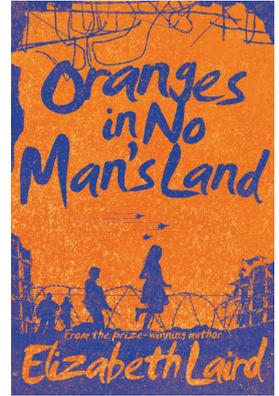


TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



“People often ask me where I get my ideas from. ‘They come from the same place as my dreams,’ I say. So where do we get our dreams from? They come from the people we meet, the places we know, the things that have happened to us, and, above all, the feelings we experience. *Oranges in No Man's Land* was born out of that mixture of people and places and events. It just needed a flash of inspiration to tie it all together into a story...” - Elizabeth Laird

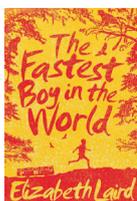
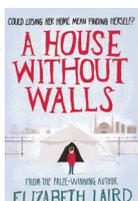
About *Oranges in No Man's Land*

Since her father left Lebanon to find work and her mother tragically died in a shell attack, ten-year-old Ayesha has been living in the bomb-ravaged city of Beirut with her granny and her two younger brothers. The city has been torn in half by civil war and a desolate, dangerous no man's land divides the two sides. Only militiamen and tanks dare enter this deadly zone, but when Granny falls desperately ill, Ayesha sets off on a terrifying journey to reach a doctor living in enemy territory.

About Me

Here's a picture of me, just in case you're wondering what I look like. I've been writing novels for more than 30 years now. A lot of them are still in print, and you can find out more about them on my website www.elizabethlaird.co.uk.

I've travelled all over the world in pursuit of adventures and stories, so take a look at my other books if you'd like to know more.



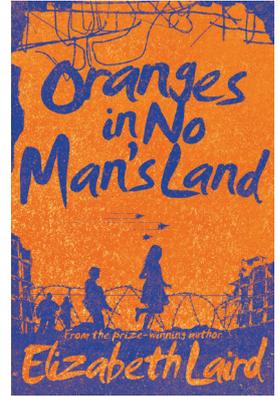

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TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



About Lebanon

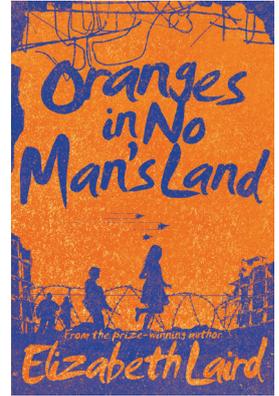


- Lebanon is a very small country. It's only half the size of Wales.
- About five and a half million people live in Lebanon. That's nearly the same as the population of Scotland.
- Lebanese people speak Arabic, but many people speak French and English too.
- People in Lebanon belong to several different religions, including Christianity and Islam.

Lebanon is a beautiful country! It has rocky coves and beaches along the coast, and high mountains running like a spine from the top to the bottom of the country. Down by the sea it's hot in the summer, but it's always cool up in the mountains. In the winter, it's cold, and the mountains are covered in deep snow. The Lebanese like to say that they can swim in the sea in the morning, then drive up into the mountains and ski in the afternoon.

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land
Elizabeth Laird



Lebanese Mountains



The Mediterranean Sea

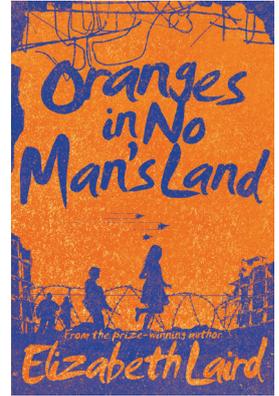
There are some magnificent old castles in Lebanon, as well as elegant palaces, and some of the most enormous Roman ruins in the world.



An old palace in the hills above Beirut

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land Elizabeth Laird



War in Lebanon

Oranges in No Man's Land is set fifty years ago during the 1970s, when there was a violent war in Lebanon. Why was the country at war, and who was fighting?

- Lebanon is a tiny country, but it has several different religious and social groups which don't always agree. The Lebanese government is too weak to control them.
- If you look at the map, you'll see that there are bigger or more powerful countries like Israel and Syria close to Lebanon.
- These powerful countries support different religious groups inside Lebanon.
- When there's trouble in Lebanon, the more powerful countries get involved. They bring in weapons and even soldiers to fight on one side or the other. Sometimes it seems as if these bigger countries are using Lebanon as a boxing ring, where they can fight their own battles between themselves. This is very hard for ordinary Lebanese people.
- When the state of Israel was created, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people were forced to leave their homes and run away. Many fled to Lebanon and became refugees. They were put into special refugee camps, which are still there today.
- In the 1970s, some Palestinians began to fire rockets across the border into Israel.
- Israel sent its army across the border into Lebanon in 1978, to try to crush the Palestinian fighters.
- Lebanese people living on the border ran away from the fighting, leaving their homes and farms. Now they were refugees too. Many of them went to Beirut, and tried to find new homes there, like Ayesha's family in *Oranges in No Man's Land*.

