



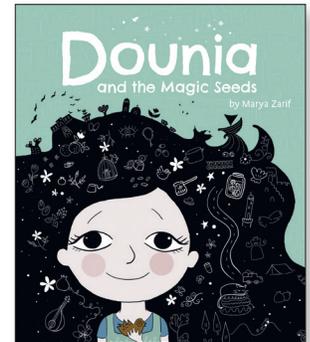
# Dounia and the Magic Seeds

## Discussion Guide by Owlkids Books

### About the Book

Dounia loves her home in Aleppo, Syria, and all of its wonderful smells, sights, and traditions. But when war breaks out, Dounia and her grandparents must flee their home to find safety. Before they go, their neighbor reads their future in a cup of coffee and predicts a long, difficult journey ahead, with a blue house waiting at the end.

Taking only a bird carved from Aleppo soap and four little baraké seeds in her pocket, Dounia, along with her family, faces dangerous waters, a camp surrounded by barbed wire, and unfriendly soldiers. Remembering the ancient knowledge that baraké seeds ward off evil, Dounia pulls one from her pocket to use for each of the threats her family faces. Magically, the seeds help the family along their way, until they finally find the blue house prophesied by their neighbor



Book written and illustrated by Marya Zarif

Elegant, eye-catching artwork beautifully illustrates a young girl's strength and resilience as she takes an active part in her own destiny.

### Keep in Mind

The book *Dounia and the Magic Seeds* deals with difficult topics, like war, and challenging abstract ideas, like well-being and family responsibilities. Allow ample time for questions, expect different points of view, and be sure to keep the discussion open and respectful.

#### THEMES EXPLORED

Immigration, migrant journeys, family well-being, helping other people, family connections, basic human needs, understanding other cultures, war, grief, refugees, optimism

#### CURRICULUM LINKS

**Language Arts:** Reading Comprehension, Early Reading  
**Character Education:** Perseverance  
**The Arts:** Visual Literacy

#### READING LEVELS

**Grade:** 5  
**Fountas & Pinnell:** T  
**Lexile® Measure:** AD 680L  
**COMMON CORE:** RL.5, WV.5, SL.5, L.5

**ISBN**  
978-1-77147-523-5



## Before Reading

Show students the front and back covers, read out the title, and ask students what they think the book is about. How is Dounia represented on the cover? (Note: Dounia means “the world.”)

- *Immigration* is the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country. Many families lived in other countries before living where they are now. Is this true for your family? Where is your family from? When did your family move to live where you are now?
- A *refugee* is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to secure their safety. Can you think of reasons why someone might be forced to leave their country?
- What does the word *fable* mean to you? What do you think is the difference between a fable and a story? Can you think of any fables that you know?
- What do you think about when you hear the word *home*? What makes a home different from other places? Do you think a person can have more than one home?

## After Reading

- At the beginning, Dounia lives happily with her grandparents in Aleppo, Syria. How does Dounia’s home and community differ from the one you live in? What characters do you meet when she interacts with people in her community?
- When bombs start going off in Aleppo, Dounia’s world changes and difficult decisions need to be made. What did Dounia’s family decide? How did they prepare for departure? How does Dounia prepare? How would you feel if you were in this same situation?
- As Dounia, Teta Mouneh, and Jeddo Darwich make their way on their journey, they encounter many obstacles and challenges. What kinds of obstacles do they face? How do they meet those challenges? How do the moments of humor help the story?
- When the family’s situation seems hopeless, what happens?
- When Dounia uses the baraké seeds and carved soap along their journey, what happens in the story?
- Do you think all the parts of the story are realistic? Are there some parts that might be more imaginative or imagined than others?