

Battleground for the Future: Children's Literature and the Syrian Crisis

Why would the major factions in one of the most brutal military conflicts in modern history suddenly develop interest in children's literature? Why would they engage children's literature with a kind of urgency akin to the acquisition of arms and ammunition *during a war*? These questions might sound hypothetical, yet that is exactly what happened during the recent Syrian conflict, which later became the precursor to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

As each group tried to craft its vision for the country, a major ideological battle was taking place. Children's books became a battleground for a fight that would determine the nation's future, and groups with clashing belief systems engaged in ongoing animosity. In these dark times, the profound impact of children's book remained visible.

Whether published by Assad's authoritarian regime, the rebels' secular leadership, or ISIS's infamous Diwan of Education, children's books became a weapon of choice used in the conflict. Fighting factions seemed to recognize that while access to ammunition might help score a temporary win, it was access to the mind that could secure victory. Specifically, it was access to the minds of Syria's young generation, the one that would truly determine the nation's future. And it is no wonder the youth hold the keys in a country where an astounding 51% of the population is under the age of 24.

This paper explores how different factions made use of children's literature during the Syrian conflict and to what end. Consequently, it seeks to examine the profound impact of the genre and what its use under such settings tells us about the unique power of children's literature.