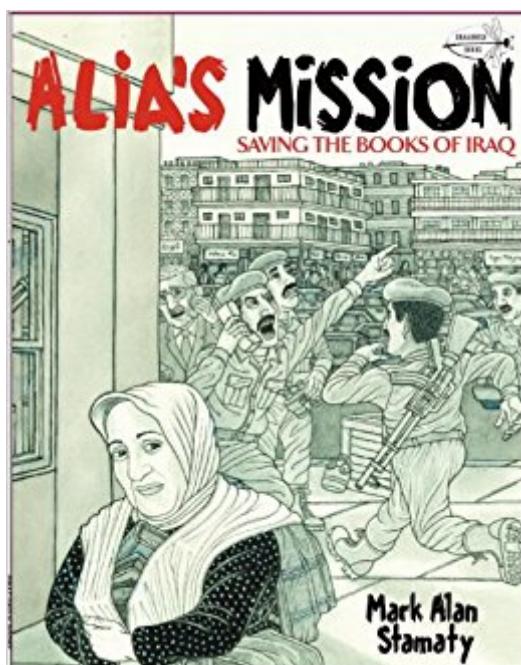


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# Alia's Mission: Saving The Books Of Iraq (Dragonfly Books)



## Synopsis

The inspiring story of an Iraqi librarian's courageous fight to save books from the Basra Central Library before it was destroyed in the war. It is 2003 and Alia Muhammad Baker, the chief librarian of the Central Library in Basra, Iraq, has grown worried given the increased likelihood of war in her country. Determined to preserve the irreplaceable records of the culture and history of the land on which she lives from the destruction of the war, Alia undertakes a courageous and extremely dangerous task of spiriting away 30,000 books from the library to a safe place. Told in dramatic graphic-novel panels by acclaimed cartoonist Mark Alan Stamaty, Alia's Mission celebrates the importance of books and the freedom to read, while examining the impact of war on a country and its people.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0850 (What's this?)

Series: Dragonfly Books

Paperback: 32 pages

Publisher: Dragonfly Books (February 9, 2010)

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ISBN-10: 037585763X

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Product Dimensions: 7.1 x 0.2 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #330,055 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #27 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Middle East #30 in Books > Children's Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Biographies #394 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Books & Libraries

Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## Customer Reviews

Grade 3-6  
A New York Times Book Review cartoonist recounts the heroic story of Iraqi librarian Alia Muhammad Baker in a swift, 32-page, comic-book format. Stamaty's soft gray-and-beige panels realistically capture Baker's tremendous undertaking as she rescues over 30,000 volumes from her library in Basra before it's besieged. The drawings themselves intensify

the traumatic story, and the in-your-face, all-caps dialogue bubbles enhance the sense of impending doom about to befall the library and the people. A fast-paced and informative Middle Eastern study for younger audiences. --Hillias J. Martin, New York Public Library --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** Gr. 4-7. The story of Iraqi librarian Alia Muhammed Baker, who, fearing looting and bombs, hid more than 30,000 books prior to the invasion of Iraq, is so compelling that two author-illustrators have retold it: Jeanette Winter, in her parable-like picture book *The Librarian of Basra* [BKL D 1 04], and Stamaty, in this graphic novel. Sequential panels concisely depict complex sequences of actions and emotions, allowing Stamaty to pack more detail into 32 pages than is possible in a traditional picture book. Stamaty's black-and-white ink, graphite, and wash artwork is equally nuanced; one can even discern the eerie, flickering shadows cast by the burning library across townspeople's faces. Younger readers will be instantly drawn by the story's anthropomorphic book emcee, but this sophisticated and timely work will also appeal to adult admirers of Spiegelman's *Maus* books and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* memoirs. An afterword about historical libraries of the Middle East sidesteps the knotty issue of current developments in Iraq, and Stamaty provides no source notes. Nonetheless, readers will come away powerfully moved by the expression of civilian life in the midst of wartime chaos. Jennifer Mattson  
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Read to my 8 and 6 year old and it was a great introduction into the Middle East conflicts going on.

