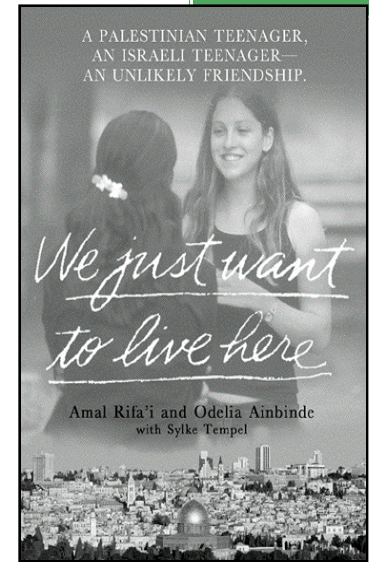


Accelerated  
Reader

# We Just Want to Live Here

A Palestinian Teenager, An Israeli Teenager—  
An Unlikely Friendship

by Amal Rifa'i and  
Odelia Ainbinder  
with Sylke Tempel



176 pages • 978-0-312-31894-9

“The openness of these young women, and their families, made it possible for me to delve more deeply into different world views than had ever been possible before.”  
—Sylke Tempel, from her Introduction to the book

“**Profoundly moving** . . . This is the book for anyone who wants to feel and understand the emotions on both sides. It will become a classic.”  
—Arthur Hertzberg,  
New York University

## TO THE TEACHER

A moving and unique collection of letters recently exchanged between two teenage girls—one Palestinian, one Israeli—*We Just Want to Live Here* depicts the Arab-Israeli conflict in an immediate, insightful, and profoundly honest manner. Palestinian Amal Rifa'i and Israeli Odelia Ainbinder are both eighteen years old, they both live in Jerusalem, yet their lives are effectively worlds apart. This important book represents a mutual effort to bridge the gap between their lives, cultures, and perspectives.

As we discover in their revealing correspondence, Amal and Odelia met on a student exchange program in Switzerland. Just weeks after they returned to their home city, however, a new round of violence—the latest Intifada—broke out. Their friendship was seriously threatened, until Middle East correspondent Sylke Tempel decided to encourage Amal and Odelia to exchange their ideas and feelings through letters. These readable, richly varied letters have been collected and arranged thematically by Tempel. Reading them, we witness a dialogue between Amal and Odelia on such vital topics as the Intifada, their own families, history, politics, religion, tradition, school life, suicide bombings, border

PRAISE FOR  
WE JUST WANT TO  
LIVE HERE

checkpoints, military service, and so forth. These young women write openly and tellingly of their anger, frustration, and fear, but also—importantly—of their hopes and dreams for a brighter future.

Together, Amal and Odelia truly convey a renewed sense of hope for peace in the Middle East; their letters will serve as a valuable tool for all high-school instructors attempting to teach both the issues and history of the Arab-Israeli conflict with sensitivity and candor.

PREPARING  
TO READ

“The letters exchanged between Amal and Odelia are profoundly moving. The conflict between Jews and Arabs has been described in countless books and argued in unending polemics, but here, in the letters between these two eighteen-year-old women, an Arab and a Jew, is the heartbreaking essence of the quarrel. [This book reveals] the battle of two rights: the Palestinians who have been made into semi-strangers in their homeland and the Jews who have no other place which is central to their history . . . In these letters (an idea brilliantly conceived and carried through by Sylke Tempel), Amal and Odelia educate each other. They conclude together that their two peoples cannot continue to make war. Instead they must agree that they are destined, perhaps even condemned, to live together in the land, at first in two separate states, and ultimately in growing comradeship. This is the book for anyone who wants to feel and understand the emotions on both sides. It will become a classic.”

—Arthur Hertzberg,  
author of *A Jew in America: My Life and a People's Struggle for Identity*  
and Bronfman Visiting Professor of the Humanities, New York University

This Teacher's Guide is divided primarily into two sections, which both appear immediately below. The first, “Reading and Understanding the Book,” will help students with reading comprehension, conceptual appreciation, interpreting the narratives and contexts of these letters, and related matters. “Questions and Exercises for the Class,” the second section, will enable students to think more broadly or comparatively about the letters in this book—both individually and collectively. A final section on “Using This Book's Supplements in Your Classroom” is offered as a brief conclusion, along with a list of books (including fiction and non-fiction) suggested for further reading.

