



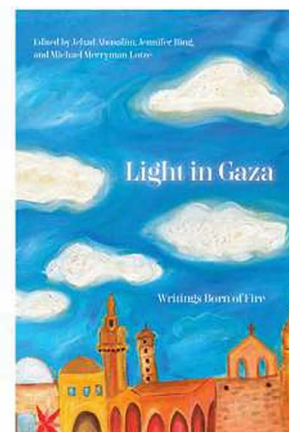
Light in Gaza : Writings Born of Fire

Study Guide



Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has been engaged in the Gaza Strip since December 1948, when the United Nations asked AFSC to oversee the relief program for Palestinians displaced because of the 1948 War that had begun months earlier. AFSC's concern for the lives and well-being of the Palestinians of Gaza (who identify this experience as the Nakba*) has continued up until the present, as has the continued experience of war, displacement, and disruption of "normal" life for the 2.1 million people living in Gaza today.



Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire provides an in-depth look at the experiences of Palestinians in Gaza. The anthology was created by staff at AFSC to provide a platform through which Palestinians from Gaza could offer up their own narratives to help readers better understand their dreams, fears, and aspirations for a future beyond the confines of Israeli military occupation and blockade. The book was published by Haymarket Books in August 2022. In addition to the offerings in this volume, we suggest that you review the maps and facts on the following pages, as well as the AFSC sponsored website, Gaza Unlocked (gazaunlocked.org), as an initial orientation to Gaza realities.

The study guide that follows offers discussion questions for each of the fifteen contributions to this anthology. If you plan to explore these writings in a group setting, we suggest initially the whole group read the Introduction, written by Jihad Abusalim, and collectively address the Initial Discussion Questions listed below. Then, depending on the size of the group, individuals or smaller groups may select and read one, several, or all of the contributions, reflect on the questions pertaining to each chapter, and share responses.

Initial Discussion Questions:

1. What do you, as individuals, consider essential to a life of basic dignity and opportunity? Create a list.
2. After reviewing Light in Gaza's introductory maps and graphic illustrations and "Quick Facts" provided in this study guide, what are your initial impressions, responses, and questions?
3. In the introduction of Light in Gaza, Jihad Abusalim writes about the importance of understanding historical context in the case of the history of Gaza. What does he identify as the central element in understanding Gaza's historical context? (pp. 1, 2)
4. What are three (3) difficulties people face when trying to understand the situation in Gaza? (pp. 5, 6)
5. This collection of writings is the result of AFSC's 2020 call to Palestinians in and from Gaza to submit responses to this central question: "Can a better future for Gaza be imagined as a part of a broad vision of ending the Nakba through return, restoration of rights, and achieving justice?" (p. 9) As you read the pieces in this volume, ask yourself – how does each writer make you think about Gaza's future in new ways?

*Nakba is an Arabic word meaning "catastrophe" and refers to Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine, its exiling of Palestinians and making them into refugees, its dispossession of Palestinian property, its destruction of Palestinian cities, towns, and villages, and its attempt to erase the existence of the Palestinian people from its homeland in 1948. The Nakba is not only a historical event; Israel's ongoing dispossession of Palestinians and colonization of Palestinian land means that the Nakba is ongoing and accurately defines Palestinian life under Israeli military occupation, apartheid, and settler-colonialism. Source: IMEU, "The Nakba and Palestine Refugees | IMEU Questions and Answers," accessed January 26, 2023, <https://imeu.org/article/the-nakba-and-palestine-refugees-imeu-questions-and-answers>.

Quick Facts on Gaza and the Blockade

The Gaza Strip is a small territory with a total area of around 140 square miles, or 360 square kilometers. It is home to 2.2 million Palestinians and is the only part of Mandatory Palestine's shoreline that was not incorporated into what became the state of Israel in 1948. The Gaza Strip includes the Palestinian cities of Gaza City, Deir el-Balah, Khan Yunis, and Rafah, as well as villages like Beit Hanun, Abasan, and Beit Lahia. There are also eight refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, including Jabaliya and al-Shati'. It is estimated that 70% of Gaza's current inhabitants are refugees who were expelled by Israel from their cities, towns, and villages in 1948. The Gaza Strip has been under a severe blockade imposed by Israel since 2007.

