



Lost Boys

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I woke up several hours later, wondering how I'd been asleep at all when it was so incredibly cold. Then I realized I'd woken because the key was turning in the lock. I didn't think it was possible to get colder, but a chill shook my already-frozen skin. The dim light coming through the high window shone on the door creeping open. Should I wake the others? I thought of the stories we'd heard of boys taken away and never seen again.

It's 1982, and twelve-year-old Reza has no interest in joining Iran's war effort. But in the wake of a tragedy and at his mother's urging, he decides to enlist, assured by the authorities that he will achieve paradise should he die in service to his country.

War does not bring the glory the boys of Iran have been promised, and Reza soon finds himself held in a prisoner-of-war camp in Iraq, where the guards not only threaten violence—they act upon it.

Will Reza make it out alive? And if he does, will he even have a home to return to?

Lost Boys Details

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From Reader Review Lost Boys for online ebook

Melissa says

Darcey Rosenblatt's luminous MG novel, LOST BOYS, centers on 12-year-old Reza, a musically gifted Iranian boy who is expected to join the Iran-Iraq War. The problem is, Reza has zero interest in following in his deceased father's footsteps, despite the urging of his devout mother and his best friend, Ebi. But then tragedy strike and Reza decides to enlist. What awaits Reza is not the "paradise" the mullah who recruited him promised, but a brutal foray into battle followed by an assignment to Camp Six, an Iraqi POW camp. Camp Six is supposed to be the "best" of all the iraqi prison camps, but the conditions are squalid and Reza encounters physical and emotional abuse, the majority of which is meted out by Abass, a particularly sadistic guard. Reza finds solace by befriending fellow inmates Salar, Omid, and Jaafer, and he soon forms a close bond with Miles, an Irish aid worker. All the while, Reza never stops searching for his BFF, Ebi—or gives up hope of finding him one day. A magnificent debut. Highly recommended.

Anne says

Set in Iran in 1982, this is the story of Reza. He's 12-years-old and lives with his mother. His favorite uncle is killed because of his part in the resistance. Young people, like Reza, are being encouraged to join the army in the fight against Iraq. Despite his mothers objections, Reza and his best friend enlist. They are taken almost immediately to the front lines where the young people are tied together to form a line and are sent out in front of the troops as human mine sweepers. Reza is injured but not killed and is taken to a POW camp. Conditions are harsh, but he is told that conditions are much worse in the other camps. He is seeking any information about his friend and also hoping desperately to escape the camp and return home.

It helps to have a little knowledge about the conflict in Iran/Iraq, but the author does a good job of filling in information for the reader. This is a shocking but realistic look at what young men in the Middle East are facing, even this much later in time than when the story is set. This is a well-written debut novel. The author explains in the afterword where she got the idea for the story as well as the research involved in making it as authentic as possible. Grades 6-10.

Supriya Kelkar says

This was a gripping, powerful debut I could not put down.

Ben Guterson says

Darcey Rosenblatt bravely charts the interior longings and material terrors confronting twelve-year-old, Reza, as he is coerced into becoming a boy soldier during Iran's early-'80s war with Iraq. Spiritual doubts and a love of Western music gnaw at Reza as he becomes increasingly indifferent to his mother's orthodoxy. When he becomes a prisoner of war after a disastrous charade of an attack (boys are cannon fodder rather than fighters to the leaders urging them onward), and finds himself both encouraged by a kindly camp instructor and mortally threatened by a bullying guard, Reza's aspirations restlessly seek outlet. Rosenblatt understands the delicate path she walks in presenting the world of a Muslim boy from Iran--she delivers

something heartfelt and heartening.

Ms. Yingling says

E ARC from Edelweiss Above the Treeline

Iran in 1982 was a difficult place to be. Reza loves Stevie Wonder music, but it is forbidden, and his mother is spouting her adherence to whatever the Ayatollah has decreed even though it cost Reza his father. Luckily, his uncle Habib understands, but he is active in the resistance and doesn't last long. Reza's best friend Ebi believes in supporting the cause, and Reza finally gives in to joining the army. Many of the boys (who are about 12) believe that if they die in support of the cause it will be an honorable death and they will go to heaven and be given virgins (which is a deeply disturbing thought if ever there was one-- this article was helpful in illuminating the myth behind it), but Reza quickly finds that the boys are all expendable. After being gravely injured, he is separated from Ebi but ends up in a decent prison camp where the boys are taught by Irish Aid worker, Miles. Miles is very supportive, and even lets Reza play his guitar. Eventually, Miles is asked to leave the country, and Reza realizes that he and the other boys are never going to get to go home. Even though Ebi shows up at the camp, Reza has to make some bold decisions about his future.

