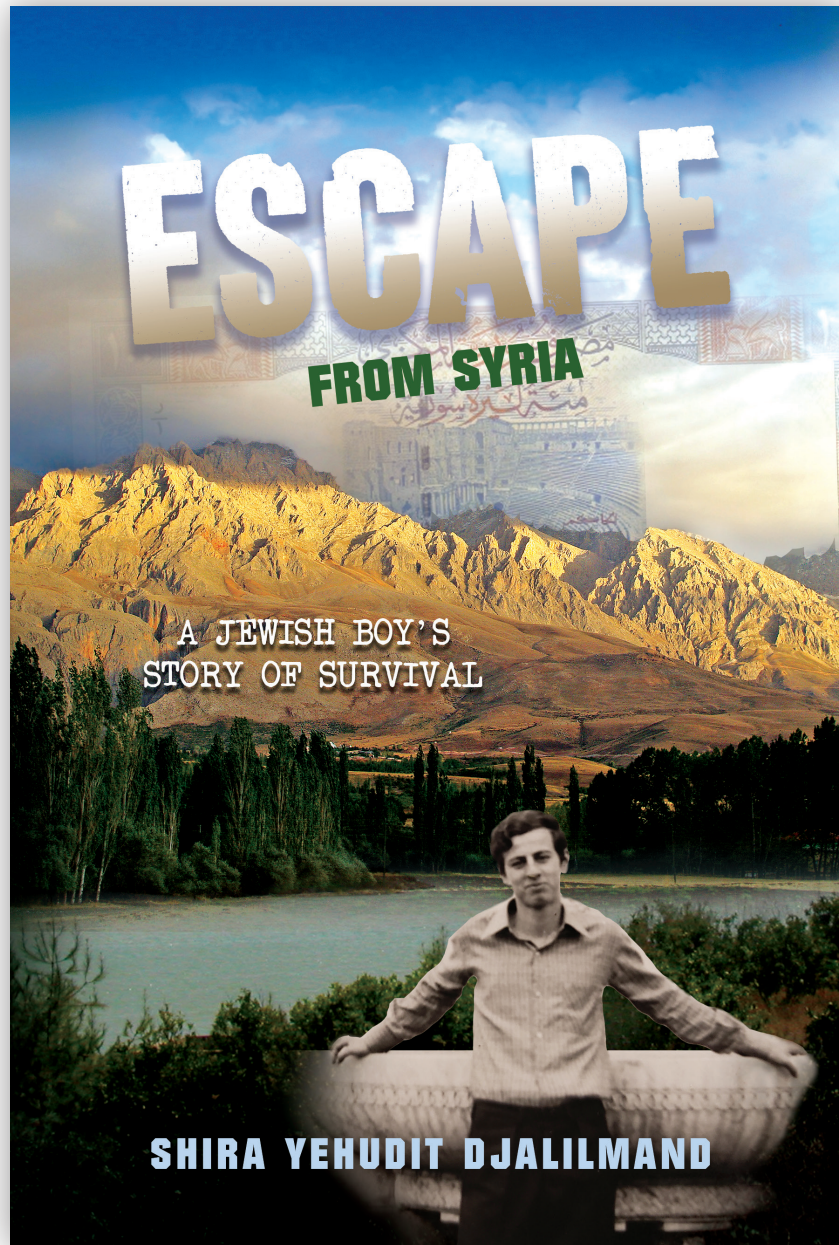


Educator's Guide



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CONTENTS

For the Teacher	3
Pre-Reading Activities	4
Prologue	4
Chapter 1: Born in Fear	5
Chapter 2: Clouds of Suspicion	6
Chapter 3: Fleeing from Persecution	7
Chapter 4: Escape Plan	8
Chapter 5: To Turkey!	9
Chapter 6: New Plans	10
Chapter 7: Goodbye, Aleppo	11
Chapter 8: Miracle in the Mountains	12
Chapter 9: Across the Border	13
Chapter 10: Risky Business in Beirut	14
Chapter 11: Suspects in the Synagogue	15
Chapter 12: Trapped in Beirut	16
Chapter 13: Beirut to the Border	17
Chapter 14: Border Crossing	18
Chapter 15: A New Life	19
Epilogue	19
Supplementary Activities	20

FOR THE TEACHER

This guide consists of lessons to assist you in using *Escape from Syria: A Jewish Boy's Story of Survival* in your classroom. The guide is written in a chapter-by-chapter format and includes a synopsis, pre-reading activities, and comprehension questions, as well as supplementary activities to be used at the end of the book.

