

The Bird's Nest

A Reading A-Z Level P Leveled Book
Word Count: 850

Connections

Writing

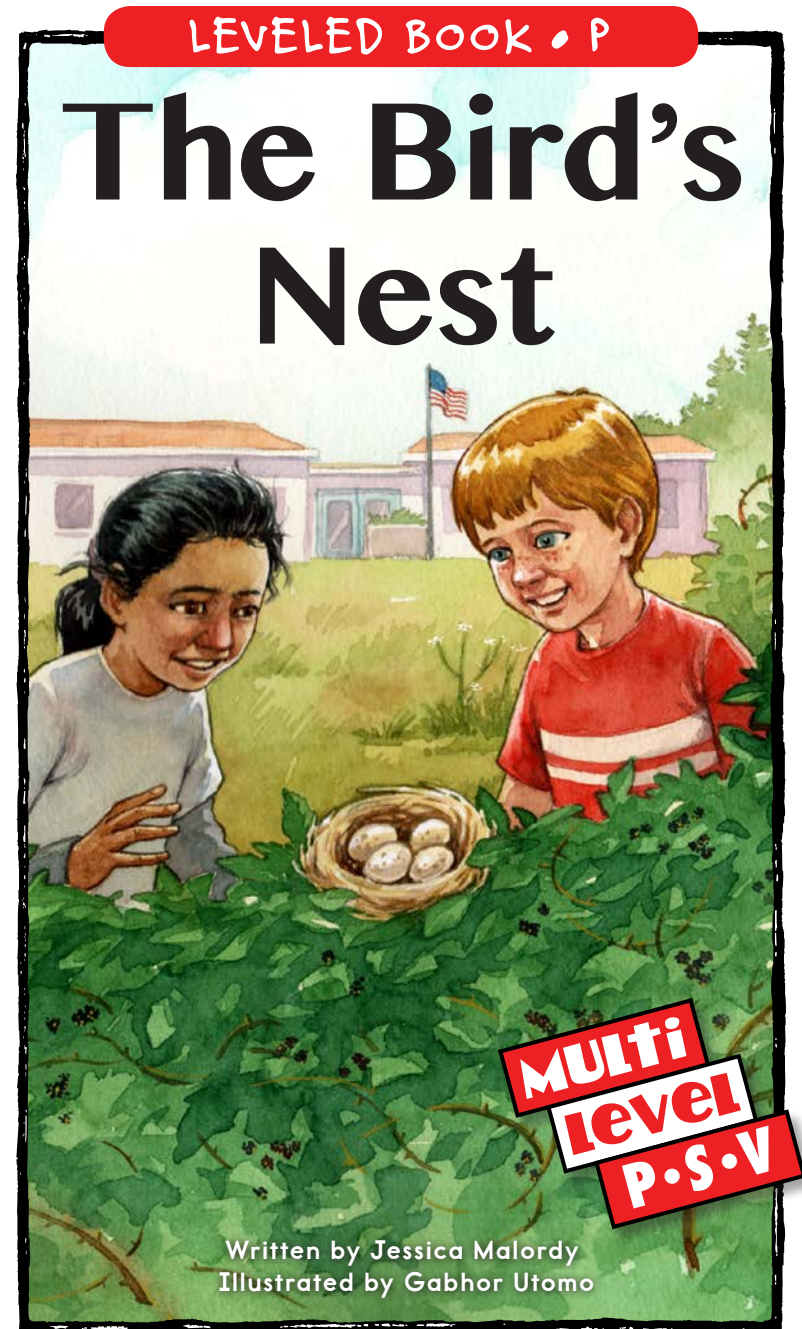
Write a recipe for a favorite food dish in your family.

Social Studies

Make a map of Syria. Include major cities, landmarks, rivers, and the countries that border it.

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The Bird's Nest



Written by Jessica Malordy
Illustrated by Gabhor Utomo

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Focus Question

What is the importance of bird nests in this story?

Words to Know

accent
Arabic
baklava

pistachios
refugees
Syria

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Level P Leveled Book
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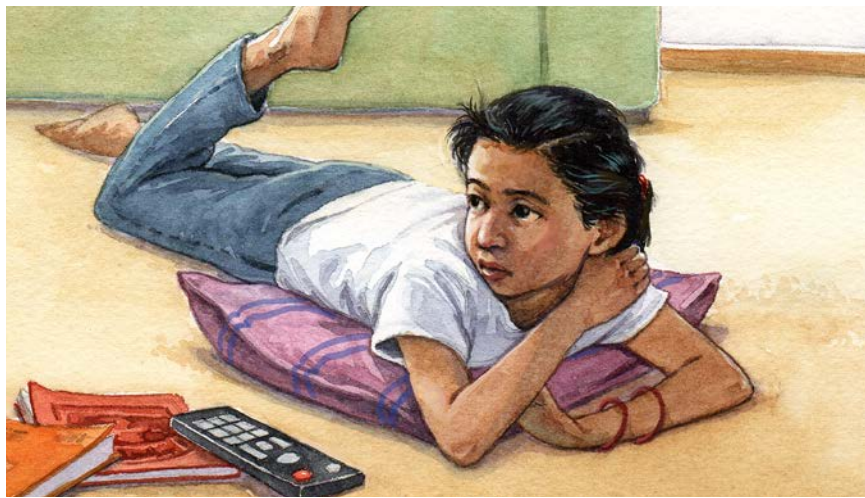
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Correlation

