

Life Under **BLOCKADE:**

study guide



American Friends
Service Committee

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GAZA FACTS



- Gaza is 25 miles in length and from 3.7 to 7.5 miles wide, with a total area of 141 square miles. Gaza ranks as the **third most densely populated polity in the world**.

According to World Population Review, about 75% of Gaza's population is under the age of 25.
<http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/gaza-population/>

- Over 68% of households in the Gaza Strip, or about 1.3 million people, are **severely or moderately food insecure**, according to the preliminary findings of the latest Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey carried out in 2018.
<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/food-insecurity-opt-13-million-palestinians-gaza-strip-are-food-insecure>

- Acute medical shortage: Throughout 2018, over **40% of essential medicines** and approximately **25% of essential medical disposables** at the Gaza Ministry of Health Central Drug Storage in Gaza were at **zero stock**, less than

one month supply. Projections for 2020 are that Gaza will need over 1000 additional hospital beds, 1000 doctors, and almost 1000 nurses to be at a 2010 level of care. United Nations (U.N.) Report Ten Years Later: https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gaza_10_years_later_-_11_july_2017.pdf

- In March of 2018, Conflict and Environment Observatory reported that 95% of water distribution in Gaza is unfit for human consumption.
<https://ceobs.org/country-brief-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

- Water filtration equipment is not permitted to be imported to Gaza. Thus, over **96% of the water** extracted from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption. The U.N. projects that by 2020, none of the aquifer water will be safe to drink and the aquifer will be irreversibly damaged.

- Equipment is needed to build new and maintain existing sewage treatment facilities. Necessary equipment for repairs is banned from Gaza. Gregor von Medezza, head of water and sanitation for UNICEF, wrote that nearly 28,530,528 gallons, **equivalent to 43 Olympic sized swimming pools, of untreated sewage** are dumped into the sea from Gaza everyday.

<https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/searching-clean-water-gaza/>

- In 2018 an average of 9,000 Palestinians were allowed to exit Gaza **each month** through the Erez crossing in the north. For contrast, in the year 2000, 26,000 people crossed **each day**.

- Education needs are examined in the U.N. report "Gaza 10 Years Later":

- Over the past decade (2007-2017), the literacy rate in Gaza increased from 94% in 2006 to 97% in 2016. At the same time, the average years of schooling increased from 9.17 to 10.66 years, and remained higher than in the West Bank. (p. 26)

- Classrooms (2016) now have an average of 38.9 students in public schools and 39.3 in UNRWA schools. Moreover, 61.7% of government schools and 70.4% of UNRWA schools currently operate on a double shift system, limiting student access to the classroom to only four hours per day. (p. 26)

- In the UNRWA report Gaza 2020 report, (<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/gaza-2020-liveable-place>) it was projected that 250 additional schools were needed immediately, and another 190 schools would be needed by 2020 to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding population.

- In addition to the problem of ensuring adequate facilities, equipment and personnel to keep up with the high growth in the student population, the quality of the services in the education sector will be difficult to sustain. This will require increased opportunities for training of teachers and educational advancement, which requires a relaxation on the restrictions of travel to the West Bank and abroad.

- The 2019 World Bank Report for West Bank and Gaza states that 52% of Gaza's labor force are unemployed, including two out of every three youth.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/overview>

- The U.N. report “Gaza 10 Years Later” on unemployment of youth and women states:

The increase in unemployment has been particularly stark among youth and women. Between the first quarter of 2006 and the last quarter of 2016, the unemployment rate for 20-24 year olds increased by nearly 10 percentage points (from 50.6% to 60.3%) while that of 25-29 year-olds increased by close to 16 percentage points from (36.3% to 52.1%). In the same period, the unemployment rate for women increased from 35.1% to 64.4%, with the gap between men and women steadily increasing over the decade.

However, education alone will not create additional job opportunities. Currently, even higher education in Gaza does not protect from unemployment and poverty. In 2016, the unemployment rate for graduates with an Associate Diploma Certificate or above reached 42.9%. This is even more pronounced for women, with a 65% unemployment rate for women with more than 13 years of education, while the unemployment rate was actually lower for women with fewer years of education.

For more facts on Gaza, visit GazaUnlocked.org

GENERAL

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1.

What are the similarities in these essays?

