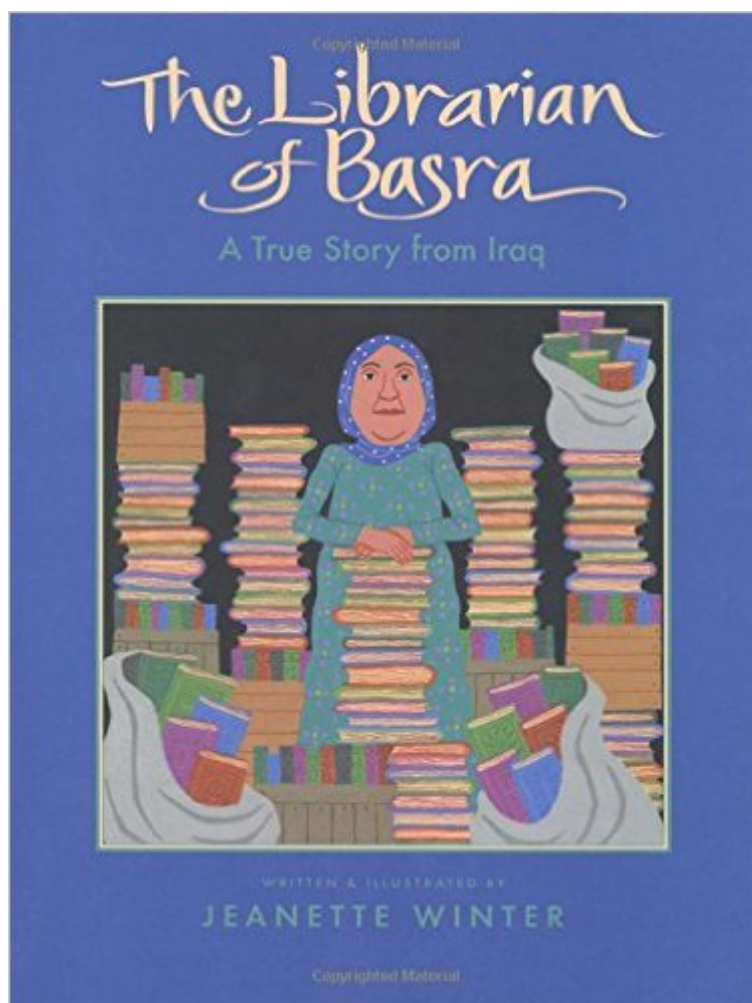


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# The Librarian Of Basra: A True Story From Iraq



## Synopsis

"In the Koran, the first thing God said to Muhammad was 'Read.'"<sup>\*</sup> --Alia Muhammad Baker  
Alia Muhammad Baker is a librarian in Basra, Iraq. For fourteen years, her library has been a meeting place for those who love books. Until now. Now war has come, and Alia fears that the library--along with the thirty thousand books within it--will be destroyed forever. In a war-stricken country where civilians--especially women--have little power, this true story about a librarian's struggle to save her community's priceless collection of books reminds us all how, throughout the world, the love of literature and the respect for knowledge know no boundaries. Illustrated by Jeanette Winter in bright acrylic and ink. Includes an author's note. <sup>\*</sup>From the New York Times, July 27, 2003

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 640L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: HMH Books for Young Readers; 1 edition (January 1, 2005)

Language: English

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ISBN-13: 978-0152054458

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.4 x 10.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (60 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #20,663 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Middle East](#) #18 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Military & Wars](#) #37 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Jobs & Careers](#)

Age Range: 4 - 7 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## Customer Reviews

Writing current picture books about the war in Iraq is difficult for a number of reasons. First of all, people tend to shy away from writing picture books that have strong political messages in them. And it is clear that any view of American involvement in Iraq is going to contain a slant one way or another. Second, picture books are supposed to inspire and instruct. How inspirational is it to look at the rising death toll and innocent lives taken during the course of this most peculiar of wars? So it's little wonder that when several children's authors heard the story of Alia Muhammad Baker they felt

moved to write her story out for children everywhere to hear. One of the best of these is Jeanette Winter's, "The Librarian of Basra". Though no book about Iraq is completely bereft of a political view of what we did, this story speaks beyond the immediate problems and looks to the future in a truly moving way. It stands as perhaps one of the best ways to instruct little children about the war and its aftermath. As librarians go, Alia Muhammad Baker is an inspiration to her brethren. When people started predicting the impending war in Basra, Alia was certain that the books would be destroyed. These aren't just your shabby paperbacks or romance novels either. Alia's collection was privy to owning a biography of Muhammad that was 700 years old, amongst its other treasures. When pleas with the authorities to move the books yielded nothing, Alia went out and rescued the books herself. She took them home, recruited friends and neighbors to help her remove them from the library, and hid them in her friend Anis Muhammad's restaurant. Then, when the worst of the initial war was over, she transferred them into the homes of different people.

"Alia Muhammad Baker is the librarian of Basra, a port city in the sand-swept country of Iraq." So begins this moving tale of one librarian's attempts to save the beloved books in her library as war threatens. When the governor of Basra refuses her request to move the books to a safe place, "Alia takes matters into her own hands." When the city is "lit with a firestorm of bombs and gunfire," Alia, with the help of her friends, manages to transfer thousands of books—some of them irreplaceable—to a nearby restaurant. Nine days later, the library burns to the ground. As the war moves inland and away, Alia is able to move the books once again—this time to her home and homes of friends. One double-page spread shows the inside of Alia's house: Books are everywhere: in cupboards; under the bed; stacked on stools. Until a new library can be built, "the books are safe—safe with the librarian of Basra." The story, a true one, was inspired by an article about the librarian's efforts which appeared in the New York Times in 2003. Jeanette Winter does an outstanding job. The tale is simply, yet powerfully told—at once both haunting and hopeful. The bold, colorful, acrylic and pen illustrations adroitly and accurately portray the people and place. An author's note is appended which informs us that not long after the library burned, "Alia suffered a stroke and had heart surgery. But she is healing, and despite all, she is determined to see that the library is rebuilt." Classroom Uses: We took this book into a 6th-grade geography classroom that was studying the Middle East. The students had previously researched and discussed the restricted roles of women in some countries in the region. We read the book aloud.

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