

## A LITTLE PIECE OF GROUND

It's a book set in Palestine. It's a book about Palestine; but it's also about a 12 year-old boy growing up trying to make sense of his world. It's a book that doesn't preach, it doesn't offer solutions. In fact, it raises more questions than it answers.

### Pre-reading activities



**Read the following article that will help you understand the conflict**

[http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/08/140801\\_israel\\_palestinos\\_conflicto\\_preguntas\\_basicas\\_jp](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/08/140801_israel_palestinos_conflicto_preguntas_basicas_jp)

**Summarize it in a nutshell**

A large empty rectangular box with an orange border, intended for summarizing the article. The box is positioned below the text 'Summarize it in a nutshell' and above the page number '1'.

### ***Football in Ramallah***

**Look at the photo of the abandoned football in Ramallah. Brainstorm the following questions:**

Whose ball is it?  
Where are they?  
Why aren't they playing?



#### **Write**



- Write a 10 part list entitled “The ten best things I want to do (or be) in my life”.
- Write a second list entitled “The ten things I don't want to do (or be) in my life”.

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Discuss**



Can you identify any similar themes or wishes to the ideas your classmates had? Any differences? How is Karim like them? How is he or his life different?

What is Karim's relationship with Jamal like in the first chapter? What do they argue about?



#### **Imagine**

You are locked inside your house for 3 days. What activities would you not be able to do that you could do if you were free to leave the house?



Create individual **still images** that show what activities you would be doing if they were inside the house.

There is a two hour break in the curfew.



### **Discussion**

In small groups, discuss what individual family members would do in the 2 hours you were able to go outside the house.

Group 1: Dads

Group 2: Mums

Group 3: Teenage boy

Group 4: Younger sister

Group 5: You

### **Chapter 2 & 3**

#### **Photo (2): Street scene in Ramallah: break in curfew?**



*Look at the picture:* what can you see?

Now close your eyes: what can you hear?

What can you smell? Taste?

What does it feel like?

❖ What is the curfew? Who imposes it?

There are several examples of **imagery** to describe Karim's feeling of release in these chapters. This is the first on p11:

*"The last few minutes before six o'clock came seemed to Karim like the longest since the curfew had begun. He felt like a can of Pepsi that had been shaken up and was full of fizz, just bursting to shoot out in a wild, frothing spray."*

This second example is in Chapter 3, on p17:

*"Karim felt as if a stone had been pressing down on his head and it had been eased off for a moment, as if he'd been a fly buzzing against a glass pane and the window had suddenly opened, as if he's been an animal caught in a trap and the door had been left ajar so that he could squeeze out, at last into the open air."*

### **Draw**



Select your favourite piece of imagery and draw it as if it were real.

### **Photo (3): Two boys in Nablus**

*Who could these boys be in the book?  
Karim & Joni? Hopper? Jamal? Why? Why not?*



***Photo (4): Woman and Boy carrying shopping across road closure near Hebron***

*Page 15 – Karim helps his mum with the shopping*

*In this photo (taken in 2009), notice the concrete blocks across the road and the parked car. Palestinians are prevented from driving/using over 634 roads in the West Bank by the use of checkpoints, permits, road blocks, earth mounds or blocking as in this photo*



***Chapters 4 & 5***

***Discuss***



Why is Karim nervous around Hopper? Why is Hopper different to Karim? What do they have in common?

Other Peoples' Views: Why can't Karim play football near his flat? Why might it be annoying for the neighbour?

***Photo (5): Aida Refugee Camp.***



Originally, refugees set up tents. As their exile became more permanent the tents became concrete shelters. Planning was minimal; infrastructure poor. New generations simply build another story on top; space is very restricted.

- What is a refugee camp?
- How is Hopper's camp different from the neighborhood where Karim and his family live?
- In what ways are the refugees different from Karim's family? In what ways are they the same?

## Chapter 6

On the road to his grandmother's village, Karim sees Hopper from the car window. What is Hopper doing? Why is Karim embarrassed to see him?

What is a checkpoint? What is the effect of the checkpoints on Palestinian life?

## Discuss



The attack by Israeli Settlers/Checkpoint Incident (pp 36-41)

What fears do the different characters/parties have?

In small groups study the description of the events described here in detail but with the focus of one of the following characters:

Israeli Soldier/Lamia (mother)/Hassan (father)/Karim/Farah/

Are any of the fears the same? Are any different? What other emotions does this incident stir up for any of the characters?



**Describe** the incident from the point of view of one of those characters



**Photo (7): Pedestrian Checkpoint at Bethlehem**

Note graffiti & 'humanitarian lane' which runs to the side

Footage of Palestinians crossing checkpoints like this on YouTube

<https://youtu.be/gki1wjm9ChU>

## **Chapters 7 & 8**

**Photo (8): Israeli Settlement**

*Despite being against international law, there are 500,000 illegal settlers living on occupied land in the West Bank.*



### ***Cut down olive trees***

*P48. Israelis have cut down thousands of ancient olive trees as a way of taking control of Palestinian land.*

***Discuss*** *Compare/contrast the incident in Chapter 6 with that in Chapter 7 with the olive groves & settlers: what fears were felt here?*

### **Chapters 9 & 10**

Hopper says that Karim is “lucky” to have a village. What happened to Hopper’s family’s village?



