inc. imagery

Read Chapter 11

Photo (12): Children & Soldier at Checkpoint in Hebron

**P 79: Karim’s thoughts about the soldier.**

*What do you think is going through the heads of the girls at the checkpoint? What about the soldier?*

Contrast the characters & description of Joni & Hopper (71, 72, 88)

Discussion What makes Karim & Joni follow Hopper? Why does Hopper pretend to plant the bomb? Do you think he was right to do this? What would Jamal think of Hopper’s actions? Why?
Read Chapter 12

*Photo (13-15): Hopper’s Ground?*

*Photo (13): Bombed site of a soap factory, The Old City, Nablus*
How does this compare to ‘Hopper’s ground’?
(Note oil cans in left foreground)

*Photo (14): Cat in ruins of Old City, Hebron*
Aziza & kittens?

*Photo (15): 3 boys playing football, Old City, Nablus*
‘They had become a trio ’ p92
Feelings?
What happens next?

Contrast Joni & Hopper (pp92, 94)

Read Chapter 13

Discuss Hopper’s brother’s arrest (p106)– revisit question ‘Why does Hopper pretend to plant the bomb?’ Does the story of his brother shed any light on his actions?

Write Imagine you are Hopper. Write a letter to your brother in prison. What news would you tell him about your new friends, Karim & Joni. What news would you have of the family?

What wouldn’t you write in this letter? Why?

Read Chapter 14

Compare Hopper at home: what does Karim think has changed about him? Why is that?

Discuss the key to the house in Ramle (p111).
**Photo (16): Key at entrance to Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem**

This refugee camp marked the 60th anniversary of the ‘Nakba’ (the ‘catastrophe’ when Israel was created in 1948) by building this entrance to the refugee camp with a huge key to represent the homes they lost and still fight to return to.

**Photo (17): Mural of Refugee at Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem:**

*Hopper’s Grandfather’s story*

**Mime**

What one item would you take from your house if you had to leave in an emergency? Use facial expression & gesture to communicate as much detail as you can about the object including how you feel/why you took it.

**Share**

Students show their mimes; Teacher to note the different objects on the board.

**Discuss**

Which objects interested you? Which surprised you? Could the objects be categorized (eg., practical, sentimental, valuable)

**Write**

Use a chart or table to categorise the different objects. Then write a report with a new paragraph for each category discussing some of the different objects that people chose to mime.

**Discuss**

Did anybody take a key? Why do Hopper’s family keep the key? Is it symbolic? Is it a reminder? Do they think they will ever get to use it or go back? What does a key symbolize?

*What purpose does it have if you can’t use it?*
Read Chapter 15

Photos (18-20): UNWRA School at Aida Camp, Bethlehem

**Photo (18): The school building**

*Note the blinds pulled permanently down over the windows to protect students from gunfire & rockets. Classes of 55 taught for half day sessions only.*

**Photo (19): UNWRA school Playground**

*It's the only playground in the camp and only accessible outside school hours by permission*

**Photo (20): UNWRA school gates**

*No guns in school…*

Compare

What is different about the description of Karim’s school & your school (corporal punishment, ½ day shifts, damage, disruption)? What kind of emergencies happen at your school (fire drills)? Why is Hopper particularly worried?

Read Chapter 16

Discuss the transformation from Karim’s hopelessness (p124) to his jubilation (p127). What has changed?

Extension: Does claiming a piece of land and putting a flag on it make it yours (p126-127)?

Read Chapter 17

Reportage p128

Role-play In pairs. A is parent, B is child. Choose a situation:

A) Child is in trouble (Karim’s parents think he has been fighting)

B) Child is angry with parent (Karim having to babysit for sister)

Role-play the conversation between the two characters.
Read  Chapter 18

*Photo (21): Children playing in the street in Old City, Jerusalem*

Do children play out in the street/round the flats near you?
What do they play? Similarities? Differences

**Design (1)**  Ask students to imagine their perfect play area for them and their friends:

Students to design a ‘Dream Playground’. What would it include? Use pictures, symbols, annotations & a ‘key’. Aim for fantasy & imagination.