2.

What do the authors hope readers will understand about life in Gaza?

3.

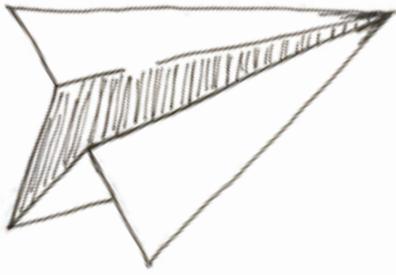
How has reading these essays changed or enhanced your understanding of life in Gaza?

4.

There are 12 essays included in the booklet. Select one or two essays that have remained with you after reading the collection. Which portions of those essays resonated with you and why? What further questions or feedback would you want to share with the author?

5.

What has surprised you the most from reading these essays?



Essay

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below are related quotes from each essay in the booklet. In a group setting, the leader may assign a person an essay to reflect upon and then invite them to share their ideas with the group. Alternatively, the questions from one or more essays could be posed to the entire group for reflection. Numbers following the quotes are (page, paragraph).

Prison Without a Roof by Karim Abualroos (pp.1-4)

"A friend of mine, who lives in the outside world, has once asked me 'how do you describe your life in Gaza?' It is painful to answer this question, as you will think a lot about the answer. I eventually said, 'Gaza is a prison without a roof.'" (1:1)

- How does the title of the essay (*Prison Without a Roof*) bring the reader into Karim Abualroos's world? What are the conditions he describes that resemble a prison?

"Gaza is not a city of hatred and violence, nor does it deserve death or destruction." (3:4)

- Why do you think Karim writes that Gaza isn't a city of "hatred"? What images of Gaza are often portrayed in the media? How does this essay contrast with stereotypes of Palestinians from Gaza?

"So how if that man was a writer! A musician or an artist! It's a real tragedy for the Palestinian artist living in Gaza. He doesn't have the foresight to develop his creativity, and pour imagination into his mind and heart..." (1:3)

- Karim writes about his challenges and accomplishments. Karim has been able to publish a novel while experiencing "major disasters in all aspects of life." (3:1) Imagine your life confined to a limited area with limited opportunity to move beyond your community, or have access to reliable electricity. How Has Karim adapted his life to the conditions of the blockade?

"The siege of Gaza has made it a tired city, a city of miserables and expatriates. Full of wasted energies, full of shattered youth, and full of beauty with nowhere to appear. Gaza is a city of children, dreams, cultures, literature and music. Full of heritage and folklore. Full of programmers, technologists, engineers, and brilliant minds. Nevertheless, the world always turns its back on them, to convince them that their situation is individual. Yet Gaza continues to offer a tremendous humanitarian model to the world." (3:5)

- How do these two seemingly contradictions bring out the reality of life, the sadness, and yet the vibrancy of Palestinian life in Gaza? Karim says that Gaza is a "humanitarian model" to the world, what does he mean by this?

"In Gaza we need the world to hear us once, only once. Once we say everything, and then we will be silent forever." (4:2)

- What do you think it will take for the people around the world and governments to say the situation in Gaza must change?

Gaza is a Blockaded Planet by Ali Abusheikh (pp. 5-7)

"On the night of October 26, 2018, I couldn't sleep, so I opened the window and stared at the stars in the sky...I was totally engaged until I heard two intense bombs, freezing me in terror..." (5:2)

"I am deprived in this blockaded, isolated planet of ours - Gaza... it has a very different and abnormal atmosphere than in other parts of the Earth...it's easier for most people to travel to the moon than to visit us." (5:5)

- The metaphor blockade planet provides a description of life for Ali Abusheikh. How has the isolation of Gaza from the rest of the world impacted his life?

"My mind wandered to all the little things of which I am deprived in this blockaded, isolated planet of ours--Gaza. I recently started to call it a planet because it has a very different and abnormal atmosphere than in any other parts of the Earth. " (5:5)

- What is abnormal or different about life in Gaza compared to where you live? From Ali's description of his life in the essay, are there similarities to your daily life? How does Ali know that life is different in other parts of the world?"