**Role-play** Students in groups of 3. Two of you are friends (A & B). A new person (C) comes to the area/school and wants to make friends. A wants to. B doesn’t.

Explore what happens. How do you feel?



## Chapter 11

*P 79: Karim's thoughts about the soldier.*

*What do you think is going through the heads of the girls at the checkpoint? What about the soldier?*

**Contrast** the characters & description of Joni & Hopper (71, 72, 88)

**Discussion** What makes Karim & Joni follow Hopper? Why does Hopper pretend to plant the bomb? Do you think he was right to do this? What would Jamal think of Hopper's actions? Why?

## Chapter 12

***Hopper's Ground?***

*How does this compare to 'Hopper's ground'?*

*(Note oil cans in left foreground)*



*'They had become a trio' p92*

*Feelings?*

*What happens next?*

**Contrast** Joni & Hopper (pp92, 94)

- What is the big hoax that Hopper plays on the soldiers?
- How does this hoax disrupt the soldiers and what they are doing?
- What do you think would happen to Hopper if he were caught?

### **Chapter 13**



Why are the boys clearing this “little piece of ground?” What do you think it means to them?

**Discuss** Hopper’s brother’s arrest (p106)– revisit question ‘Why does Hopper pretend to plant the bomb?’ Does the story of his brother shed any light on his actions?



Imagine you are Hopper. **Write** a letter to your brother in prison. What news would you tell him about your new friends, Karim & Joni. What news would you have of the family?

What wouldn’t you write in this letter? Why?

### **Chapter 14**

**Compare** Hopper at home: what does Karim think has changed about him? Why is that?



**Discuss** the key to the house in Ramle (p111).

Why do Hopper’s family keep the key? Is it symbolic? Is it a reminder? Do they think they will ever get to use it or go back? What does a key symbolize?

What purpose does it have if you can’t use it?

## Chapter 15



### ***The school building & playground***

*Note the blinds pulled permanently down over the windows to protect students from gunfire & rockets. Classes of 55 taught for half day sessions only.*

*It's the only playground in the camp and only accessible outside school hours by permission.*

**Compare** What is different about the description of Karim's school & your school (corporal punishment, ½ day shifts, damage, disruption)? What kinds of emergencies happen at your school (fire drills)? Why is Hopper particularly worried?

## Chapter 16

Why do you think the cats become important to the boys?



**Discuss** the transformation from Karim's hopelessness (p124) to his jubilation (p127). What has changed?

Extension: Does claiming a piece of land and putting a flag on it make it yours (p126-127)?

## Chapters 17 & 18

*Photo: Children playing in the street in Old City, Jerusalem*

Do children play out in the street/round the flats near you? What do they play?  
Similarities? Differences?



**Karim's dream playground.**

**Compare** to the 'little piece of ground'. What is the reality gap? How have Karim, Hopper & Joni tried to bring some of their dream to life there?

### Discuss

- Karim gets Lineman back in this chapter. Why is this computer game so important to him? Why are computer games so important to young people in the UK? How many of you play out in the street or park unsupervised? What risks are involved in playing computer games? What risks are there in playing out? Who is worried – parents or children?

- Jamal's Stone-slinging: is it a game or is it real? What are the risks?

Was Jamal brave or stupid?

## **Chapter 19**

How does Karim feel at first about the new boys who come to Hopper's ground?

By the end of the chapter, Karim feels very proud. About what? Explain.

## **Chapters 22 & 23**

### **Compare and contrast**

Karim's situation to the curfew in the beginning of the book: what is the same? What is different? What is the same? Is it worse? Is it a haven or a prison?

### **Discuss**

Karim's list and the thoughts he has about it now: what does he really want (p174)?

What is 'endurance'?

What is 'betrayal'? (Aziza the Cat)

## **Chapter 24**

- What happens to Karim when he makes a run for it?
- Who rescues Karim?

**Discuss** Heroism; Courage; Cowardice; Fear

**Individually** Who/What makes a hero? Why? Think of 3 reasons to justify your choice.

## **Chapters 25, 26 & 27**

- How do you think Jamal and Karim's relationship will change after these events?

**Discuss** “That’s what refugees always say”; link back to Hopper’s family and the house in Ramle. Will the Boutros family ever return? Will they keep their keys?

## Chapter 28



**Write** 2 lists: 10 reasons to go & 10 reasons to stay

- ❖ Would you stay or would you go?
  
- Why does Karim feel that Joni’s family is running away?

## After Reading



Do you think this story has a happy ending? A sad ending? Some of both? Explain.

## Discuss

Think about the author’s perspective in this story. What do you think is the author’s opinion of events in the story? Does the author seem to have biases that affect the way the story is told?