The book and its accompanying guide can be used in a number of ways. Students reading at the same level might participate in a small-group guided reading of the book, returning to it over several weeks as they read and discuss it with the teacher. The entire class might read the book and discuss it in small groups using literature circles or reciprocal teaching. The teacher can then use the suggested questions to guide students in their discussions. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. Students should be encouraged to support their answers with evidence from the text. Students might keep a notebook of their responses throughout the year, which can then be used for progress monitoring and assessment purposes.

This teacher's guide includes many document-based questions. These questions focus on utilizing critical-thinking skills. Students are also asked to make comparisons, draw analogies, and apply historic analysis using primary and secondary sources from this time period. Source material for questions include photographs, maps, and documents. The questions can be used to teach students how to analyze source documents and deepen their understanding of the life and times of the people featured in this book.

Using this guide can help you as a teacher create more active readers. Students who are encouraged to think about their reading, make inferences, compare and contrast events and characters, and notice author's language will read more closely and carefully. They will become more thoughtful readers, and their reading comprehension will improve. Working on this in the context of authentic literature helps to inspire a motivation and love for reading.


SYNOPSIS Zaki Farhi escapes 1970s Syria for Israel in a plan filled with danger.

Pre-Reading Activities

Use one or more of the following activities to introduce the book.

1. **Predictions:** Have students preview the book by reading the title, the author, and looking at the picture on the cover. What do they think this book will be about? Have they read any other books in this series? What clues can they gather from the photograph on the cover?
2. **Building Background:** This book tells the escape story of a boy living in Aleppo, Syria, of the 1970s. Discuss with students their personal connections to the Syrian community today. Do they know anyone who escaped from Syria and now lives in the United States or in Israel? Have they ever heard their story?
3. **Building Background:** The Jews of Syria were Sephardic. What does this mean? What customs might students expect to see in the book? How might Hebrew words be pronounced throughout the story?
4. **Genre Focus:** *Escape from Syria: A Jewish Boy's Story of Survival* is a true story. Students can read the disclaimer on the copyright page and discuss: Why are some conversations and minor episodes changed in the book?
5. **Geography:** Have students study the map on the inside front spread of the book to acquaint themselves with the route Zaki traveled on his escape journey. Have them refer to it while they read the book and trace his route as it develops.
6. **Predict:** What hardships might Zaki have faced on the way?

PROLOGUE

1. What are some questions you now have about Zaki's story? Note these questions and leave space to record their answers as you read the rest of the book.
2. What hardships did the boys face as they tried to cross the al-Kabir River?
3. **Predict:** Who was the Arab who found them, and what do you think might happen next?
4.  **Document-based question:** Refer to the map on the inside front cover and locate the al-Kabir River. At this point, how far have the boys already traveled from Aleppo? How much further do they still have to go?

CHAPTER 1 — BORN IN FEAR

SYNOPSIS Zaki is growing up in Aleppo among dangerous and hostile Arabs, and his father is taken to jail for standing up to the Arab police.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what life is like for children growing up in Aleppo, Syria, in the 1970s.

Guided Questions

1. Keep track of the Farhi family by creating a family tree with important information about each family member based on what you have read in this chapter. Use the photographs on pages 14 and 18 to help you. Add to this as you continue reading the book.
2. What type of person was Selim, Zaki's father? Use details from the chapter to support your answer.
3. Describe the living conditions for Syrian Jews in Aleppo at this time.
4. Contrast conditions for Syrian Jews before and after 1947.
5. What was the Aleppo Pogrom, and how did it affect Aleppo's Jewish community?
6. Explain how the boys dealt with the Arabs who started up with them.
7. The text says, "The Jews of Syria were prisoners in their own country." Explain what this means.

CHAPTER 2 — CLOUDS OF SUSPICION

SYNOPSIS The situation becomes even worse for the Aleppo community after the hanging of Eli Cohen.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how conditions become even worse for the Jews of Aleppo.

Guided Questions



1. List some of the restrictions placed on the Jews of Aleppo.
2. How and why did the hanging of Eli Cohen affect life for Syrian Jews?
3. What can you infer about Zaki's personality based on the story of the police and his tefillin?
4. Describe the kinds of foods enjoyed by the Syrian Jews. Contrast this with the foods your family enjoys today.
5. Why was Mr. Farhi called by the chief rabbi to help with the arrested Jews? Why might he have been able to help them?
6. Explain the title of the chapter, "Clouds of Suspicion." What might this mean?

CHAPTER 3 — FLEEING FROM PERSECUTION

SYNOPSIS Conditions worsen in Syria after the Six Day War in 1967, and more and more Jews secretly escape.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Mr. Farhi frees the arrested Jews and how conditions continue to worsen.

