



LITERATURE WITH MELINDA

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It is always important to submerge yourself in and learn about different cultures and religions. Opening one's mind to different ways of life is such a fulfilling learning experience that widens one's view of the world. With this in mind, this week's literature recommendation is a wonderfully written historical fiction novel that allows readers to learn a little bit about the history of Islam.

Though simply reading a book--fiction for that matter--cannot provide nearly enough exposure to the culture, it is at least somewhere to start, especially during quarantine.

"The Jewel of Medina" by Sherry Jones gives readers the opportunity to learn about Islam in a different way than just reading a history textbook. Though it is a novel and some details are made-up, Jones did a lot of research and actually incorporates many true historical details into her story. The book is set around the years 619 to 632 A.D. in both Medina and Mecca, Arabia. The main character of the novel, A'isha, is first introduced as a carefree, young girl playing with her friends outside; everything is great. Her world soon gets turned upside down, however, when she must enter purdah at the age of six to prepare for her marriage to the Prophet, Muhammad. She is to marry him in just a few short years. At first A'isha resists and swears she will run away with her young love, Safwan, but this fantasy is crushed by the many people who support her marriage to Muhammad.

The book tells A'isha's story as she grows up married to the Prophet and how she finds her place within her marriage, the community, and the religious world. Though many obstacles come her way, A'isha is able to overcome them, helping other women find the courage to do the same.

Though readers must keep in mind that this is a fictional novel--simply a story--it does contain many true historical events, people, and locations. It is a great way to learn a little about the history of Islam. Nonetheless, one should not base their entire knowledge of Islam on this one book. I encourage readers to go out and learn more about this religion and culture. Happy reading and come back again next week for another great literature recommendation!

CHRONICLES OF TOWER HALL: THINGS I NOTICED ON MY WALK

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There is something comforting about putting one foot in front of the other and knowing that the outcome will be you, sweaty, and at home, lying in your creaky little bed in the room you share with Susie. Something incredibly necessary in the thought that, if everything goes to hell, you can always turn back, run home, and forget all about the way that trees squeak when the wind knocks them down.

Tell me about the man who hunts you down and I will tell you about mine. He is the smallest slip of a man, capable of hiding beneath the pebbles on the road when I turn around to see him. He is fear and he is always there. And I am always pretending not to see him when I peak sideways, blurring him with the tears that gather in the corners of my eyes.

I walked through the cemetery today and thought of all the people behind the names. I wrote a poem to Sister Margaret who died one hundred years ago from a sore tooth or a broken spiritual connection or because her heart could not stand all the love she had for God. Did her parents know that when Maggie grew up she was going to dedicate herself to the tireless pursuit of putting others first? I can barely put myself first. My life is a race and me and all the girls, we are all tied for last place. When Maggie fell out of a tree when she was eight, did her parents tell her to pray for God to heal her quickly? Was this when she fell in love with prayer?

I started keeping a journal like Susie and Helen. Not because I think anyone will want to read it, but because I want to know that in one hundred years, when curious and hurting girls stand at my grave and wonder about me, they will be able to find the answers.

This is a work of historical fiction and should not be treated as a historical account of boarding school life at the College of Saint Scholastica, Duluth, MN. Information comes from librarian Heidi Johnson and the journals of Hermina von Witzleben (Copyright of the Family of Hermina von Witzleben and Used by Permission).