

Words in the Dust

By Trent Reedy

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Winner of the Christopher Medal and a "heart-wrenching" Al Roker's Book Club selection on the Today Show.

Zulaikha hopes. She hopes for peace, now that the Taliban have been driven from Afghanistan; a good relationship with her hard stepmother; and one day even to go to school, or to have her cleft palate fixed. Zulaikha knows all will be provided for her--"Inshallah," God willing.

Then she meets Meena, who offers to teach her the Afghan poetry she taught her late mother. And the Americans come to her village, promising not just new opportunities and dangers, but surgery to fix her face. These changes could mean a whole new life for Zulaikha--but can she dare to hope they'll come true?

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal
Gr 5-8-Zulaikha's life in Afghanistan is not easy. She is teased constantly for a facial deformity and although the Taliban is no longer in power, it has violently taken her mother from her, and the 13-year-old is left keeping house for a busy, traditional father and his bad-tempered wife. She is trapped by the confines of her culture as well as by her own fears, but things begin to change when she meets a mysterious woman who wants to work with her on her writing and teach her about poetry. When American soldiers roll into town and offer her the chance to fix her cleft palate, Zulaikha allows herself to wish for a better and different future. Reedy was inspired by a girl he met during his tour of duty in Afghanistan, and Zulaikha's character is based loosely on her experiences. Infused with poetry, and wrought with hardship, the story gives a bleak, but ultimately hopeful, portrayal of girlhood in Afghanistan. It is full of hard truths, painful lessons, beautiful human interaction, and the promise of possibility.-Sharon Senser McKellar, Oakland Public Library, CA (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

From Booklist
Born with a cleft lip, Zulaikha struggles to feel worth in a society that values women by their marriage prospects: “What bride-price would Baba get for me? Maybe one Afghani?” Then, by chance, Zulaikha meets Meena, a former professor, who begins to teach her to read and write just as American soldiers arrive, bringing the chance for both more education and surgery to correct Zulaikha’s birth defect. Reedy based his debut on real people and places he encountered while serving with the National Guard in Afghanistan, and the extensive detail about Afghani customs gives the story the feel of a docu-novel while also creating a vivid sense of place and memorable characters. Reedy skillfully avoids tidy resolutions: the grim fate of Zulaikha’s sister, who is married to a much older man, offers a heartbreaking counterpoint to Zulaikha’s exciting new possibilities. A glossary of Dari phrases, an extensive author’s note, suggested-reading lists, and an introduction by Katherine Paterson complete this deeply moving view of a young girl caught between opportunity and tradition in contemporary Afghanistan. Grades 5-8. --Gillian Engberg

Review

"I love this story -- it leaves no doubt that hope and love speak the same language everywhere." -- Suzanne Fisher Staples, author of SHABANU: DAUGHTER OF HTE WIND

"Both heart-wrenching and timely." -- KIRKUS REVIEWS

"A beautifully written novel that introduces young readers to a fascinating culture." -- PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

"Readers will readily find themselves rooting for Zulaikha in this simply told yet thoughtful story." -- THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Grace Moreno:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make these people survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice by simply surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated it for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a guide your ability to survive raise then having chance to remain than other is high. In your case who want to start reading a new book, we give you this Words in the Dust book as starter and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Levi Ryan:

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Mae Bushee:

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Helen McClain:

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