The blockade has had a devastating impact on the Gaza population, affecting all aspects of life.

- Before the Second Intifada began in 2000, about 500,000 exits from Gaza were recorded each month by workers crossing Erez checkpoint to work in Israel. In comparison, this number dropped to around 15,000 per month in 2019. While the numbers have risen in the last few years, they are nowhere near the pre-Intifada levels.
- Sixty-four percent of Gaza households are food insecure, and approximately 80% receive some form of food assistance.
- Gaza's unemployment rate is around 45%, one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. Youth unemployment is around 65%.
- Due to fuel shortages and damaged or destroyed electrical infrastructure, there are power outages for up to 11 hours per day in most areas of Gaza.
- Only one in ten households have access to safe drinking water.
- Over 98% of the water extracted from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption, while needed filtration equipment cannot be imported to Gaza.
- The equivalent of 43 Olympic sized swimming pools of untreated or partially treated sewage are dumped into the sea off Gaza every day. Equipment needed to build new or maintain existing treatment facilities is banned from entering Gaza.
- In addition to the toxins of the bombs and munitions dropped on Gaza, Israel's bombing of one of Gaza's largest stores of pesticides and fertilizers in May 2021 released carcinogenic chemicals that damage the environment including the soil, groundwater, and by extension food supply, leading to acute health concerns.
- Essential drugs and medical supplies are frequently out of stock in Gaza. In February 2022, the Ministry of Health in Gaza faced shortages of drugs and medical disposables, with 203 drug items (39% of the essential medicine list) and 174 medical disposables (20% of essential list) at zero stock, meaning with less than one month supply.
- Despite the human suffering caused by the blockade, the situation in Gaza is not a humanitarian crisis that can be resolved through international aid. It is a political crisis that results from the blockade that can only be resolved through political action.

For more information about the impact of the continuing blockade of Gaza, visit: Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, <https://www.mezan.org/en/>; Gisha, <https://gisha.org/en/>; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), <https://www.ochaopt.org/>

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AFSC's concern for the lives and well-being of the Palestinians of Gaza (who identify this experience as the Nakba*) has continued up until the present, as has the experience of violence, displacement, and disruption for the 2.1 million people living in Gaza.