Strengths: I thought this offered a good depiction of how even members of the same family can react differently to a sociopolitical environment. Reza feels his mother (whose father was a holy man) loves her god more than she loves him. Ebi's family is more progressive, and angry at his more conservative views. Reza just cannot think that his love of music is sinful, and while he loves his country, he doesn't like the divisions. This seemed very well researched, and offers a glimpse into a very interesting but treacherous time. Modern readers will draw many parallels between Iran in 1982 and current political situations.

Weaknesses: This is not an #ownvoices book. This does not bother me, since I think writers should be able to research and write sympathetic books about other people, but some people will be bothered by this.

What I really think: This is an essential purchase for all middle school libraries. The cover is great, and all manner of readers will be drawn to Reza's story of music, adventure, and personal journey.

Paula says

While I found the story of compelling, I also found some aspects to be troubling. Our protagonist Reza is living with his mother in Iran during the war with Iraq in 1982. His father died in the war and his uncle is recently killed. His mother thinks he should become a martyr fighting in the war so he and his best friend Ebi sign up. Unfortunately he is seriously injured and taken into a prisoner of war camp as one of the "Lost Boy Soldiers". Life there is hard, but not as bad as other camps. Reza is befriended by a Red Crescent worker who helps him discover his talent as a musician. It's a glimpse into a history I didn't know much about. However, it troubles me that many stereotypes about good and bad Muslims run strong through the text. I am also increasingly aware that stories are best told by people who live them or have ties to them. Rosenblatt is not Muslim. She is not Iranian. She is not a boy. Her perception of a young Iranian Muslim boy is filtered through her life experiences that are far removed from that life-raising concerns about its accurate portrayal and implicit or unconscious bias. While I think Rosenblatt is good storyteller, I question whether it's her story to tell. I would rather read the story told by someone with authentic ties and connection. A 2018-19 MSBA nominee for grades

Cindy Mitchell *Kiss the Book* says

Rosenblatt, Darcey *Lost Boys*, 288 pages. Henry Holt (Macmillan), 2017. \$17. Language: G (1 swear, 0 'f'); Mature Content: G; Violence: PG-13 (piles of bodies, beatings)

Reza's mother has been pressuring the twelve year old to join Iran's army in the fight against Iraq in 1982. His favorite uncle, however, is an Iranian rebel, who has nurtured Reza's love for Western music, so he has been resistant. When his best friend, Ebi, joins up, though, Reza feels obligated to stay by his side. The boys are shattered, however, when they find out that their final purpose for the Iranian army is to act as human minesweepers. When Reza finally wakes up, he has been sent to a detention camp and Ebi is missing, perhaps dead. Life in the detention camp is harsh, made harsher by a guard with a cruel streak who seems to have it out for Reza.

Rosenblatt has chosen a little known (for Americans) war as the background for a book about hope and courage. The descriptions of life in the detention camp would be excellent to read aloud in any modern history class to help students connect to the harshness of life in a war zone. In elementary schools, I would only suggest this for sixth graders. For middle schools, hand this to your boys who read books about war – its an easy sell and a very good look at another aspect of war.

EL (6th grade only) – ADVISABLE; MS – ESSENTIAL Cindy, Library Teacher
<https://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2017...>

Bridget says

There are some parts of this that are compelling (not least the cover that got me to pick this up), but I don't think I'd recommend it unless it was for a very specific request. The author's note talks about the research she conducted and her passion for the history that inspired her to write the story, and I believe that it's accurate for the most part. However, the overall impression the book leaves is of a war with "good" and "bad" Muslims, and I feel like that sort of simplifies and flattens all the complexities of the political and cultural time/situation the story is depicting. Particularly when the bad guys play into so many very specific stereotypes about Muslims. There's also an aid worker whose role really seemed to fall into white savior tropes. Which isn't to say that aid workers (who were probably often white) didn't play crucial roles in situations like Reza's, but I just don't know that this is the best or most authentic depiction of such a complex historical event. These reservations aren't enough for me to label this DO NOT RECOMMEND EVER or anything, but it's not one I'm interested in bringing on school visits.

Nancy says

Wow-oh-Wow. I love when an author can take me to a place I've never been, connect me to a character so unlike myself, and make me feel (and learn) so much. This is an amazing and heartbreaking story, based in a reality that no child should ever have to face. Beautifully written. Kept me up late reading, and I am very protective of my sleep. Not to be missed!! (Out Aug 2017; go ahead and pre-order!)