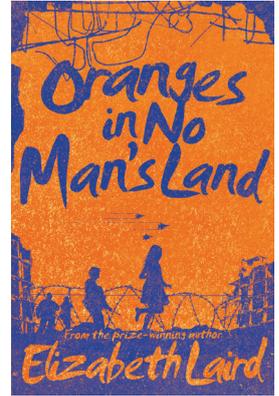


One of the worst things about war is that modern weapons are so powerful that they destroy people's homes and even entire cities very quickly. The picture shows ruins of houses after they've been bombed.

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



These soldiers are setting up a launcher for mortar bombs. These bombs are very destructive, but they can only hit targets that are quite close. However, a mortar bomb can destroy a whole house.



This soldier is firing a rocket. Rockets are popular with militias because they're easy to carry around and can be fired from a person's shoulder. Rockets can go a long way and cause a lot of damage, but it's impossible to aim them properly at long distances.

How I Came to Write the Book

I went to live in Lebanon a long time ago, in 1977. My husband, David, had new a job in Beirut, Lebanon's capital, helping refugees. The horrible civil war had been raging for several years, but things had quietened down, and it seemed as if the war was coming to an end.

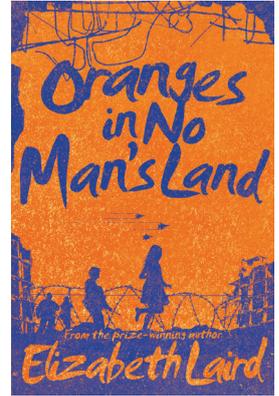
Beirut had been a lovely city once, but it was a sad sight when we arrived. An invisible line, which everyone called the 'Green Line', ran right through the centre of the city. It divided Beirut between the two sides which faced each other across it. Their militias had blasted away with their mortar bombs and guns so hard that the whole of the city centre was in ruins. Buildings had collapsed, ruined cars and tanks cluttered the streets, and most of the lamp posts and trees had been knocked over. The picture below shows what the 'Burj', the main square of Beirut, looked like. Even the statue in the middle of the square was full of bullet holes, and parts of it had been blown off.

DISCUSSION POINT: Can you think of any other countries or cities that have been divided up like this?

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



A friend offered us her flat to camp in for the first few weeks until we could rent a place of our own. “It’s a bit of a mess,” she said, “but I’m sure you’ll manage.”



Oh, that flat! It had been beautiful once. Handmade tiles covered the walls, chandeliers hung from the ceilings, and the furniture had once been elegant. But it was a sad sight when we moved in. Splatters of broken glass were all over the floor, some of the windows had been shot out, and rows of bullet holes ran along the wardrobe doors.

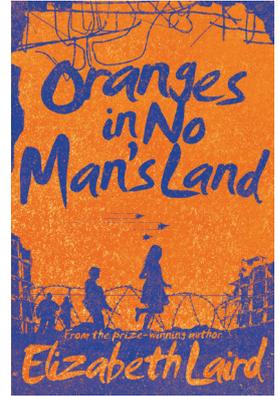


Our baby, Angus, was only six months old. He hadn't learned how to crawl, which was just as well because of the broken glass and dust. He spent most of the day happily sitting in my old suitcase, which turned into a handy cot at night.

TEACHING NOTES

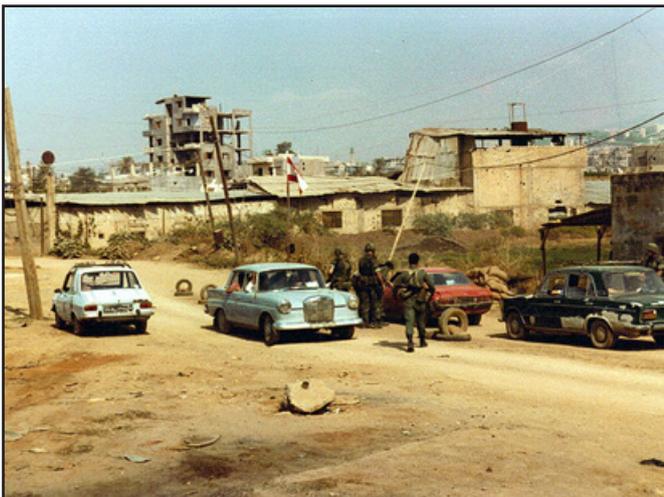
Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



In the morning, I used to stand on the balcony overlooking the street, bouncing Angus in my arms. There was always something going on. The shopkeepers arrived first. They pushed up their battered metal shutters with a great rattling noise, and soon old ladies dressed in black were clambering over piles of rubble towards them to do their shopping.