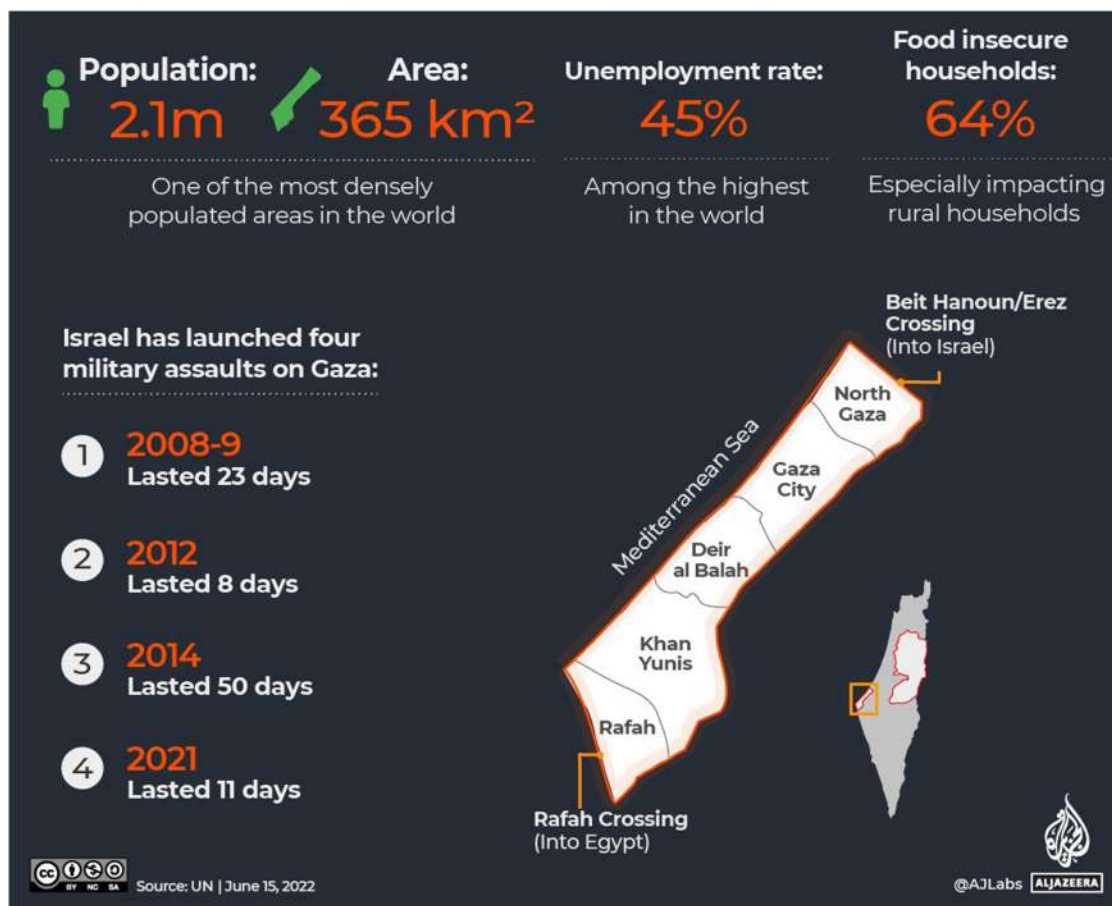
Population:
2.1 Million

Area:
365km

Source: Mohammed Haddad, "The Gaza Strip Explained in Maps," accessed January 26, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/7/the-gaza-strip-explained-in-maps>.

Gaza: 15 years of living under blockade

Israel's land, air and sea blockade has trapped more than two million people inside the Gaza Strip since 2007. No portion of Gaza's society or economy has been left untouched.



Source: Mohammed Haddad, "The Gaza Strip Explained in Maps," accessed January 26, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/7/the-gaza-strip-explained-in-maps>.

FOUR WARS OLD FOURTEEN YEARS OF CHILDHOOD IN GAZA

Of the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza, 41% are children aged 14 or under. These children have lived their entire lives under Israeli blockade and experience multiple types of trauma.

LIFELONG CONDITIONS

WATER CRISIS

97% of fresh water contaminated. Lack of access to clean drinking water is a leading cause of illness and child mortality in Gaza.

DEEP POVERTY

64% poverty rate / 69% food insecurity; 35% of Palestinian children under 5 at risk of not reaching their developmental potential due to chronic trauma.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

2/3 of schools in Gaza operate on double shifts due to classroom shortages.

MENTAL HEALTH

88% of Gaza children participating in one study had experienced personal trauma; 34% meeting PTSD diagnostic criteria.

2007

BORN A REFUGEE

I was born as one of the more than 70% of Palestinians in Gaza whose families were originally displaced during the Nakba in 1948.

BLOCKADE

The year I was born, Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza (ongoing as of 2021) by land, air, and sea, intensifying earlier restrictions.

DEC 2008 - JAN 2009

FIRST WAR

I survived a 22 day attack on Gaza. Israeli forces killed 1,385 Palestinians, including 318 children.

NOV 2012

SECOND WAR

I survived an eight day attack as Israeli forces killed 168 Palestinians in Gaza, including 33 children.

JULY 2014

THIRD WAR

I survived fifty days of onslaught as Israeli forces killed 2,251 Palestinians in Gaza, including 556 children. Over 1,500 children were orphaned.

MAR 2018 - DEC 2019

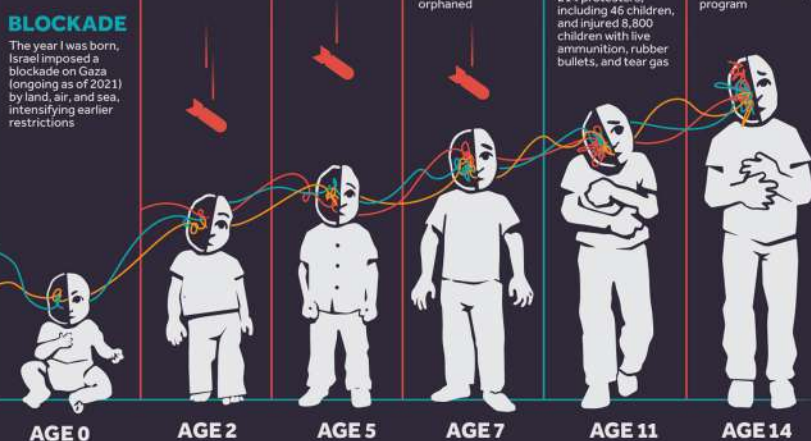
GREAT RETURN MARCH

For two years, I saw my community turn out en masse to protest the blockade. Israeli forces killed 214 protesters, including 46 children, and injured 8,800 children with live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas.