1. What do we learn about Amal Rifa'i and Odelia Ainbinder in this book's opening pages? How are they alike? How are they different? What do they—and don't they—have in common? Where, in general, does each young woman now find herself on the road of life? And how did their friendship begin in the first place?
2. Why do Amal and Odelia have such differing views throughout Chapter Two regarding the so-called "psychometric test"? (What is this test? What does it measure? Why does it matter?) Why are Amal and Odelia unable to agree on this matter? Why is it so important to each of them?
3. In her letter (in Chapter Three) dated October 10, 2002, Odelia refers to something called *Am*. What is *Am*? Translate this term, and then explain why Odelia rejects it.
4. What does Amal mean when she writes in Chapter Four, in her letter of September 8, 2002: "I am trapped in my own country"? Later in this same missive, Amal writes: "Jordan is a great and beautiful country." What specifically does she like or enjoy about Jordan?
5. Chapter Six, entitled "Jerusalem," finds Amal and Odelia reflecting on the city they both call home—its politics, its religious contexts, its neighborhoods, its attractions, its meanings to various people over time, and so on. We also encounter the individual accounts of Odelia's mother and father as well as Amal's grandfather. What does Jerusalem mean or represent to each of these three persons? What brought each of them to the city? And why has each remained?
6. In Chapter Eight, in her letter dated October 18, 2002, Odelia discusses her upcoming stint of mandatory service in the Israeli army. How does she personally feel about this obligation? And how does she feel about it more broadly or philosophically—that is, as a fact of life in Israel? Why does she claim that "the [Israeli] army is more moral" than the other armies of the world today? Explain her reasoning.
7. In the revealing chapter entitled "How I Became What I Am" (Chapter Nine), Odelia gives primary credit to her parents. But she quickly adds: "My movement also helped me understand many new things a lot." What is this movement she's referring to, and what did you learn about over it the course of the book? How would you say it has influenced Odelia's life, thought, and personality?

QUESTIONS AND  
EXERCISES  
FOR THE CLASS

8. Later in Chapter Nine, Amal addresses the same issue (i.e., the reasons for and sources of her selfhood). Who or what does Amal credit as “the biggest impact” on the formation of her identity? Were you surprised or intrigued by this? Explain why or why not, given what you have learned of Amal over the course of *We Just Want to Live Here*.

9. The last letter appearing in this book is a note from Amal dated November 2002. What sort of “passport” does she wish for at the conclusion of this letter? Why does she want such a document? What would it give her—or meant to her, or do for her? And why doesn’t Amal have such a passport already?

10. Near the end of this book’s Afterword, Odelia says: “I think neither Israelis nor Palestinians should forget the suffering inflicted on the them by the other . . . But I also feel that Israelis and Palestinians should stop blaming one another constantly.” Having finished this book, does this statement strike you as paradoxical or contradictory? Explain why or why not, citing passages from throughout the book to underscore your view.

1. Explain the title; identify the “we” in *We Just Want to Live Here*. Then conduct a brief introductory discussion on what specifically this book taught you about history, religion, politics, and/or current events. Express yourself candidly while listening carefully to your classmates.

2. In her Introduction to the book, journalist Sylke Tempel asserts: “It is the young generation [of Palestinians and Israelis] that suffers most from the violence both sides inflict on each other.” As a class, explore the veracity, history, and reality of this remark.

3. Chapter Two is entitled “Meeting the Other in Switzerland.” How and why did these two young women first meet? What did each originally think of the other? When, if at all, did the impression that each had of the other begin to change, and why?

4. In Chapter Three, in her letter of October 10, 2002, Odelia writes, regarding the tragic and incessant violence of the Intifada: “I think we [that is, both Israelis and Palestinians] should look at great people like Martin Luther King and try to learn from them.” (She later expands on her thoughts about Dr. King in a letter dated November 3, 2002.) Either on your own or with your class, list other historical figures or contemporary leaders whom Israelis and Palestinians ought to study and emulate in order to resolve their conflict. Then elaborate on why you selected these particular individuals.

5. Elsewhere in Chapter Three, in a letter dated October 17, 2003, Odelia writes: “So we have two different wars.” What are the two conflicts to which she is referring? Do you agree with the distinction Odelia is making here? And does Amal—in her answer (of October 25, 2002) to this letter—seem to agree with her? Explain.
6. Midway through *We Just Want to Live Here*, in Chapter Five, the book-long exchange of letters is temporarily replaced by an in-person dialogue between Amal and Odelia that is moderated by Sylke Tempel. How do both Amal and Odelia regard the Israeli-Palestinian borderlines as compared to the borders of Europe?
7. Amal and Odelia have very different impressions and ideas about school, as we find in Chapter Seven. Elucidate and, if possible, explain their separate reasons for these differing perspectives.
8. As an independent exercise, develop a “pen-pal” relationship with someone who sees the world somehow differently from yourself. Be they near or far, neighbor or stranger, distant relative or anonymous acquaintance—try to exchange your ideas and experiences with this person in a sincere, respectful manner, just as Amal and Odelia do. Then prepare a short presentation (to be delivered before your class) in which you describe what you have learned—about your correspondent and about yourself—from this exercise.
9. The Afterword to *We Just Want to Live Here* features a second face-to-face conversation between Amal and Odelia, as facilitated by Sylke Tempel. At one point, Odelia remarks: “I guess we have to accept that there will always be different versions of the same history.” As a class or in an individually composed essay, express what this book has taught you about such “different versions” of past and recent events.
10. Finally, how would you characterize the overall tone of this book? Optimistic? Hopeful? Cautious? Perplexing? Uncertain? Otherwise? Identify the prevailing mood of these pages. Also, make an informed guess on the probable future course of Amal and Odelia’s friendship.