In the afternoon, crocodiles of children in pairs, wearing little red aprons and carrying tiny schoolbags on their backs, held hands as they crossed the road. Then I'd hear hooves clopping along, and down the road would come a horse with a plume on his head, pulling a cart with bottles of paraffin to sell. This was needed for cooking, because the electricity often didn't work. Sometimes a man selling feather dusters strolled into sight, his dusters arranged in an arc around his head like a giant peacock's tail.



Just down the road from the flat there was a checkpoint. Checkpoints were scary places. Soldiers with guns stood beside them. They would string a rope across the street so that no one could pass without their permission. You had to know which militia the soldiers belonged to. They might be friendly or they might not. It usually wasn't hard to tell because the soldiers would hang their special flag and sometimes a photograph of their warlord from the rope. The soldiers were bored of standing around all day with nothing much to do.

If I went too near them they'd call out to me and want to pick Angus up out of his pushchair and give him a cuddle. I felt nervous at first but I needn't have worried. They seemed to love babies. Perhaps they were missing their families at home.

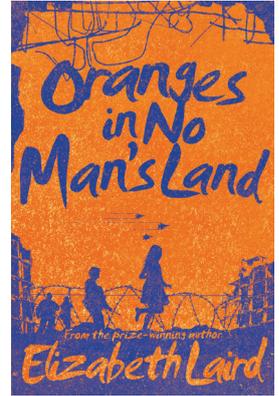
When the electricity wasn't working, we had to go to bed early. It was scary listening to the noises outside. Was that banging sound a broken shutter hitting a wall in the wind, or was it a bomb going off? Were those rumbles distant thunder, or the sounds of collapsing timbers and walls in the ruined buildings that surrounded us? And what was that flash?

"Lightning," David would say reassuringly, having listened for a moment. "With mortars, you always hear answering rifle or machine gun fire."

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



He had once been in the British army, so he knew what he was talking about.



The picture shows a badly damaged flat just off the Green Line, but even though it's a wreck, people are still living in it.

After a few weeks, we moved into a little rooftop flat in another part of town, where the buildings and streets were undamaged, but I never forgot our first Beirut home so near the Green Line, and I had it in mind when I wrote about the flat where Ayesha and her family are looked after by Mrs Zainab.

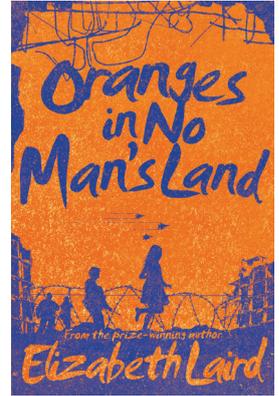
The 'Burj', Beirut's central square, had been a beautiful, open space once, fringed with shops and cinemas, with rows of palm trees down the middle. But the soldiers had used the tops of the trees for target practice, and all the leaves had been shot off. There were gaping holes in the buildings on each side of the square and there was no glass in any of the windows.

The Lebanese were so brave! They did their best to keep things going. They set up market stalls in front of the ruined buildings, and got busy selling fruits, vegetables, clothes, pots and pans, crockery, cutlery, watches, and anything else you could think of.

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



Soon after we arrived in Beirut, the fighting started up again. It didn't go on all the time. Sometimes there were days or even weeks of peace and everyone hoped the war was nearly over. One Sunday, when things seemed peaceful, we decided to visit some friends on the other side of the Green Line. When it was time to go home, we strapped Angus into his seat in the back of the car and set off across the city.

But as we came near the Burj, David said, "We've got a problem. Look, no one's around. Things are about to start up again."

It was too late to turn the car and go back. Snipers would already be in place on the rooftops. We would have become a target. So David put his foot down on the accelerator and we roared across the Burj as fast as our little car could go. As we hurtled through the ruined square, I saw that although everyone had fled, the market stalls were still in place with all the goods laid out on them. The first shot must only just have been fired, because a fruit stall had been tipped over and the oranges on it were still rolling down the street. That image stayed in my mind and gave me the idea of the title of the book: *Oranges in No Man's Land*.