Sam says

Huge thank you to Raincoast for this ARC!

Lost Boys is both a beautiful people of historical fiction. While this book is classified as middle grade fiction, it actually reads much older in some aspects of the story, but regardless of that it's a very heartbreaking and beautiful story about friendship in Iran during 1982. According to the author's note, parts of the story were based on an account by her neighbour who had been growing up in Iran.

Reza is a wonderful protagonist who is both kind as he is curious. You learn about Reza's love of Western music which he got from his Uncle. You learn his love of modern music and the kinds of songs that were present in the 1980s. In some regards this makes Reza seem a little older than he actually is, but I found him to constantly be endearing throughout the story. His friendship with Ebi and Miles are both unique aspects in the story as Ebi at the tender age of twelve believes young boys need to die for their nation, while Miles an Irish aid worker tries to instill a different perspective...

...And it works well in this story. In this story you see Reza feeling torn between the love of his family and country, but also struggling with his feelings towards the political environment in Iran. Characters like Ebi break your heart because they are the product of propaganda, the belief that every man must die for his nation. There's an idealism in this notion, but the story shows how many of the children are completely robbed of childhoods.

Lost Boys is a very thoughtful read, and Rosenblatt is a beautiful writer. I appreciated much of the leg work that went into this novel, and if you haven't read the Author's Note it is worth checking out just to get some extra context to where the author was coming from with the story. This book will leave you sad yet very hopeful in the end.

Jason Gallaher says

This book was so eye-opening and beautiful as it details horrifying truths of the Iran-Iraq War. It still seems extremely timely in our current political climate. This is a must-read for those who enjoy historical fiction and for fans of "Persepolis."

T says

My favorite historical fiction stories are ones that teach me about a time period I knew little about. This one was given to me by a favorite reader who is very picky about his book choices. It did not disappoint and drew me in from the first few pages.

Lost Boys, set in Iran in 1982, tells the heartbreaking, painful, and hopeful story of twelve-year-old Reza and a generation of Iranian teens who were either forced into or willingly, but blindly and without training or equipment went to fight a hopeless and deadly holy war against Iraq. Sadly the war did not bring the promised glory and innumerable boys find themselves prisoners of war in cruel, hateful Iraqi prisons. In sometimes appalling conditions, the boys find camaraderie, friendship, and immense bravery. With the help of a kind, wise teacher, and surprising allies, the boys discover hope. Though their future is bleak - some will not be welcomed home as they "failed" to fulfill the promise of eternal martyrdom, and most are forever

scarred and changed by their years of imprisonment.

Reza's voice is honest and compelling. His story is at once traumatic and full of survival against insurmountable odds. I couldn't put this book down and hope a new generation of young men and women read it and learn about the capacity for kindness and love in the human heart even when hatred feels stronger. A voice and story that will linger and teach.

Barbara says

Twelve-year-old Reza is a gifted musician who loves Western music even though it is forbidden in 1982 Iran. His Uncle Habib supports his interests and even gives him a Thelonious Monk tape while his mother does not. While Reza's mother is a traditionalist and considers that soldiers are martyrs, destined for glory and a place in Heaven when they die, Habib is involved in the resistance movement. But after a tragic event, Reza feels that he has no choice other than to join the military forces along with his best friend, Ebi. The boys are somewhat swept up by patriotism, but their ardor quickly chills once they are thrown in battle with no training. Both boys are wounded, and from the prisoner of war camp to which he's been taken, Reza worries about his friend and uncertain whether Ebi has even survived. Reza is singled out for bullying by Pasha, another prisoner, and by torture by Abass, one of the guards. Thanks to the kindness of Miles, a British citizen who works for an organization that provides aid to prisoners, and who recognizes Reza as a musical prodigy, and the help of some of the other POWs, Reza somehow manages to escape and flee to freedom. Much of the story is heartbreaking, and the last third will have readers' hearts racing as they note the lengths Reza takes to leave this horrible place far behind. How likely it is that he could have managed an escape in that way might be debatable, but it surely left me impressed. I had no idea about this part of the war and what happened to so many young boys during that time, and would like to learn more. While the author is not a cultural insider, she seems to have done her best to understand Muslim culture and the events depicted here. An Author's Note explains her inspiration and sources for telling this important story.

Sally says

Wow! I couldn't put it down. Action, suspense, and immersion in a very different moment in history, one most American kids don't know enough about. I greatly enjoyed Reza's story.

Hoover Public Library Kids and Teens says

What is an almost 13-year-old boy with a soul full of music doing marching into battle for God and country?