"Nevertheless, despite a dark, unknown future, we persist in pursuing our dreams. The phoenix is the logo for Gaza City, which means arise from our ashes. (6:1)
When will the curse of mourning and death leave my oppressed city? When will the colors of the rainbow return? I love Gaza, it's a beautiful city..." (7:1)

- What are the characteristics you associate with a phoenix that might be applied to Gaza? Does the author think Gaza will rise from the ashes? What do you see as the future for people in Gaza?

A Balloon's Murder by Ehsan Wael Yousef Bader (pp. 8-11)

"The scene in the sky blends between smoke, dust, tear gas, and between the colourful kites and balloons. While on the ground, it muddles between the scenes of the numerous ambulances, casualties, crowds, the sound of bullets and drones 'Zananas' and the scenes of children reciting national poetry and singing enthusiastic songs." (8:1-2)

- Ehsan Bader is describing the scene at the Great March of Return held at the Gaza boundary fence beginning in March 2018. Eshan describes the contradictions between what is seen in the sky versus on the ground. What have you heard about the Great March in the media and is it similar to what Ehsan describes?

"Last Friday, while I was standing in the same place every Friday, I saw, for the first time in my life, a soldier lying normally on the ground... the most noticeable thing I realized when I saw the exposed soldier, who was less than 200 meters away, was that he had a face, mouth, nose, and a pair of eyes, just like a normal, ordinary human being." (9:3)

- Why is it significant to Ehsan that the soldier looked like a human being? What thoughts does Ehsan share in the essay about this encounter?

"...this soldier, who looked "very human" did not seem to distinguish between the destruction of a balloon and the spirit of a human being." (11:2)

- How does the title of the essay "A Balloon's Murder" reflect what occurred for Ehsan the day he saw an Israeli soldier at the Great March? Why does he use a balloon as the metaphor?

The Party by Rahaf Ayman Hasan Elhallaq (pp.12-15)

"There's going to be a party tonight!" (12:1)

- What is the "party" Rahaf Elhallaq is referring to? Why does Rahaf think the party will happen that night?

"It's a strategy they use to scare us and remind us: "we are here." So I sit and wait. (12-4). Our life in Gaza...is a constant state of fearing and waiting." (13:1)

- How has the blockade and the occupation caused “waiting” to be central to life in Gaza? What is Rahaf waiting for and why is she afraid? What do you think is Israel’s strategy for continuing the blockade and bombing Gaza?

“...People like me, though, are still clinging to the hope that things will get better soon. Every nation that has been occupied in the past has had to sacrifice for its freedom.” (13:3)

- How have Palestinians in Gaza accommodated their lives to living with the possibility of Israeli air attacks? Why does Rahaf still have hope that the situation will change?

“When you’ve survived three wars and twelve years of blockade, your definition of real danger gradually changes.” (14:3)

- Rahaf writes about her neighbor’s reactions to the bombing attacks on Gaza and describes that life routines continue the next morning after the bombings, or when the “party” is over. What would be the definition of “real” danger if not bombs after midnight?

A Seeker Who Seeks Nothing by Haneen Jamal Abed Elnaby (pp.16-17)

“I am transported somewhere else when I read Wordsworth. I opened my laptop and read slowly to make it last longer. Literature is my escape from bombs and drones. I consume it like a parched person in a desert given a mini cup of water.” (16:2)

- How has literature given Haneen Abed Elnaby the strength to continue her studies?

“... In the morning, I tried to offer the electricity as my explanation... No excuses.” (17:1)

- The teacher had a harsh response to Haneen not finishing her homework. Why do you think the teacher would not accept Haneen’s excuse?

“One day, I hope I can be transported out of Gaza, standing on the edge of Glencoyne Park, gazing on the daffodils about which Wordsworth wrote so eloquently.” (17:1)

- Haneen’s autobiography on (p 41) describes her many accomplishments while living in Gaza, and yet she dreams of being “transported out of Gaza.” Is her title “A Seeker who Seeks Nothing” a reference to her own reality?

A Terror to Remember by Sarah Nafez Hammad (pp. 18-20)

"Saturday 27 December 2008. I remembered the scene very clearly, me sitting on the uncomfortable cylinder between the rider, who was my brother Mohammed, and the handlebars of the bicycle." (18:1)

- Sarah Hammad is describing the first day of the Israeli attacks on Gaza later called "Cast Lead." Why do you think she starts her essay with the image of being on her brother's bike? What are her concerns and fears for that day in fourth grade?