LEVEL P

Fountas & Pinnell	M
Reading Recovery	28
DRA	28



Rima is bored with Saturday cartoons, so she gets up and walks into the kitchen. The counter is covered with baking sheets, a sack of sugar, **pistachios**.

“We’re going to bake today?” Rima asks. After a week at school learning English, it feels good to speak **Arabic**.

“Tomorrow there will be a bake sale,” Rima’s mother explains.

“Bake sale?” Rima asks. “What’s that?”

“We **refugees** will bake our favorite sweets from home,” her mother says. “Americans will come to buy them.”



This time last year, when Rima was eight, home was a tent among many other tents. The year before that, home was the side of the road, a storm-tossed boat, a stranger’s basement. It was wherever they happened to lay their heads at night.

When Rima was six, though, home was a house in the country of **Syria**. Home had a big window in the kitchen where black-and-white-tailed birds came to roost. It had a carpet in the living room that smelled of honey and flour. It had a bedroom with a perfect view of the moon.



Now they live in an apartment in America, and her mother speaks in a hushed voice whenever she mentions Syria. War came to Syria long before they left, and it has only gotten worse. They are never going back. There is nowhere to go back to.

What Is a Refugee?

A *refugee* is a person who is forced to leave his or her country to seek safety in another country. The term comes from the word *refuge*, which means a safe place—the very thing that refugees are in search of. Refugees usually leave behind their family and friends as well as their home. In the case of Rima and her mother, they left Syria because of war. Since 2011, millions of Syrian families have fled their country and become refugees all over the world.



Her mother opens the refrigerator and pulls out a box of dough noodles. Rima grabs some pistachios and begins to chop them. They haven't baked together in forever—and they are making bird's nest **baklava**! When they are done, the pistachios will sit inside the dough, just like little eggs in a nest.

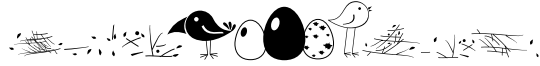
Rima begins to hum an old song she loves from home.



The next day, the bake sale is crowded and noisy. Everywhere Rima turns, she sees the sweets of her childhood . . . and beyond them, a long line of families waiting. What if the Americans don't like Syrian baking?

They *ooh* and *ahh*, though, pointing at the trays. "What are these called?" they ask in English before trying to repeat the food names in Arabic. Rima thinks it's fun to teach someone else a new language for a change.

“Delicious,” they say, one by one, after biting into the baklava, and Rima blushes with pride.



Rima and her mother return the next week, and the next. Their bird's nest baklava is the star of the bake sale. Rima thinks people can taste the joy that she and her mother share in the kitchen. Joy and peace after three years living as refugees, never settled or safe enough to bake together.

One week, a boy named Andy from Rima's school stops by her table with his family. “At my house in Syria, birds built nests just like this outside our kitchen window,” Rima tells him.

When Andy hands her three dollar bills, Rima says, “*Yislamou*.”



“Sorry,” she adds, blushing. “*Yislamou* is how we say ‘thank you’ in Syria.”

“*Yislamou*, then,” says Andy, lifting her baklava with a grin.

