

Myth and Mind Level 3 (W238433)

Damascus Nights, Rafik Schami

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“O king, O creator of all good things in Damascus! I spent the whole day wandering about the city. When I asked passersby where I could find the prison, they simply laughed at me. What need for prisons in paradise? Children heard the word hunger for the first time from my lips. ... Everything works as if guided by the hands of angels.” —Musa the Barber, Chapter 9

Synopsis:

Salim the coachman tells enchanting tales as a way of protecting himself from bandits. But suddenly he is struck dumb, and his gift seems lost. Just as Scheherazade told tales to save her life, Salim's friends agree to give Salim the gift of a story in an attempt to save his voice. Set in mid 20th century

Damascus, the novel intertwines the real lives of these storytellers with tales from a distant past. Part fable, part fairy tale, part political polemic, these stories within a story asks readers to suspend disbelief while simultaneously confronting political tyranny, requires the reader to examine personal faith and mythology. An episodic and engaging read recently back in print on account of political turmoil in the Middle East.

Assignment:

As you read Schami's tale, pay careful attention to the conflicts faced by Salim and his friends. How does Salim's story inspire his friends to share their stories? What are the trials they face? We will begin our course with a discussion of how these characters confront their problems—social, political, personal—and how they attempt to overcome adversity.