MAY 2021

FOURTH WAR

I survived an eleven day attack as Israeli forces killed 230 Palestinians. Twelve of the 67 children killed were participating in a trauma recovery program.



“

In Gaza, there is no 'post' [traumatic] because the trauma is repetitive and ongoing and continuous.

Samah Jabr
Chair of Mental Health Unit, Palestinian Ministry of Health

TYPES OF TRAUMA

CHRONIC TRAUMA

Prolonged, pervasive distressing events such as poverty or institutionalized discrimination.

INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Psychological trauma experienced by the descendants of a person who has survived a traumatic event.

ACUTE TRAUMA

An extremely distressing individual event.

VISUALIZING PALESTINE

SOURCES bit.ly/vp-trauma
WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG

[/visualizing_palestine](https://www.facebook.com/visualizing_palestine)
[fb.me/visualizingpalestine](https://www.facebook.com/visualizingpalestine)

[@visualizingpal](https://www.instagram.com/visualizingpal)

JUNE 2021
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Source: Visualizing Palestine, “Four Wars Old: Fourteen Years of Childhood in Gaza,” accessed January 26, 2023, <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visuals/four-wars-old>.

Refaat Alareer ***"Gaza Asks: When Shall This Pass?"***

After reading this selection by Refaat Alareer, select one of these quotations. Interpret the quotation and discuss how it contributed to your understanding of life in Gaza - the place, its people, their experiences, and your response to their reality.

1. "In 2001, Israeli occupation forces opened fire on Palestinian farmers in the Shuja'iyya neighborhood in Gaza City, killing a distant cousin, Tayseer Alareer, while he was farming his land... Tayseer was a farmer. He was not a fighter. He was not a stone thrower...but that did not shield him from Israeli fire...Tayseer left behind three little kids, a distraught widow, and a farm without a farmer. At the funeral, people comforted the unknowing kids. Everyone insisted: It shall pass. It shall pass." (p. 18)
2. "Perhaps the most emotional moment in my six-year teaching career in the IUG's [Islamic University in Gaza] English Department was when I asked my students which character they identified with more Othello, with his Arab origins, or Shylock, the Jew. Most felt they were closer to Shylock and more sympathetic to him than to Othello." (p. 22)
3. "The wounds Israel inflicted in the hearts of Palestinians are not irreparable. We have no choice but to recover, stand up again, and continue the struggle. Submitting to the occupation is a betrayal to humanity and to all struggles around the world." (p. 24)
4. "When I was approached to write for this book, the promise was that it will effect change and that policies, especially in the United States, will be improved. But, honestly, will they? Does a single Palestinian life matter? Does it? Reader, as you peruse these chapters, what can or will you do, knowing that what you do can save lives and change the course of history? Reader, will you make this matter?" (p. 25)

Asmaa Abu Mezieb ***"On Why We Still Hold onto Our Phones and Keep Recording"***

1. What reasons does Asmaa Abu Mezieb give us for Gazans' efforts to record Israeli attacks and their aftermath on their phones?
2. For whom does she say these recordings are made?
3. In the opening chapter by Refaat Al Areer, he calls for action from the international community to support Palestinians in Gaza. How can those of us outside of Gaza respond to the realities recorded by Asmaa and others in Gaza?

Shahd Abusalama ***"Breaking the Vicious Cycle of Permanent Temporality"***

1. Shahd Abusalama speaks at length about the idea of "permanent temporality." How would you explain this concept? What has caused this state of permanent temporality for Palestinians in Gaza?
2. What answer(s) can you suggest to Shahd Abusalama's question: "How can we break free from the vicious circle that traps us and our families in a state of permanent temporality?" (p.38)
3. Create a list of the major problems Shahd Abusalama identifies as affecting the lives of Gazans today.
4. In Abusalama's view, where does hope lie? How do you respond to her conclusion?