Guided Questions

1. Why did the Syrian officers think the arrested Jews were communicating with Israel? How did Mr. Farhi explain that this was not the case?
2. What does it mean when it says that it was an “uneasy peace” for the Jews of Aleppo? What was uneasy about it?
3. Even as more and more people escaped Syria, why did the Farhi family remain behind?
4. What were some of the ways the Farhi family tried to protect themselves even as they arranged for Rosa to be smuggled out of Syria?
-  5. **Creative writing:** Write a diary entry for Zaki on the night he discovered the Abadis had escaped. Include his thoughts and feelings at that time.
-  6. **Document-based question:** Many Syrian Jews paid smugglers to take them over the mountains to Turkey. Find this route on the map on the inside front cover of the book and study the photograph on page 31. What might have been some dangers associated with this escape plan?

CHAPTER 4 — ESCAPE PLAN

SYNOPSIS Zaki and his friends make a plan to escape and learn to ride motorbikes, which they hope will take them to the border.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Zaki and his friends create a plan to escape Syria.

Guided Questions

1. How was Zaki's high school experience different from boys his age in other countries?
2. What did Zaki mean when he said to his friends, "You know there's no future for us in this country"?
3. Why did Zaki suggest escaping Syria by riding across the border instead of being smuggled across the mountains, as other Jews had done previously?
4. Why did Zaki and his friends make their plans in the park?
5. Why did the boys ride the motorbikes around the yard instead of in the streets of Aleppo?
6. Zaki warned his friends at the end of the chapter, "And remember, not a word to anyone, not even your family." Why was that so important?

CHAPTER 5 — TO TURKEY!

SYNOPSIS The boys try to escape with their bikes but find a minefield at the border, and they return home that night.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what happens when the boys try to escape.

Guided Questions


1. How did Zaki feel as he left his house that morning? Bring details from the text to support your ideas.
2. What difficulties did the boys face when they reached the Syrian-Turkish border?
3. Describe the boys' feelings when they returned home that night.
4. Look at the title of the next chapter and predict what might happen next.

CHAPTER 6 — NEW PLANS

SYNOPSIS Zaki and Ezra make new plans to leave, this time dressing as Arabs and escaping to Beirut.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what plans the boys make next.

Guided Questions

1. Describe how Zaki and Ezra tried to avoid the Secret Police with their new escape plan.
2. Explain why the boys thought their lack of passports would be a problem at the Syrian checkpoint but not at the Lebanese one.
3. List the different types of official documents the boys would need on their escape, and explain the role of each one.
4. What were some of the steps the boys took to make themselves seem like Arabs as they traveled around Aleppo for the next few days?
5.  **Creative writing:** Write a secret letter from Zaki to his parents, telling them of his plans and explaining the reasons for his escape.

CHAPTER 7 — GOODBYE, ALEPPO

SYNOPSIS Zaki and Ezra leave Aleppo and travel to Hama and then to Homs by taxi. They then climb the hills to the al-Kabir River.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the boys finally leave Aleppo.

Guided Questions


1. Explain why the boys carried two very different sets of clothing with them when they escaped.
2. List the steps in the boys' plans from Aleppo to the border with Lebanon. Refer to the map in the front of the book, and trace the steps of their journey.
3. Contrast the taxis of Aleppo with our taxis today.
4. How did the boys plan to actually cross the border into Lebanon?
5. Explain why the boys were shocked when they finally reached the al-Kabir River.

CHAPTER 8 — MIRACLE IN THE MOUNTAINS

SYNOPSIS The boys try to cross the al-Kabir River, but it is too deep. An Arab meets them and shows them a narrower spot where they can cross, and they finally reach Lebanon.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the boys make it across the deep river.

Guided Questions

1. Explain why Zaki thought their plans had failed once again.
2. Explain how the Arab Abdullah helped solve the boys' problem.
3. Why was it important that the boys not show how excited they were when they finally crossed the al-Kabir River?
4.  **Creative writing:** Based on events up to this point, write a step-by-step guide for Syrian Jews on how to best escape Aleppo.

CHAPTER 9 — ACROSS THE BORDER

SYNOPSIS The boys cross the Lebanese border and head to Beirut with Abdullah.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what happens once the boys reach the Lebanese border.

Guided Questions

1. Why were the boys worried about the Lebanese checkpoint?
2. The text says that when the boys approached the checkpoint, “again, Abdullah proved his worth.” What does this mean?
3. Why were the boys anxious to get rid of Abdullah as soon as possible?
4. Why would it be safer for the boys to travel to Beirut alone, without Abdullah?
5. Explain why the boys were afraid at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER 10 — RISKY BUSINESS IN BEIRUT

SYNOPSIS The boys deliver Abdullah's message to his wife and settle into a hotel in Beirut for the night.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what happens once Zaki and Ezra reach Beirut.