**Discuss**  Karim’s dream playground. Compare to the ‘little piece of ground’. What is the reality gap? How have Karim, Hopper & Joni tried to bring some of their dream to life there?

**Design (2)**  Ask students to identify a place near their home or in school that they could try and redesign to bring some of their ‘dream playground’ to life. Students should draw one plan of the area noting what is there already and then a second plan with the changes they would make to it. The aim is for possibility not fantasy.

**Compare**  Students to compare & contrast the different designs. This could be done as an evaluative activity with students peer assessing the dream designs and then the reality designs; or looking at how well students have managed to bring elements of their dream designs into their real designs. The emphasis could be on realization of ideas: making it possible.

*Photo (22): New playground/park built by volunteers, Askar Refugee Camp, Nablus*

How does it compare to your designs?
Would you play in it?
Who is the park & playground for?
Is it only children who need space to play or relax?

**Discuss or Debate?**  Karim gets Lineman back in this chapter. Why is this computer game so important to him? Why are computer games so important to young people in the UK? How many of you play out in the street or park unsupervised? What risks are involved in playing computer games? What risks are there in playing out? Who is worried – parents or children?
Jamal’s Stone-slinging: is it a game or is it real? What are the risks? What are the comparisons with games – football or basketball? Hockey?

Reportage

The Language of War: newspaper headlines & sport/Guardian advert for the Ashes – why do we use so many war references for sport or games?

Students to do a study – find war references in sports page

Biblical reference to David & Goliath

Debate/Role-play

Was Jamal brave or stupid?

Put students in character groups with sugar paper. Students to look at I incident from perspective of their character and use evidence from the book to back up their argument (events, things the characters have said or done). For example, Hopper might think he was brave to do it but worry that he might end up in prison like Salim.

Good characters might be Violette, Karim, Hopper, Israeli soldier Jamal’s parents, Uncle Abu Feisal

Read

Chapter 19

Discuss

the large boulder: how does Karim tackle this obstacle? What does this boulder symbolize?

Discuss

‘marvellous harmony’, ‘joyful’ – what are the antonyms?

Photo (23): ‘Israel’ rock, Beit Sahour, Bethlehem

Why is there a star on the rock?
What is the tower in the background?

(Settlers bid to occupy Beit Sahour recently featured in Guardian reports on West Bank)


Read

Chapter 20 & 21

Discuss

What has happened to the ‘joy’ & ‘marvellous harmony’?
**Photo (24): Team dispute, Old City, Nablus**

*Inference grid?*
*Thought bubbles – what is the argument about?*
*What do the boys want?*
*Why is one boy holding the ball aloof?*

**Read**  
**Chapter 22 & 23**

**Compare/Contrast**  
Karim’s situation to the curfew in the beginning of the book: what is the same? What is different? What is the same? Is it worse?

Is it a haven or a prison?

**Imagery**  
of release

“He darted through to the front seat...like an animal emerging from its night burrow” (pp171-172).

with

“Karim felt as if ...squeeze out, at last, into the open air.” (p17).

**Symbolism**  
of Israeli flag on Hopper’s Ground (p171) where their homemade Palestinian flag of stones etc had been.

**Discuss**  
Karim’s list and the thoughts he has about it now: what does he really want (p174)?

What is ‘endurance’?

What is ‘betrayal”? (Aziza the Cat)

**Read**  
**Chapter 24**

**Discuss**  
Heroism; Courage; Cowardice; Fear

**Individually**  

**Groups**  
Give each group a different character and ask them to brainstorm ‘Do they display courage in the book?’

Joni (p88)/Jamal/Karim/Hospital Staff/Parents/Hopper/Hopper’s brother Salim/Hopper’s mother? Find evidence in book to back up position
**Read**  Chapter 25, 26, 27

**Discuss**  death of Ginger – significance/symbolism

**Discuss**  “That’s what refugees always say”; link back to Hopper’s family and the house in Ramle. Will the Boutros family ever return? Will they keep their keys?