Asmaa Abu Mezied *"Lost Identity: The Tale of Peasantry and Nature"*

After reading this selection by Rafaat Alareer, choose one of these quotations. Interpret the quotation and discuss how it contributes to your understanding of life in Gaza – the place, its people, their experiences, and your response to their reality.

1. Asmaa Abu Mezied quotes her Bedouin grandmother saying, "A lap covered in soil is better than one covered in gold!" What does this proverb signify to her grandmother, and what does it say about the trajectory of agriculture in Gaza?
2. In what ways did historical events and colonial policies and practices reshape peasant identity, especially the roles of the Palestinian farmer? (p. 61)
3. How have the latest attacks on Gaza impacted attempts to revive agriculture in the area? (p. 81-82)

Salem Al Qudwa *"Ethical Implications of Experimental Design on Affected Communities in the Gaza Strip"*

1. What are the questions Salem Al Qudwa raises at the beginning of his article on housing design in Gaza? And what is his goal in addressing this concern?
2. What does Salem identify as a key element of Palestinian identity? And how is the "home" connected to the concept of family or family identity?
3. How have Israeli military offensives in Gaza and subsequent blockades of Gaza affected housing?
4. What has been the response from the local population and from most international aid agencies? What does Salem suggest as an alternative to these approaches? Describe "architecture of the everyday" as Salem applies it to Gaza. What factors influenced his design focus? (p. 97ff)
6. What do you see as effective results of his work? Structurally, environmentally, and socially?
7. What are key lessons Salem learned from his work in Gaza? (pp. 108-112)

Suhail Taha *"People's Light In Gaza's Darkness"*

In this article, Suhail Taha highlights the ongoing lack of dependable electricity for the 15 years since the beginning of Israel's ongoing blockade, as a deterrent to progress and development in the Gaza Strip. However, in the examples he cites, there is also evidence of the strength and determination of the people of Gaza to survive, and in some cases creatively thrive.

1. Identify examples of how limited or lack of access to electricity has damaged the quality of life in Gaza, then, provide examples of how individuals and families have creatively risen above/beyond the lack of electricity in their struggle to continue and survive.
2. What are the times in your life when you have lost access to electricity? What do you imagine are the long-term impacts of not having reliable electricity for years on end?

Nour Naim, (translated by Anas Abu Samhan) *"Artificial Intelligence as a tool for Restoring Palestinian Rights and Improving the Quality of Life"*

1. Identify (list) the ways Nour Naim reports that Israel uses artificial intelligence technology to control Gaza and its population.
2. What technology exists that can challenge Israeli surveillance and repression in Gaza?
3. In what ways might artificial intelligence reconnect Palestinians with land and communities lost to them during the Nakba of 1948?
4. In what ways does Nour Naim suggest artificial intelligence might improve the quality of life for Gazans?
5. What is the Algorithmic Accountability Act and how might legislation such as this address the problems Gazans face in these areas of advanced technology?

Mosab Abu Toha *"Exporting Oranges and Short Stories: Cultural Struggle in the Gaza Strip"*

1. "What is Gaza? ...Gaza appears in the global mind, momentarily when it is attacked by Israel or declared unlivable by the UN. When people think of Gaza, they think of harshness, suffering, poverty, militancy...we've also been viewed through the lens of destruction. ...Yet, there is another side – in fact, many sides – to who we are, how we live, and what we aspire to..." (p. 154-155)
 - As you review this piece by Mosab Abu Toha, what "other side(s)" to Gaza are revealed through his reporting?
2. "In 2015, the Palestine Museum, ...conducted a survey. The survey revealed that "a majority of Palestine's libraries are located in the Gaza Strip." (p. 160). However, since the beginning of the siege there has been a decrease in the number of bookshops and libraries in Gaza, and in 2015, Atef Abu Seif, the Minister of Culture, wrote, "A healthy cultural atmosphere requires a healthy political one. We don't have this unfortunately. The politician doesn't support the intellectual..." (p. 164)
 - What forces repress and restrict Gazan literary and artistic expression today?
 - Despite this repression and these restrictions, what are the ways Gazans have challenged these forces?
 - To what does the article's title refer – "Exporting Oranges and Short Stories?" What does the section, "Literature in Gaza," tell us about Gaza's literary history from 1966?

