

The Olive Tree

SUMMARY

- This story takes us to the beautiful mountains of Lebanon, an unusual country in the Middle East
- Distrust between two families keeps the children, Sameer and Muna, apart, even though they might like to be friends
- An old olive tree, overlooking their properties, causes trouble when it comes time to harvest the olives
- But a heartbreaking loss may hold seeds for growth
- When “right versus wrong” doesn’t get anywhere, maybe listening to one’s heart can help find an answer?

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Muna and her family returned after the war, Sameer thought that he would finally have someone to play with. Together they could climb and eat from the big olive tree that overlooked both their gardens. But Muna didn’t want to play or share the olives. And then, one night lightning struck and everything changed! Find out if the two children can learn to put their differences aside in order to share and work together?

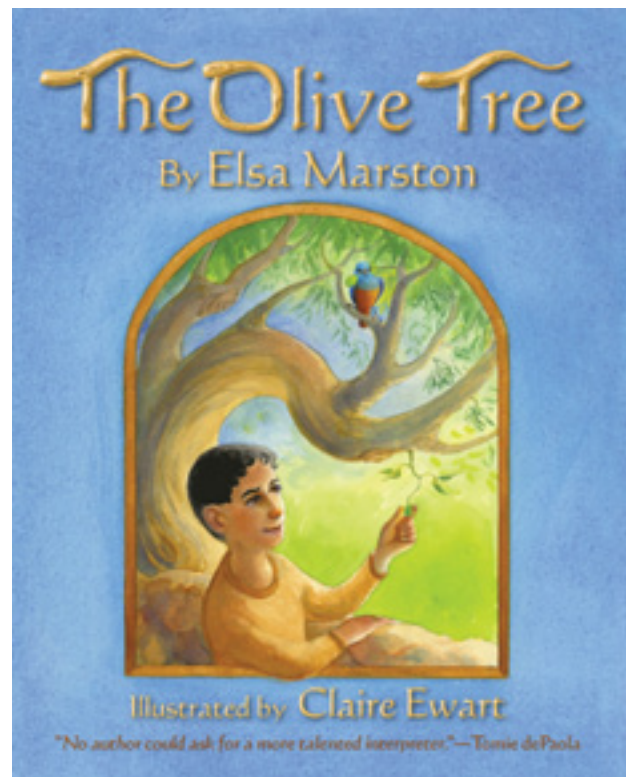
The original version of this story won a fiction contest sponsored by *Highlights for Children* in 1992, was published in the October 1993 issue of *Highlights*, and in 1994 received the Paul A. Witty Short Story Award from the International Reading Association. This is the first time it appears in picture book format, with permission from *Highlights for Children*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ELSA MARSTON is the author of more than two dozen books for children and teens, plus many articles and stories. She grew up near Boston, Massachusetts, and from a young age was fascinated by the Middle East, both ancient and present-day. After attending Harvard University, she studied at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, the start of her lifelong interest in that part of the world, where she has lived and visited often. Her home is in Bloomington, Indiana.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

CLAIRE EWART is an award-winning author and illustrator of children’s books. In addition to illustrating books by such well-known authors as Tomie dePaola and Paul Fleischman, she has also written and illustrated several of her own books, including *One Cold Night*, *The Giant*, and *Fossil*. Claire has received the Celebrate Literacy Award from the International Reading Association, while her work as an illustrator has been included on Best Book lists from *School Library Journal* and *Parent’s Magazine*. Her titles have also appeared on the PBS television shows *Reading Rainbow* and *Storytime*. Claire lives in Fort Wayne, IN.



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32 color illustrations

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“Marston subtly transforms the story’s sadness into hope as the children surprise each other with acts of quiet generosity. . . . Ewart’s watercolor illustrations deftly employ color to signal the story’s emotional developments.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Marston’s understated text aptly captures the children’s feelings and their uneasy relationship. . . . A valid story that shows how perceived prejudice can be just as destructive as actual hatred.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Wisdom Tales
Stories from Around the World

THE OLIVE TREE — WISDOM TALES DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can you tell about Lebanon from looking at a map of the Middle East? [Very small, sort of hemmed in by neighbors, a long coastline for trade and fishing and recreation; maybe high mountains]
2. Many people think that Middle Eastern countries are mostly hot, flat, and barren. What does the land of Lebanon look like to you, from this story?
3. Olives are hard and bitter when they're harvested from the tree. Why do people bother with them? Do you like olives? Did you ever imagine they could cause trouble between people? (Oil pressed from olives is used for many things, from cooking to care of skin and hair, to medical uses. And when the olives are prepared for eating, they're very tasty!)
4. The story doesn't say exactly what made Muna's family feel "different." What do you suppose could make some people in a village feel so different from others that they might want to leave?
5. After their quarrel, Sameer and Muna just ignore the olives that drop in Sameer's yard. Have you ever felt like wasting or even destroying something, just out of spite? (Because something had made you very angry)
6. Have you ever had a dispute with someone over who had the better right to have something? (such as a soccer ball, a bedroom, a friendship) How did it make you feel? And how did you settle it?
7. Why do you think the grownups just "drifted sadly back into their houses"?
8. After the tree is destroyed, and Muna sees what Sameer is doing, she makes important decisions. What might she say, if she put those decisions in words?
9. What do you think Sameer might say, when he finds what she has done?
10. Who do you think is the "hero" in this story?