Guided Questions


1. What details in the chapter suggest that Abdullah may not have fully trusted the boys?
2. Explain Zaki's telegram home: "Twins born in Beirut. Mazal tov."
3. What were some of the boys' worries as they went to sleep in the hotel that night?
4. Describe how you would feel if you were in the boys' position.

CHAPTER 11 — SUSPECTS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

SYNOPSIS In the early morning, Zaki and Ezra leave Abdullah sleeping in the hotel and reach the synagogue, where they are surprised to be met by suspicion from the rabbi, who does not believe their story.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the two boys finally get rid of Abdullah.

Guided Questions



1. Describe Zaki and Ezra's feelings when they were met in the synagogue. How did their welcome differ from what they had been expecting?
2. Why was the rabbi so suspicious of the two boys and their story?
3. Up to this point, the two boys had been very cautious and prepared for anything that could go wrong in their plan. Why might they not have been prepared for this problem in the synagogue?
4. How do you think Zaki and Ezra could prove to the rabbi that they were really Jews?
5.  **Creative writing:** Write a diary entry for one of the men who were in the synagogue that morning. Describe the two boys who showed up in the early morning and your suspicions as to who they are.

CHAPTER 12 — TRAPPED IN BEIRUT

SYNOPSIS The rabbi agrees to let the boys stay, and they remain in the synagogue attic and then at the home of the Agai family, since they have no documents with which to leave Lebanon.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what the rabbi decides and how the boys are treated.

Guided Questions

1. What made the rabbi soften a little in his handling of the boys at the beginning of the chapter?
2. Why did the rabbi decide to let them stay, but only for one day?
3. Why did the boys need to remain inside all the time, first in the synagogue and then in the Agais' home?
4. Why did Zaki finally decide to approach the Lebanese government for help?
-  5. **Document-based question:** Use the photograph on page 90 and details in the text to describe Beirut at the time.
-  6. **Creative writing:** Write a thank-you note from Zaki to Mr. and Mrs. Agai. Be sure to thank them for their hospitality and include what this meant to you when you were stuck in Beirut.

CHAPTER 13 — BEIRUT TO THE BORDER

SYNOPSIS The Lebanese government devises a plan for the group of refugees, which involves crossing through Hezbollah-controlled territory to get to Israel. The group gets lost in the night but ultimately reaches Israel.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the group of refugees finally leaves Lebanon.

Guided Questions



1. Why did Zaki think he might be successful approaching a government official directly for help?
2. Why did the boys need to disguise themselves as terrorists when crossing the border from Lebanon to Israel?
3. What were some measures taken so Hezbollah would not catch the refugees?
4. Across the wire fence, the boys saw houses with large cylindrical tanks on their roofs with Hebrew lettering on them. What were those tanks?

CHAPTER 14 — BORDER CROSSING

SYNOPSIS The refugees finally meet up with the Israeli soldiers and cross into Israel, where they are led to a kibbutz.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the refugees finally cross into Israel.

Guided Questions


1. Why did the Israeli soldiers approach the refugees in front of them with an army tank?
2. Explain why the refugees laid themselves down on the ground in front of the oncoming army tank.
-  3. **Document-based question:** Consider the photograph on page 101. Why did the boys decide to dig a hole to crawl through to Israel?
-  4. **Creative writing:** Write a dialogue between one of the refugees and the Israeli soldiers, where the refugee explains who they are and how they got there.

CHAPTER 15 — A NEW LIFE AND EPILOGUE

SYNOPSIS Zaki, now called Yitzchak, settles into Israeli life, learns in yeshivah, and then fights in the Israeli army during the Yom Kippur War.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Zaki and Ezra settle into life in Israel.

Guided Questions

1. Why did Zaki and the other refugees want to switch to a different kibbutz?
2. List the major events in Zaki's life from when he arrived in Israel until he moved to America.
3. Look back at the family tree you created at the beginning of the book. Add details to show how each family member escaped from Syria.
4. When President Hafez of Syria gave permission for the Jews to leave in 1992, why was it on condition they not go to Israel?
5.  **Document-based question:** Study the postcard to Zaki on page 113. What details do you notice in the photograph?

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Use one or more of the following activities to conclude the book.

Life Lessons

Read the author's note at the back of the book. What lessons can we gain from reading the Farhi family's story?

Art

Create a poster to advertise this book so people will want to read it.

Creative Writing

- Write a speech Rabbi Isaac Farhi may have delivered at his synagogue on the anniversary of his escape from Syria. Reflect on the lessons he learned from his life story and the message he'd want his congregants to take from that.
- Compare this story with another one in the Escape series. How are the stories similar? How are they different?