"I was shaking, but didn't cry. I was terrified just like everyone else, and the bombing never stopped, am I going to die now? We all ran towards the school's gate. Regiments of children were there as far as the eye could see. We were all children crying and running to the exit, but where to go?" (19:1)

- Sarah describes the impact of the bombing while at school. What did the children do? Why does she remember so clearly this incident of "terror"?

"The streets were in total chaos, nobody understood what's going on. We arrived home. My mom was waiting for us anxiously: "Thank God!" she said as soon as she saw us..." (20:2)

- Education is important to Palestinian families and literacy rates are high in Gaza. Parents know that schools cannot provide protection for their children during Israeli army attacks. How can parents create safety for their children in Gaza?

"'War?' I only know the word from The National Education school subject. In that moment, I only had a misty idea about this word, but the following 21 days taught me its meaning so well that I wished such a word never existed!" (20:3)

- What do you think Sarah has learned about war?

Dear Blockade by Tarneem Hammad (pp. 21-23)

"I was 14 when I first met you. You never asked me to be friends, you just took over my life." (21:1) [The essay gives sixteen reasons why the blockade is wrong 'You're wrong because' (21-23) and concludes, 'Please, leave and never come back.' (22:4)]

- What have you learned about Tarneem Hammad's experience of the blockade from her essay? How has Tarneem's life been impacted from the time she was 14?

"You're not dear, you're just near. You're inhumanely wrong and I wish you to fade away quickly. My heart and soul cry for help as I try to fight against you. Yet, I laugh and smile once in a while because I love others enough not to put them through the same misery I am going through." (23:1)

- Who do you think Tarneem is crying out to help her? What gives her the strength to be able to laugh and love other people?

"I AM STILL HERE.... I'll just have to dust myself off, pick up my feelings and thoughts, and follow my dreams. I just have to remember how many people out there support our cause." (23:2)

- Do you feel Tarneem has triumphed over the blockade? Why do you think Tarneem chose to write this essay as a "break up" letter?

I HATE RED! By Marah Mahdi (pp. 24-26)

"Another thunder with an earthquake, as if someone slapped us to throw us back to the wall, to crash us. Something got into Sarah's neck that cut her skin. I could barely move after the crash of the wall. I felt something warm on my right hand, it was red like blood." (25:4)

- Marah Mahdi begins her school day in fourth grade talking with her best friend about their continuing friendship. What occurs after they hear thunder sounds? Why do you think the Israeli army targeted a school in Gaza?

"That moment I realized that the red liquid is blood, I was wounded. I remembered Sonic when he saved that girl from that doctor, so I imitated him. I took off my rubber glove and rubbed my right hand. I took the scarf off her neck, and I started pressing on the cut, to stop the blood, she was not awake. -Please Sara, wake up! Wake up." (26:1)

- After Marah finds out that she has been wounded, her first instinct is to save her friend. Why do you think Marah remembers this incident ten years later?

"Why do you hate the color red?' she asked. I replied whispering, 'It brings bad luck.'" (26:9)

- Marah's mother asks her why she hates the color red. Why did Marah not tell her mother the full story? Does Marah fear for the future? Do you think she feels lucky?

My Life in a Nutshell by Hatem Raafat Mohammed Saadallah (pp. 27-29)

“Congratulations, YOU HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED TO UNITED WORLD COLLEGES!” (27:1)

- What are the mixed emotions that Hatem Saadallah feels after he is accepted to study outside of Gaza? How do his friends and family respond to his news? What are the obstacles he faces in order to attend college abroad?

“While traveling is considered a pleasant experience for other people, it is literally an inferno for Gazan people.” (28:1)

- Why is travel so difficult for Palestinians in Gaza? Why does Hatem use the word “inferno” to describe this situation?

“Spent the next day scrolling on Facebook, hoping to finally receive my permit and leave to pursue what became my only hope. I felt my life clinging to Japan, my mind was there, while I was physically stuck in Gaza.” (28:2)

- Why do you think Facebook is so important to youth in Gaza? How has Hatem’s acceptance to study abroad changed his mental state?