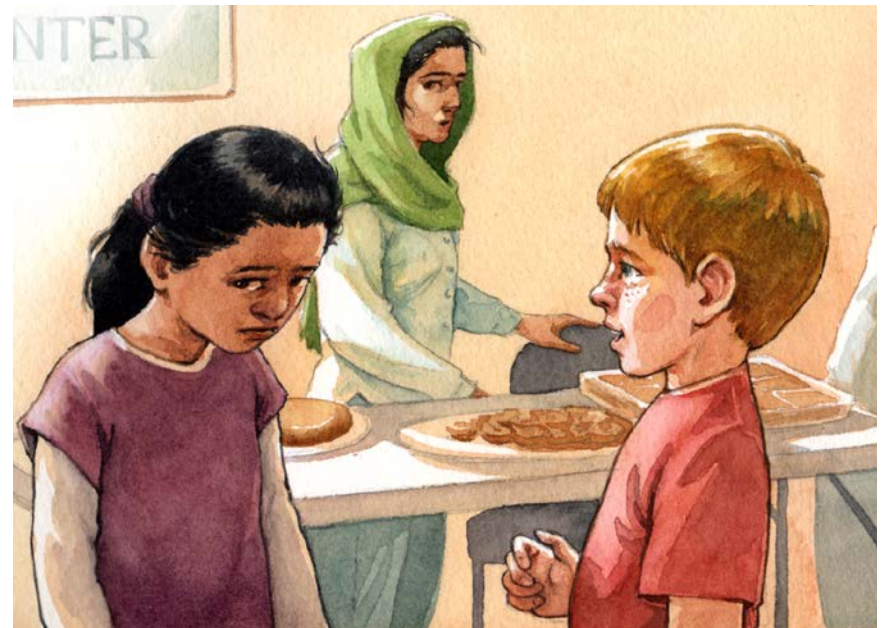


Rima and Andy don't talk at school. He plays during recess with the other boys, and Rima spends half the day learning English. But every weekend, Andy and his family return to the bake sale.

Each time, Andy asks Rima how to say something new in Arabic: *hello, goodbye, you're welcome.*

Rima says the words clearly and slowly. Andy's **accent** is awful, but she knows not to tease. Rima doesn't like it when the kids at school tease her about her English.

One day, Rima tells Andy about how, when she was little, she would pick pistachios straight from her grandparents' tree.

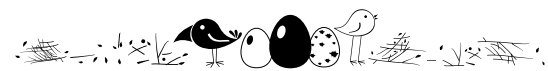


"You must miss it there," Andy says, and suddenly Rima's eyes fill with tears. Ashamed, she ducks her head.

Andy just smiles, though—a kind smile, Rima thinks.

Afterward, as they pack up, Rima's mother says, "Who is that boy who always talks to you? A friend?"

"No," Rima mumbles. "Just a boy from school."



That week during recess, Rima is reading on a bench when Andy taps her on the shoulder.

“I want to show you something,” he says. He points to the woods behind the school, and the two walk toward them together.

“Look,” Andy says and points again.



Rima gasps. There in some blackberry brambles is a bird's nest. The two of them look more closely: inside the nest sit four perfect eggs.

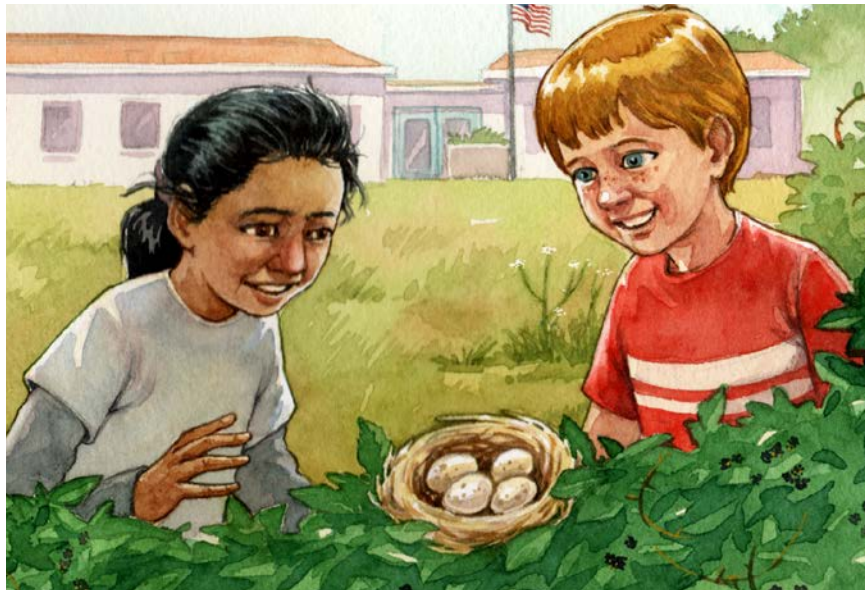
“Wow,” Rima breathes.

Andy nods. “They really do look just like your baklava,” he whispers.

“I wonder if they'll live close to home once they hatch,” Rima says, “or fly far away to somewhere new.”

Andy puts his hands in his pockets.
“Rima?” he says shyly. “I know you’re
sad to have left your first home behind.
But I want you to know that here in
your new home, you are . . . my *sadiq*.”
He looks at her. “Did I say that right?
Sadiq?”

Rima grins. “Of course,” she tells him.
His Arabic sounds as awful as ever,
but she means the words with all
her heart. “There’s no wrong way
to say *friend*.”



Glossary

- accent** (*n.*) a style of pronunciation or way of speaking a language (p. 11)
- Arabic** (*n.*) the language originally of the Arab people, now widely spoken in the Middle East and Northern Africa (p. 3)
- baklava** (*n.*) a Middle Eastern dessert made of thin pastry dough, honey, and nuts (p. 7)
- pistachios** (*n.*) pale green nuts (p. 3)
- refugees** (*n.*) people who flee war, hunger, bad treatment, or natural disaster, often with no definite place to go (p. 3)
- Syria** (*n.*) a country in the Middle East that is on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea (p. 5)