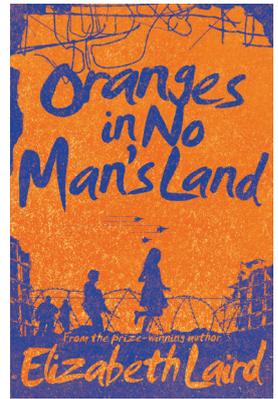


The picture shows one of the ruined streets we rushed through as we left the Burj, just as it was that day. Once we were back in our own part of the city, everything was normal. People were out in the streets and the shops were open, but we could hear the sound of fighting behind us, and we were very glad to get home safely.

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

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The Characters in the Book

People often ask me if my characters are based on real people, and the answer is nearly always 'no'. Every character comes into my mind slowly, and develops into someone who feels to me like a real person. But sometimes I'm inspired by people I've met, and things about the way they look, or things they say and do, might get mixed in to the fictional character. There is one such exception in *Oranges in No Man's Land*. Abu Boutros, who helps Ayesha when the soldiers at the checkpoint try to stop her, is based on rumours I heard of a brave old man who refused to leave his home in the ruins. He went on trying to dress smartly and live normally, and he helped anyone he could. He became an inspiration to many people.



The picture shows how Gary Blythe imagined Ayesha in his lovely drawing for the cover of the first edition of *Oranges in No Man's Land*.

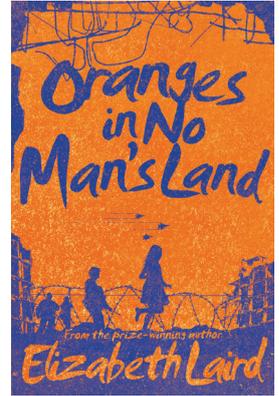
Ayesha and her family are Muslims from the south of Lebanon. Dr Leila is a Christian from the other side of the city. They're on opposite sides in the war, but they can still be friends. Samar came to mind after I'd spent time in a deaf school in Ramallah, Palestine. The children in the school loved trying to communicate with me. I couldn't understand their sign language, so their teacher interpreted for me. I wanted to know why the girls were all giggling. 'They think you ought to grow your hair longer,' the teacher explained, laughing too.

What's the End of the Story?

Peace returned to Lebanon at last. For years, I nearly forgot my time there. I was too busy visiting Ethiopia and writing about what I discovered there. But a few years ago, David and I went back to Lebanon for a visit. I couldn't believe my eyes! The centre of the city had been completely rebuilt. People were going in and out of the new offices, and the shops were busy with customers. It showed me that even the worst of times don't last forever, and people and countries can heal themselves in the end.

TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land
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Beirut then...

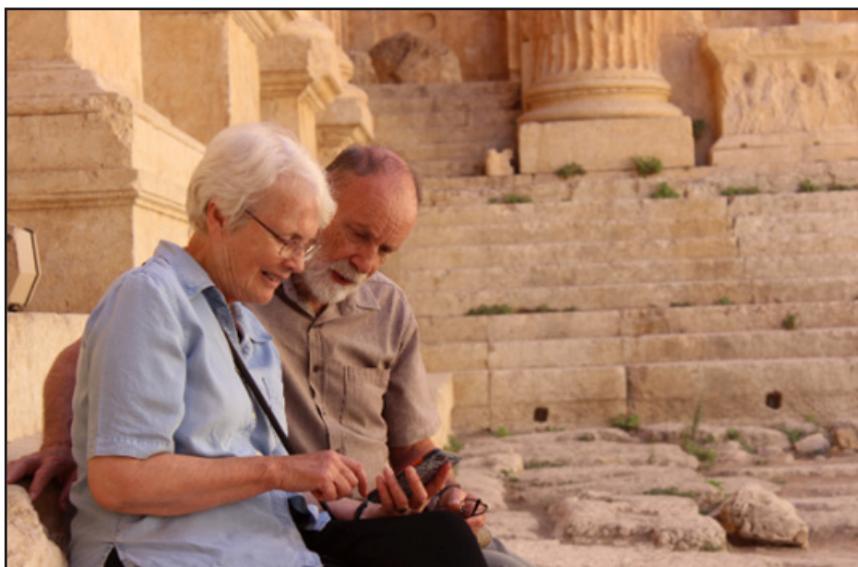


...and Beirut now.