“And after coming back to Gaza, my view totally changed. Gaza is not anymore the hell I always imagined. Gaza is home, and home can never be hell. Gaza was my incubator, that raised me for the world. Gaza is family and friends. Gaza is love.” (29:3)

- Hatem did not go to Japan, but spent a few weeks in Jordan before returning to Gaza and later studied medicine in Egypt. Hatem says his view of his home changed. How has his experience caused him not to give up hope?

Living in a Savage Rose Named Gaza by Daliya Safi (pp. 30-32)

“I am one of one million, eight hundred and sixteen thousand bloody red fatigued yet still not withered petals. The rose I am melt in once was white and free as any savage rose is supposed to be... Day by day, night by night, the briar rose will keep bleeding until the end of this twilight...” (30:1)

- How does the metaphor of a rose create a picture of life in Gaza? Why does Daliya Safi describe herself as a red rose?

"My soul is also caged but with the sorrow of truth. For it knows as nothing better how agony burns the blood inside your veins making all your squeezed gloom flame out of your exhausted eyes. However, how we are still alive?" (30:2)

- What is the truth that makes Daliya sad? What gives her joy and the will to stay alive?

"For me, this (English) specialization is a survival key that may help me in the future." (31:1)

- Why does Daliya choose to study English literature? Why do you think English will help her survive? What does she mean by saying she wants to "become the tongue of my people and the scream of my soul" (31:2)?

"These petals need to live in peace. They are the clearest evidence of their root existence." (32:2)

- Daliya returns to the metaphor of the rose in the last paragraph of her essay. Why does she talk about a rooted existence?

Raed's Life Under Blockade by Raed S. A. Shakshak (pp. 33-35)

"Hello. My name is Raed, and I don't have a life. I'm not writing this essay to win. I'm writing this because I want to get my voice heard (complain), especially since you're a foreign organization. I just want to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. My life under blockade is laborious and miserable." (33:1)

- Why do you think Raed Shakshak starts his essay by saying he doesn't want to win the essay contest? Why does he use American legal slang to describe his rationale for writing?

"To be honest, I never felt the bad circumstances we live in Gaza till I traveled to America in 2016." (33:2)

- How did Raed's perspective about life in Gaza change after he returned from his college experience in Pennsylvania? What are the ethical considerations for encouraging students to leave Gaza to pursue study abroad?

"I believe youths are the foundation for any community. Without them, that community is so weak. The Gazan youths are unemployed, and therefore are broke. I am broke." (34-1)

- Youth make up nearly half of the population in Gaza and over 60% are unemployed. Why does Raed believe youth are important to the community? In what ways do you think Raed is “broke”?

30 Minutes... A Thousand Times Over by Nadya Faisal Siyam (pp. 36-39)

“At times of war you become extra alarmed. You become a navigator as you try to predict how far each bombing is from your house and who of your beloved lives near the area you’ve predicted. And when you’re done with your calculations, you pray you were wrong.” (36:1)

- Why does Nadya Siyam start her essay from a detached perspective? What are ways Nadya’s family responds to the bombing?

“My dad works as an orthopedic surgeon at Gaza’s largest hospital, Al-Shifa Hospital...”(36-2)

“My four little siblings, Mum and I stayed alone without Dad throughout the 50 day assault. Dad used to call us once every day and insisted to speak to each of us separately, even if it was for 10 seconds.” (36-3)

‘Nobody bombs a hospital,’ Dad said. ‘Nobody bombs a hospital, sweetie.’ And I trusted Dad. (37-4)

- Why does Nadya’s father reassure her that his workplace will not be bombed? What are ways he tries to make his family feel safe in his absence?

“The next 30 minutes were the longest in my life. We were sitting in the living room waiting to face the truth. The phone rang seven times. And each time it was either a relative or a neighbor asking if we knew what happened. Mum calmly replied, ‘no’ each time. And we waited. And I died once. Twice. Twenty times. A hundred times, and we waited.” (38:2)

- Nadya powerfully describes the anxiety while waiting to get news about her father. Why does she describe this experience as dying? How do you think Palestinians in Gaza were able to cope with 51 days of continuous bombardment in 2014?

“Humanity shouldn’t be trusted. Dad was alive but for 30 minutes he wasn’t. And during this time, I died a thousand times over.” (39:2)

- Why does Nadya not trust humanity? What do you think is the long term impact of experiences such as Nadya’s on Palestinians living in Gaza?