

# Delve Deeper into *Last Men in Aleppo*

A film by Feras Fayyad

**This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Penny L. Talbert, MLIS and Laura E. Eaton, MLIS of Ephrata Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Last Men in Aleppo*.**

*After five years of war in Syria, the remaining citizens of Aleppo are getting ready for a siege. Through the eyes of volunteer rescue workers called the White Helmets, **Last Men in Aleppo** allows viewers to experience the daily life, death, and struggle in the streets, where they are fighting for sanity in a city where war has become the norm.*

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## ADULT NONFICTION

**DiGiovanni, Janine. *The Morning They Came For Us*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.** Award-winning author Janine de Giovanni describes life in the Syrian war zone through the eyes of ordinary people: a doctor, a student, a nun, a musician. This book offers an intimate human perspective on the conflict that is rarely found in news reports.

**Malek, Alia. *The Home That Was Our Country*. New York, NY: Nation Books, 2017.** Alia Malek travels from her home in Baltimore to Damascus, the birthplace of her ancestors. As Malek renovates her grandmother's apartment, she ventures into the Syrian resistance and becomes an informant on the workings of the secret police. This memoir describes the oppression of the Syrian people and the dangers of resistance to the Assad regime.

**Pearlman, Wendy. *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017.** This is a collection of personal narratives from people living through the Syrian conflict. These stories testify to the strength of the Syrian people who risk their

lives to protect their country despite Syria's wide-ranging oppression and political backlash.

**Yassin-Kassab, Robin & Al-Shami, Leila. *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*. London: Pluto Press, 2016.** Under President Bashar al-Assad, Syria has become a country repressed: those who speak out against the government become exiles and refugees. Syria is mired in the worst worldwide refugee crisis since World War II. *Burning Country* chronicles the lives of these opposition fighters, contrasting a militant government with a people who want to live in peace.

**Yazbek, Samar. *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*. Haus Publishing, 2012.** Yazbek is a well-known Syrian novelist who grew up in an Alawite family – the sect of Islam associated with Bashar al-Assad's regime. When she became active in the uprisings against the government, she was ostracized by her family and community and forced to flee with her daughter. This narrative, which draws on Yazbek's diary entries, tells the harrowing stories of ordinary Syrians during the revolution.

**Borri, Francesca. *Syrian Dust: Reporting from the Heart of the War*. New York: Seven Stories, 2015.** *Syrian Dust* is a powerful first-person account of the Syrian war from the perspective of a young Italian journalist who decides to stay in Aleppo after the outbreak of the violence. Borri's book shows the risks journalists must take in order to convey Syrians' stories to the outside world.

**Scheller, Bente. *The Wisdom of Syria's Waiting Game: Foreign Policy Under the Assads*. Hurst, 2014.** Longtime Syria policy analyst Bente Scheller provides background on the politics of Syria since 1989 and contextualizes the Assad

regime's brutality. She argues that Assad has shifted from his father's focus on national policy to a strategy of maintaining power at all costs; the result of these policy decisions is catastrophic for the Syrian people.

**Al-Sabouni, Marwa. *The Battle for Home: The Vision of a Young Architect in Syria*. Thames and Hudson, 2016.** Marwa al-Sabouni offers an architect's perspective on the Syrian crisis, describing how the physical destruction of buildings and infrastructure in Syria's cities has accelerated the war and the destruction of social cohesion. Including 50 black and white architectural drawings, this book combines a firsthand account of human suffering with analysis of the politics and culture of a society in wartime.

**Hinnebusch, Raymond. *Syria: A Revolution from Above*. Routledge, 2002.** Written almost ten years before the Arab Spring, this study provides useful background information about the state of Syria during the 35 years it was ruled by the military Ba'thist regime. It analyses the struggle for primacy between nationalism and other political ideologies in Syria and shows how Assad's Alawite faction rose to power.

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## ADULT FICTION

**Ackerman, Elliot. *Dark at the Crossing*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2017.** Arab-American Haris Abadi decides to leave the comfort and security of his home and travels to Syria to resist the Assad regime. Unable to enter the country, he meets a Syrian man and his wife and they exchange stories. *Dark at the Crossing* is a trenchant examination of grief, idealism, and second chances.