This is a true story about saving books. It takes place in Basra, Iraq, in 2003. Yes, that Basra. It's in the news all the time. At the beginning of the book, "Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq," there is no war in Basra. But Alia Muhammad Baker, chief librarian of Basra Central Library, knows it is only a matter of time. As a girl, Alia had read about the Mongol invasion of Iraq and the burning of the Baghdad Library. She equates the burning of a library and its books with the destruction of the culture of her country. Burn a library and you burn a collective recorded memory. Alia singlehandedly assumes the responsibility for saving the 40,000 volumes in her library. How? She stuffs her purse and loads her arms under her shawl and walks out, loads her car, returns for another load. City and military officials who now occupy the library, daring the enemy to bomb their library, pay her no heed. She fills her car. Night after night she comes home with a car full of books. Her husband, bless him, unloads them into a closet, then guest room, then into other rooms. (I'm a

librarian and understand her distress and need to save the books!). Then neighbors and friends, and those who hear about the effort, and then many other people help rescue the books. The only books intentionally ignored are those about Saddam Hussein. After England invades, a fire finally destroys the library and 10,000 volumes. Currently, plans are underway to rebuild as soon as the war is over. "Alia's Mission" is told in graphic panel form and will appeal to all ages. It is a great teaching tool for parents and teachers to explain the Iraqi Conflict, Saddam Hussein, libraries and why it is important to preserve them and their books, and most definitely the fact that one person can make a difference performing a simple heroic act and becoming the impetus to drive others. What a magnificent lesson from an Iraqi librarian wearing the Islamic head covering. Certainly, the love of books is a universal language that crosses all barriers and opens doors to future reconciliations. When the war is over, let us find a way to help Alia Muhammad Baker to rebuild the Basra Central Library.

This was bought for my children and I and they said "It's a good book but it's serious. It's serious because the library has problems but I like that Alia the librarian loves books and wants to take care of them." This was not what we expected after reading "Who needs donuts?" but it was real, informative, unique and thoughtful. I highly recommend this book and this author/illustrator.

This book is topical and beautifully illustrated. It is an excellent book to introduce children to the war in Iraq in a nonpolitical way and to break some stereotypes: I appreciated the strong but caring Muslim woman and the men who helped her. Adults will enjoy reading this book with their children, too, because of the good story and the wonderful drawings. (I am a child psychology professor).

I got turned on to illustrator/author Mark Alan Stamaty through my niece's book collection which includes the graphic novelette "Who Needs Donuts" - a black and white illustrated children's book with such intricate and wondrous drawings that any adult or child could stare at a single page entranced. I looked for other books by him and found this gem: "Alia's Mission" which contains Mr. Stamaty's lovely detailed illustrations (some readers have complained about the panels being too busy, but I find this exact quality totally compelling). "Alia's Mission" tells the story of a heroic Iraqi woman, Alia Baker, a librarian at Basra Central Library who takes on the monumental task of trying to save the books of Iraq during the war. It has an American political slant but I still found the story and drawings fabulous, and a great jumpstart for discussions about war and cultural treasures and so on. And it made me cry. I recommend it for just about anyone.

Oh my stars, don't encourage them to stack up MORE books. It already looks wall-to-wall around here! I'm a read-aloud Mom with a family of boys, and we all have a reading habit. It's a borderline obsession. My kids love the idea of books stacked in closets and guest rooms, instead of put away on shelves with spines outwards. Oh, what fun. This graphic biography tells about a brave librarian who saved the books when looters burned the Library of Basra. Also depicts Saddam's troops using the library building as a headquarters and weapons platform, daring the allies to bomb the building. There was no need -- the townspeople destroyed it themselves. Love the Iraqi moustaches -- great graphic panels and the information flows well across the pages. Especially nice: emotional books.

I've struggled for a while with how to introduce my 7-year-old to the reality of war, and this book provided the opening I was looking for. The focus is on the non-political actions of a strong, intelligent, middle-aged Muslim woman (headscarf and all) whose commitment to knowledge and history causes three-quarters of the books in the Basra library to be saved from destruction. Yet the unavoidable backdrop is the current war. The book does a good job of not explicitly naming names/countries -- the only political figure specifically named is Saddam, who is described as a highly unpopular tyrant. But it led my child to ask questions -- why is the war happening? who started it? why do people loot? who dropped the bombs? etc. -- that led to difficult answers. But I was glad to have an opportunity to open this discussion with her at her pace, and to give her a positive figure/action to focus on at the same time as she considers the tragedies of war.

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