*We Just Want to Live Here* concludes with three useful supplements that will aid any instructor in their efforts to teach this book.

The Chronology presents a detailed yet succinct history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the form of a clear timeline. Teachers might want to communicate the historical narrative of this chronology—that is, its dates, places, and events—directly alongside the dual narrative of Amal and Odelia's letters. Doing so will help students come to the history of this conflict in both general and specific ways.

It should also be noted that half a dozen Maps are interspersed throughout the book's Chronology. These will afford students a pictorial understanding of the history/development of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Much of this difficult conflict is, of course, a matter of land—that is, of geography. Maps are thus essential tools for comprehension.

Finally, *We Just Want to Live Here* offers a Glossary of key terms. Students should be encouraged to define and discuss these terms, as well as any others which, even though they are not listed here, might prove fruitful in any extended consideration of the book. (For example, *pogrom*, *kibbutz*, and *Intifada*.)

SUGGESTIONS  
FOR FURTHER  
READING

FICTION: *The Zigzag Kid: A Novel* by David Grossman; *Four Mothers: A Novel* by Shifra Horn; *Feeling Sorry for Celia* by Jaclyn Moriarty; and *The Bullet Collection: A Novel* by Patricia Sarrafian Ward.

NON-FICTION: *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story* by Tamim Ansary; *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo\*; *Meena, Heroine of Afghanistan: The Martyr Who Founded RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan* by Melody Ermachild Chavis; *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* by Zlata Filipovic; *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* by David Fromkin; *Death as a Way of Life: Israel Ten Years After Oslo* by David Grossman; *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel* by David Grossman; *The Yellow Wind* by David Grossman; *Not Even My Name* by Thea Halo; *The Diary of Latoya Hunter: My First Year in Junior High* by Latoya Hunter; *All But My Life: A Memoir* by Gerda Weissmann Klein\*; *War Without End: Israelis, Palestinians, and the Struggle for a Promised Land* by Anton La Guardia; and *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel* by Tom Segev.

(\* = A Macmillan Teacher's Guide is also available for this title.)

Amal Rifa'i, an eighteen-year-old Palestinian, plans to study special education at an Israeli college.

Odelia Ainbinder, an eighteen-year-old Israeli, has started a year of community service with a socialist-Zionist movement. She will soon begin her mandatory military service.

Sylke Tempel is a Middle East correspondent reporting from Israel. She teaches at the Berlin branch of Stanford University.

Scott Pitcock wrote this Teacher's Guide. He lives in New York City and works in book publishing.

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**ALL BUT MY LIFE**, Gerda Weissmann Klein\*  
**ANNE FRANK**, Jacobson & Colón  
**ANNIE JOHN**, Jamaica Kincaid\*  
**BETSEY BROWN**, Ntozake Shange\*  
**Building Solid Readers (A Graphic Novel Teacher's Guide)**  
**ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY**, Francis Bok\*  
**I AM A SEAL TEAM SIX WARRIOR**, Howard E. Wasdin & Stephen Templin\*  
**I CAPTURE THE CASTLE**, Dodie Smith\*  
**I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN**, Joanne Greenberg\*  
**THE ILIAD**, trans., Robert Fitzgerald\*  
**THE INFERNO OF DANTE**, trans., Robert Pinsky  
**LIE**, Caroline Bock\*  
**LIKE ANY NORMAL DAY**, Mark Kram, Jr.\*  
**A LONG WAY GONE**, Ishmael Beah  
**MIDNIGHT RISING**, Tony Horwitz  
**MY SISTERS' VOICES**, Iris Jacob\*  
**THE NATURAL**, Bernard Malamud\*  
**NAVY SEAL DOGS**, Michael Ritland\*  
**NICKEL AND DIMED**, Barbara Ehrenreich  
**NIGHT**, Elie Wiesel  
**THE NIGHT THOREAU SPENT IN JAIL**, Lawrence & Lee\*  
**THE ODYSSEY**, trans., Robert Fitzgerald  
**RAY BRADBURY'S FAHRENHEIT 451**, Tim Hamilton  
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**A RUMOR OF WAR**, Philip Caputo\*  
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**THIS I BELIEVE**, Allison & Gediman, editors  
**UPSTATE**, Kalisha Buckhanon\*  
**WE JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE**, Rifa'i & Ainbinder\*  
**WIT**, Margaret Edson\*  
**A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER**, Michael Dorris

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