

al-Nakba, 1948

“It is May 15, 1948. You are a young school boy in Jerusalem. You used to play with your friends in the streets of your neighborhood, but lately your parents have confined you to the street your house is on. You don’t really understand why, but you are content that you still get to play street soccer with your friends, and sometimes even shoot your slingshot at imaginary targets. The girls play outside too, jumping rope and playing hopscotch. But it all changed the day before your seventh birthday.

Fighting has been breaking out all over the country between Zionist Jews and Palestinians, and relatives have asked your parents to leave the city to go to a safer place. Your parents decide to stay in Jerusalem, and your mother, your sisters, your young brothers, and you flee the house to stay in a convent with nuns your mother knows. You only had time to pack a few clothes in a bag to take with you, so it is the only thing you carry. Your father and three older brothers stay behind to protect the house. Hours later, only two of your brothers make it to the convent. What has happened to your father and your oldest brother? Hiding from the outside world that night, you hear bombs explode and gunfire rain down close by. You worry about your father and your oldest brother, wondering if they’re hurt. You also wonder whether your family’s hiding spot will be bombed next.

It is now June 1948. You and your family are walking down a wide, desolate road with thousands of other Palestinian families. You have no idea where you’re going; all you know is that the destination is supposed to be safer for you there. You think back to last week, when your family was reunited with your father and brother, both taken prisoner. The reunion was not a happy one, however. You’ve lost your home, part of your family, your friends, and everything that was familiar to you. You feel a tug on your hand and are brought out of your memories. ‘We’ll be okay,’ your mother says. And you believe her.”

PAUSE

“Slowly start coming back to the present and open your eyes. Think about how you would have felt if you had actually been a part of this tragic event.”

Ask the students to take out a sheet of paper and a pen and or pencil. Tell them that they are going to respond to the story you have just read them by doing a timed writing exercise. The object of the exercise is to try to write as much as possible in the time allotted. Allow a 5-minute writing period. Tell the students that their stories should convey a sense of how they felt if they had been there during the bombings and the exodus out of Jerusalem. Ask the students to finish the following sentence....

It is June XXX, 1948. As I walk along the dry, dusty road with your family, I wonder where our walk will end...

Allow five minutes for the students to respond to the writing prompt.

When the writing period is over, ask students to stop. Assure them that it is not necessary to complete their stories and ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class. After several responses have been read, inform the students that this was a real event now known as *al-Nakba*, or the Palestinian Exodus of 1948.

The story is based on a memoir by Jacob Nammur, who was seven years old at the time of the event. His father and brother were taken prisoner, but weren't reunited with the rest of their family until 1950. His family didn't take part in the exodus and were one of the few Palestinian families that stayed in West Jerusalem. They did lose their home, which was given to a Jewish family from Poland. He lived in Jerusalem until he moved to the United States with part of his family in 1964.