Here I Am in Lebanon Again, Many Years Later

Here I am with David on a recent visit to one of the fabulous temples the Romans built in Baalbek, in the heart of Lebanon, 2000 years ago. I'm trying to work out how to use my new camera. I never did get it right. Angus, the baby in the suitcase, is grown up now, with children of his own, and for four years he and his family lived in Lebanon. My husband and I visited them often.

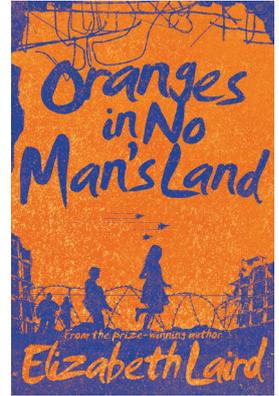
It was Angus who took this photo.



TEACHING NOTES

Oranges in No Man's Land

Elizabeth Laird



Activities

1. Choose a key moment from the story and write an entry in Ayesha's diary.

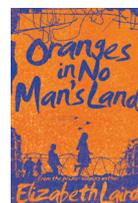
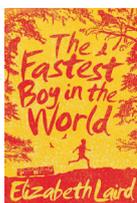
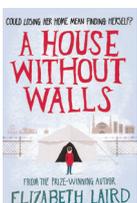
- Remember to write in the first person, as you (Ayesha) experienced it. How would she write down her experiences and feelings, and what is her tone? Excited, nervous, sad, hopeful?
- If you can't decide what to write about, you could choose one of these moments:
 - When Ayesha and her family have just moved into the flat with Mrs Zainab
 - The day Ayesha realises her Granny is ill
 - When Ayesha has just made friends with Samar and is trying to work out how to communicate with her
- You may want to pick three to five key things that stick in your mind, to help you structure your writing.

2. Imagine what happens at the end of the story. Write a letter from Ayesha to Samar, describing how she feels when her father comes back; how she has to tell him that her mother has died, and how the family are setting up a new life together. You may wish to plan your letter by dividing it into three sections and considering what details you will include in each. Draw upon details from the story and consider Ayesha's feelings and tone.

3. Pretend you're a journalist and write a news flash from Beirut, describing a battle between two militias. Think about how to structure your writing. Will it be printed in a newspaper or a magazine and read by individual people? Or will it be read out loud in a news broadcast on the radio or on TV?

4. Imagine what it's like to be old Abu Boutros, living alone in the ruins, trying to keep up his life as normal. Describe from his point of view how he rescued Ayesha from the scary militia men at the check point.

5. Write a character description of Ayesha from her brother Latif's point of view. How does he feel about his big sister at first, and how do his feelings change as he starts to respect her more?

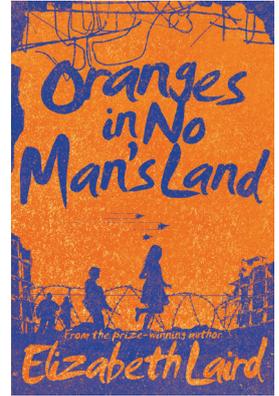



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Oranges in No Man's Land
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Keyword Glossary

Checkpoint: A barrier or staffed entrance at the border of a country or state, where security checks are carried out on people attempting to cross.

Civil War: A war between groups of people in the same country.

Militia: A private army set up by a single person or a group.

Refugees: People forced to flee their homeland because of war, violence or persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political leanings or belonging to a particular social group. Refugees require international protection.

Refugee camps: Accommodation for people displaced from their country, usually in a neighbouring country, close to the border. Camps provide basic shelter, food, water, medical treatment and, sometimes, education, but they often lack sanitation and cleaning/hygiene supplies. Given the cramped conditions, diseases can spread easily. Refugee camps are meant to offer temporary accommodation, but they often become semi-permanent.

Warlord: A military leader who controls a country or area, usually where the government is weakened. They often use violence as a control method.

Curriculum Links

Upper KS2 - years 5 and 6:

- Reading
- Writing
- History
- Geography:
 - Locational Knowledge
 - Human Geography

KS3:

- Reading
- Writing
- History
- Citizenship
- Geography:
 - Locational Knowledge
 - Place Knowledge
 - Human Geography

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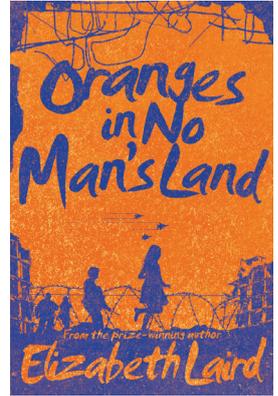


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