

Creating Persona Doll stories to support women and girls in an Early Childhood Centre in Palestine

In the summer of 2018, a college lecturer in Early Childhood Studies, advocate for Persona Dolls and the rights of Palestinian children, took several Persona Dolls to the Al Tafawk Learning Center in the Jenin refugee camp in Palestine and trained the staff in how to use them. The Center was set up to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for children from the refugee camp. Mona Jalamnh, who started the Center, asked for help in creating stories for the dolls. Mona was keen to use dolls to challenge conservative attitudes towards girls & women.



Our consultants Robb and Meeta Johnson felt that it was really important that the stories needed to be authentic and reflect the lived realities of Palestinians. As it happens, a colleague of Robb's, who he knew through the NUT, Julia Simpkins, had organised a visit of Palestinian teenage girls to Bolton in Lancashire. Robb asked her if any of the girls would help to create stories for Al Tafawk, and she put him in contact with Yumna & Rahaf in Nablus. Communicating by Messenger, they created personas with convincing background details & suggested situations that their characters would be

likely to experiences. Robb wrote them up as Persona Doll stories. This is one of the favourite stories, created by one of the girls about a doll they called Hureya.

Photo: Mona and children at the Al Tafawk Center, Jenin Refugee camp

THE STORY OF HUREYA: *Hureya visits the children in the Al Tafawk Center, Jenin*

Hureya's first visit to Jenin

Hureya is very happy to see the children of Al Tafawk. She is very excited to be in Jenin. She will say she came on a bus, it was a long journey, it took an hour & a half, but Hureya sat by the window & there was lots to see. Hureya says her name means "freedom" so perhaps that is why she likes adventures, and new places and meeting new people.

Possible questions to ask the children:

Do any of the children have names that mean anything?

Do any of the children like going on the bus?

On her first visit, Hureya just wants to hear what the children in Al Tafawk like to do – what games they play etc - she will also like doing all the adventurous things they do too. She will keep forgetting to say much about herself because she is so interested in the children of Al Tafawk, asking them questions such as "What's your name?" "What do you like to do?"



Hureya with the children at the Al Tafawk Center

Hureya's second visit

The teacher will point out that Hureya didn't tell the class much about herself. Hureya will now tell her story.

She lives with her mum Reem in a normal small house in a camp in Nablus. Hureya has never seen her dad Tarek. When Reem was going to have her baby, Tarek fought with the Israeli soldiers. Occupation soldiers enter the camp where Hureya's

family lives once a week. One week, just before Hureya was born the soldiers broke into their house. Tarek was trying to protect Reem from being pushed around by the soldiers. They arrested him & took him away.

So when Hureya was born 3 weeks later, Reem had to look after her all on her own. She had to feed her, change her, rock her to sleep, take her to be vaccinated all on her own. But Hureya says her mum did a good job of looking after her, and her mum's love & strength helped Hureya to grow up to be a self-confident person who likes adventures & making friends. Hureya would like to hear about the mums of the children in Al Tafawk – are they strong & loving like Reem?

Her third visit

Hureya has some news about something that happened in the week to tell the children. Maybe they could guess what it is?

Hureya's story is that when the Occupation soldiers came last week, they broke into Reem's house & said they were searching it because it was the house of Tarek, who was in prison for fighting with the soldiers. That was the only reason they gave. They turned everything upside down, threw things about. Reem & Hureya watched them. Hureya says she was wondering what the soldiers had been like when they were children. All children want to do is play together, says Hureya. What happens to them as they grow up to turn them into soldiers that destroy homes? When the soldiers left, Hureya & her Mum started to try to tidy everything up & mend what had been broken.

The next day, something wonderful happened. There was a knock at the door, & it was her grandparents. Tarek's parents live a very long way away, & Hureya doesn't see them very often. They brought Hureya two very special presents. Some delicious chocolate, & a photograph of her father when he was a little boy. In the photograph Tarek is smiling. "Look," said her grandmother, "your big smile is the same as his."

Her fourth visit

Hureya says that luckily the soldiers left their house alone last week. She wants to know if any of the children have got any important news that they would like to share.

This is the visit where Hureya has a problem that the children in Jenin can help her to solve.

Hureya likes adventures, she likes to be free to do what she wants to do, & to think what she wants to think. She loves to move – she likes to run as fast as she can, she likes to skip & jump & climb & dance... do the children in Al Tafawk like to do these

things? Do they like to run & run & run as fast as they can? Who likes to skip? To jump? To climb? To dance?

But best of all she likes to ride a bike. Bikes are great, she says, they are like buses with only two wheels, and best of all, you can ride them to wherever you want to go, & they go even faster than when you run as fast as you can.

But there is a problem. Some of her friends say that girls cannot ride bikes. There are some big boys in Nablus who try to push her off a bike every time they see her riding one. What do the children in Al Tafawk think?

What can she do about the big boys that try to push her off a bike when she is riding?

Hureya's fifth visit

What Hureya says on this visit depends on what happens in the 4th visit, what suggestions the children of Al Tafawk make.

To be continued!