Dorgham Abusalim *"In the Haze of Fifty-One Days"*

This piece is a personal narrative written as a diary-like story. It is set in or near Deir-al- Balah, south of Gaza City in the middle area of the Gaza Strip.

1. What critical event occurred upon Dorgham Abusalim's arrival home? How does this impact his visit?
2. What has this story, or chapter in Dorgham's life, told us about Gaza?
3. What does Dorgham mean when he writes: "I still imagine and hope for a time when that godforsaken land would rise from the depths of apathy to cherish and celebrate difference"?

4. Dorgham describes the contradiction that technology is "fundamentally a force for good" but that "technology can be a badly triggering medium" (p. 190). In Asmaa Abu Mezied's chapter (p. 29) she states that "documenting what we are going through is very important to ensure that our narrative remains alive and remains ours." Nour Naim argues that artificial intelligence could be used as a force for good (p. 141). What are your thoughts about technology and the role it plays in the Palestinian story?

Yousef M. Aljamal *"Travel Restrictions as a Manifestation of Nakba: Gaza, the Path Backward Is the Path Forward"*

1. After reading this piece by Yousef Aljamal, how do you interpret the phrase in the title (or segment of the title), "the Path Backward Is the Path Forward?"
2. What examples does Yousef provide to show how general restriction on movement, and travel in and out of Gaza specifically, have affected Yousef's family in particular and the rest of Gaza's population?
3. Yousef Aljamal has stated that the "Israeli government will not move on its own to lift restrictions on the Gaza Strip." He follows this statement with several "shoulds" that suggest Yousef's recommendations for action and engagement to address this problem. What do you think is a priority in this call to action? (pp. 213-214)
4. In what ways have Palestinians in Gaza succeeded in living "above the occupation and not under it?" (p. 215)

Israa Mohammed Jamal *"Let Me Dream"*

1. How does Israa Jamal's experience as a student in Gaza reflect ongoing restrictions on education and movement for Palestinians living in Gaza?
2. Revisit your definition of a life of dignity and opportunity that you developed at the beginning of this study. List the elements or expectations of such a way of life, then compare this with what is available in Gaza.
3. Consider Israa's description of life growing up in Gaza. She describes her experience and that of her family members. What are challenges that people in Gaza face as they try to lead creative and productive lives?
4. Make a list of Israa's wishes and dreams. (p. 229-231) Are these dreams currently attainable for her and her family?

Basman Aldirawi *“Gaza 2050: Three Scenarios”*

1. Reflecting on the other contributions to the book, discuss the possibilities and challenges raised by the “Three Scenarios” Basman envisions for Gaza in 2050. What questions are raised for you as you consider these possible futures?
2. Which of these scenarios do you think is most likely, is this also the scenario you think is most likely to occur?
3. What will it take from Palestinians in Gaza, from Israelis, and from world powers to allow those in Gaza to “live like any other place in the world?”

Poems in the Anthology:

Basman Aldirawi *“Don’t Step on My Feet Again”*

1. To whom or to what is Basman Aldirawi speaking in the title of this poem?
2. What visual, auditory, and sensual images of Gaza are presented to the reader through this poem?
3. What does the poem say about the experiences and responses of the poet?

Basman Aldirawi *“Why Are You Still Here?”*

1. To whom is Basman Aldirawi addressing the question that makes up the title of this poem?
2. What images are presented to the reader?
3. List and reflect on the daily experiences of individuals living in Gaza presented in this poem.
4. What is the significance/symbolism of the grandfather in this poem?
5. Who is the grandfather and what is his experience?

Mosab Abu Toha *“A Rose Shoulders Up”*

1. What message does this poem by Mosab Abu Toha convey to us?
2. What does the rose represent?
3. Why might the editors of this volume have placed this poem at the end of the anthology?”

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This study guide was created by Deborah Fine, Jennifer Bing, Shireen Akram-Boshar, Jihad Abusalim, and Mike Merryman-Lotze in December, 2022. This document was designed by Khaled Safi.