**Khalifa, Khaled. *No Knives in the Kitchen of This City*. Cairo: Hoopoe, 2016.** Khalifa, one of Syria's most celebrated contemporary authors, believes that "it is the duty of writing to



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help break down taboos and clash with fixed and backward concepts." The author draws on his own experience as an Aleppo native for this bracing novel about the collapse of a family and a nation. Set in Aleppo during the 1960s and the years just before the Syrian civil war, *No Knives* exposes the brutality of the Assad regime through the eyes of one family and their friends.

**Sukkar, Sumia. *The Boy From Aleppo Who Painted the War*. London: Eyewear Publishing, 2014.** A 14-year-old boy with Asperger's Syndrome chronicles the Syrian war through his paintings, including his separation from his siblings and the changes to his beloved city. The boy's unusual coping strategy brings readers a vision of wartime Aleppo in which Syrians struggle to keep their traditions alive.

**Sirees, Nihad & Weiss, Max. *The Silence and the Roar*. New York: Other Press, 2013.** *The Silence and the Roar* takes place during a day of celebration in an unnamed Middle Eastern country. The protagonist, a writer who is banned from publishing, is not celebrating. On his way to visit his mother, the secret police seize his ID papers and he is forced to go to the police station to retrieve them. As he navigates a bureaucratic maze, he tries to distance himself mentally from his government's oppressive regime.

**Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. London, England: Hamish Hamilton, 2017.** Our protagonists are Nadia and Saeed, two independent souls in an unnamed country on the brink of civil war. When they fall in love, they face consequences that are difficult to comprehend in the western world. Fleeing their country as refugees, the lovers face a future vastly different from the one they had planned.

## NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

**Englar, Mary. *Syria: A Question and Answer Book*. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2007.** This book is a comprehensive overview of Syria, including the country's politics, culture, sports, education, geography and history. Published in 2007, it lacks a discussion of the current Syrian political climate; however, it is a useful primer on the country before the civil war.

**Matthews, Jenny. *Children Growing Up With War*. London: Franklin Watts, 2016.** Photojournalist Jenny Matthews has made it her life's work to travel the world and capture images of children and families who have been affected by war. While showing the devastation of conflict, her photos also convey the resilience and the hope that these victims have preserved.

**Berlatsky, Noah. *Syria (Opposing Viewpoints)*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Greenhaven Press, A part of Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015.** *Opposing Viewpoints* is a book series for young readers to engage with controversies from multiple perspectives. This volume examines the arguments on different sides of the Syrian conflict and supplements explanations with a range of outside sources

**Capek, Michael & Abboud, Samer. *The Syrian Conflict*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Essential Library, an imprint of Abdo Publishing, 2017.** Geared towards younger readers, *The Syrian Conflict* provides an overview of the crisis in Syria from the 2011 uprising through its present day civil war. *The Syrian Conflict* is an important educational resource, teaching youth about the atrocities perpetrated against the people of Syria.

**Lawson, H.J. *War Kids*. Lexington, KY, 2015.** *War Kids* describes the tragic impact of the Syrian war on young

people. The two protagonists must make decisions they are not prepared to make, as they come to understand the disaster that has engulfed their homeland.

## FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS

**Cross, Gillian. *After Tomorrow*. Oxford University Press, 2013.** This young adult novel tells the story of two brothers, Matt and Taco, who are living in an unsafe country and must escape as refugees. However, upon arriving at their host country, new dangers await them.

**Beckwith, Kathy. *Playing War*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 2005.** In this children's book, a child from the Middle East, new to an American community, does not want to play in a game of war started by other kids in the neighborhood. The child explains what it's like to experience real war, and helps his playmates see war in a new light.

**Del Rizzo, Suzanne. *My Beautiful Birds*. Toronto, Ontario: Pajama Press, Inc., 2017.** In this moving story, a young boy must flee with his family to a refugee camp, leaving behind everything he has ever known – including his pet pigeons. His concern for his pigeons follows him everywhere, until one day, three birds land on his arm, which begins his long healing process. This story shows how the Syrian conflict affects children who are forced to leave their homes in search of peace.

**Schami, Rafik *A Hand Full of Stars*. New York, Interlink Publishers, 2012.** A teenage boy from Damascus begins a journal. At first a mundane account of his everyday life, his journal soon begins to focus on his dissatisfaction with the Syrian government. Eventually, he and his friends begin an underground newspaper to document the atrocities visited upon his beloved city.

