

Lesson 3

Stories From Gaza



Photo: a still from the performance of the play *Gaza Monologues* by Ashtar Theatre, Palestine, 2010

- a) What meanings do this photograph convey to you?
- b) Is this photo optimistic or pessimistic? Why do you think so?

A. Now read three selected monologues from Ashtar Theatre's production *Gaza Monologues* and answer the questions that follow. The pieces are translated by Fida Jiryis.

23. Mahmud Bala'wi, Born 1995

Ash Shati' Camp

I want to write the most beautiful words about Gaza but I can't. I can't not see the poverty, siege and famine, especially when all Gaza city flooded into Al-Areesh and emptied it from all goods in two hours. I can't not see the deprivation in every house, the fear and the sickness.

What do you want me to say about Gaza? From when I became aware of it, I was sad about everything inside it. Especially the kids and even the adults, youth, women, girls, animals, stones and trees, everything in it is crying... I'm looking for nice words to say and I can't find them.

The sea is the only thing that helps me dream. When I stand on the shore I can imagine Cyprus, travel to Paris, fly to Rome, all while standing in the same spot. I go around the whole world and in the end I land on my bed in our house, in the middle of the refugee camp. I go back to the reality of Gaza, the dirty market, overflowing sewage, the carts, and what's on top of the carts, the suffocating smell, and the silent people who can't speak.

When I look at the clock and it's 11:55. I start shaking and my heart beats faster, I feel that the war started again. Not only the clock scares me – everything that flies does, even the flies. I can't tell anyone about my fear so they don't call me a wimp or a sissy. I'm most scared for my older brothers. When a fly lands on any of them, I feel it's going to kill him, I start shouting and I run away from the place. That's why I'm now escaping outside the house all the time, because of the many flies.

26. Mahmud Najem, Born 1994

Ash Sheikh Radwan

For the first time the streets of Gaza were clean, there wasn't a paper or a cardboard. People were collecting the paper from the streets to use it for baking, because the electricity was disconnected. My mum didn't want to bake and she asked me to bring bread from the oven. The queue at the oven stretched from Gaza to the West Bank. People would line up for 8 hours to get to their turn and take half a pack of bread.

In seconds, a Palestinian rocket launcher was erected in the area and in less than one second the Israeli planes started bombing it. People began running in all directions and the ambulances came.

People started falling dead... others were injured. I was in shock, and people in the street started telling me thank God you're safe.

Anyway I went back home without the loaf of bread. And my mum yelled at me... but till today, she doesn't know why I didn't bring the bread.

31. Yasmeen Katbeh, Born 1996

Ash Sheikh Radwan

When the war started, my mum, my brothers and sisters and I were in Russia, which made me always worried about Dad. We wanted to leave Russia and return to Gaza among our family to live the events with them. As soon as the war ended and the crossings opened, we returned to Gaza, and from then till today we've been hearing stories of the war.

I couldn't sleep in Russia because of my worry about Dad. Before the war, when the mobile used to ring and it would be from Gaza, we'd be happy and race to answer it. But in the war, every time the mobile rang from Gaza, any number whether we knew it or not, we'd say: "Dear God..." and start looking at each other to see who will answer.

After the war, a lot of things changed in me. I started seeing things differently. I began to like the city, life became more beautiful and so did I. My friends changed, and I made older and more mature ones. I became very outspoken and brave even in front of Dad, and I could face anyone. Mum and I became friends, a lot of times we stay up at night and talk about everything.

In the future if I grow up, and in Gaza it's an achievement to grow up, because death is standing at your doorstep, I want to be a children's caretaker and defend their rights; because I feel that the children of Palestine are born as old people, a kid can be 6 years old and yet supporting a family.



B. Match the words in Column A with their meanings in Column B

Column A	Column B
Siege	direct and open in speech or expression : frank
Deprivation	causing difficulty in breathing
Refugee	a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster
Sewage	to shout something or make a loud noise, usually when you are angry , in pain , or excited
Suffocating	the fact of not having something that you need, like enough food, money or a home
Yell	waste water and excrement conveyed in sewers.
Outspoken	a military operation in which enemy forces surround a town or building, cutting off essential supplies, with the aim of compelling those inside to surrender.

C. True- False: Some of the statements below are true and some are false. In pairs, choose the True/false statements and discuss why they are true and why they are false. (Text 2 and text 3)

- 1) The streets of Gaza were littered with paper and cardboard due to the lack of electricity.
- 2) The narrator's mother preferred not to bake bread and asked for bread from the bakery instead.
- 3) The bakery line was short, and people quickly collected their bread without long waits.
- 4) Israeli planes bombed the area after a Palestinian rocket launcher was set up.
- 5) Despite the chaos and bombing, the narrator managed to return home with the bread.
- 6) The speaker and their siblings stayed in Russia during the war, eagerly awaiting the chance to return home to Gaza once the conflict ended.

- 7) During the war, any phone call from Gaza filled the family with fear and hesitation, regardless of who was calling.
- 8) The speaker's relationship with their father improved significantly after the war, and they began discussing everything openly.
- 9) The speaker's view of their city and life in Gaza became more negative and pessimistic after the war.
- 10) Due to the precarious situation in Gaza, the speaker's goal is to provide for and protect families, as children in Palestine often shoulder the burden of supporting their households.

D. Answer the following questions:

- i) Why can't the narrator of text 1 (monologue 23) find nice words to describe about Gaza though they want to?
- ii) In text 3 (monologue 31), the narrator wants to protect children's rights. What rights do you think children are deprived of and should be defended?
- iii) In text one (monologue 23) what does the narrator mean by "Not only the clock scares me – everything that flies does, even the flies."?
- iv) Why do you think the speaker of text 3 (monologue 31) says that the children in Palestine "are born as old people"?
- v) Do you think the experience of the speaker of the text 2 (monologue 26) is distressing? Explain your answer in a few sentences.

E. All the stories here tell of traumatic experiences of children in war-zones. Do you know anyone around you who carries distressing and painful memories? Write it down and share your thoughts with your classmates.

F. "The Ghost of Tom Joad" is a song by Bruce Springsteen that connects to both American literature and music. The song deals with themes of social justice, poverty, and resilience. Listen to the song and read the final part of the lyrics:



Then Tom said “Ma, whenever ya seen a cop beating a guy
 Wherever a hungry new born baby cries
 Wherever there's a fight against the blood and hatred in the air
 Look for me ma, I'll be there
 Wherever somebody's struggling for a place to stand
 For a decent job or a helping hand
 Wherever somebody is struggling to be free
 Look in their eyes ma, you'll see me”

And the highway is alive tonight
 Nobody's fooling nobody as to where it goes
 I'm sitting down here in the campfire light
 With the ghost of Tom Joad.

G. Find a song in Bangla which is similar in tone and expression and write a comparative note on both songs in 120 words.