**Read**  Chapter 28

**Question**  Would you stay (Aboudi Family)?

Would you go (Boutros Family?)

**Brainstorm**  2 lists: 10 reasons to go & 10 reasons to stay

Each group could do both lists or split the class and have some do one list and some the other.

**Groups**  Diamond 9 Exercise:
As a group, students to rank their 10 reasons in a diamond shape with number 1 being the most important and number 9 the least important. The 10th reason should be ‘discarded’ but kept in view on the table:

**Diamond Nine**

```
    1
   2   3
  4   5   6
 7   8
 9
10
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**Share**  Students circulate and look at each other’s Diamond 9. Go back to own group. Discuss differences/similarities

**Feedback**  Note all the Number 1s on the board and debate any differences

Do the same with the discarded ‘10’s.
Individual Vote: Would you stay or would you go?

Extension: What if you had no-where else to go?

Photo (25): Mural at Aida Campaign Teacher

The woman, Aida, welcomed the refugees in 1948 and gave them shelter. The three children represent the 3 routes Palestinians have to find justice: making peace, education and violence.

Debate Is it possible to use only one of these routes? What are the pros and cons? Is one route more courageous? Is one more difficult?

Active Games/Starters:

Football & the general need/right for children to play is a strong theme throughout the book. These games are good activities in themselves but can be linked to events & feelings in the story and are a good way of getting students actively involved.

GO! Class stands in a circle. One person in the middle throws a ball out to someone in the circle who throws it back to the person in the middle. Once a rhythm has been established, anyone from the circle can shout ‘GO!’ at which point they have to run into the middle and take over. The person who was in the middle runs out. The idea is to keep the ball moving in and out in a constant rhythm. Aim for all students to run into the middle. (The ‘GO!’ can be linked to being forced to leave).

Hush! Don’t Wake the Baby

A series of (potentially) noisy obstacles are set up behind a chair where a student sits facing the other way (blindfolded?). Some keys are under the chair. Another student has to retrieve the keys by going over the obstacles without being heard (Good for understanding tension & ‘danger’)

Cat & Mouse

Students stand scattered about in pairs, shoulder to shoulder. Nominate one pair as A: Cat; B: Mouse. The cat has to chase the mouse around the other pairs. If the cat tags the mouse they swap roles so the cat becomes the mouse and has to run away from the new Cat. The Mouse can save itself at any time by forcing someone else to be the mouse. This is done by standing next to another pair and nudging their shoulder with yours. This person you nudge becomes your partner and the old partner becomes the mouse.
Shoot-Out

Class stands in a big circle. The Teacher calls out someone’s name. That person ducks and the people on either side of him/her have to shoot at him and say ‘Bang’. Someone must be out: either the person doesn’t duck in time or one of the others is slow to shoot (saying ‘bang’ makes that clearer) or shoots the wrong person. You should end up with 2 left. They compete in a ‘Mexican’ shoot-out (back to back in the middle, walking apart, Teacher rattles keys and the first to turn & shoot wins.

This game is a good way to start exploring why we like to play war games

Football – or any ball game

Reviews for “A Little Piece of Ground”

“A Little Piece of Ground” is an exciting, enlightening and important story that brings to life the reality of events reported daily in the news, and will help young readers understand more about one of the worst conflicts affecting our world today. 'A fine book, and a daring book.”

Michael Morpurgo

“A Little Piece of Ground” has the same rights as any other book to be on the shelves of shops and libraries. I also think that by reading books like this, and acknowledging other points of view, it will be easier for both sides to understand each other”

Jewish Chronicle

“This book must go down as a serious and successful attempt to reach out and have this story heard”

Michael Rosen