



Inquire to Learn!

There are many ways in which *The Fortune in Damascus/Spotlight on Syria* can be used as a base for Inquiry Learning. This is just one suggestion.

Session 1

Using the Big Book, share-read *The Fortune in Damascus*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of unemployment and financial stress, babies and family life, opportunities, and using money/resources wisely.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion

Unemployment and Financial Stress: *How do people earn money? What do people need money for? Where do people get money from if they can't find a job?* Discuss that most adults work in jobs to earn money and that everyone needs money to pay for housing, food, clothing, and other expenses. Explain that in New Zealand and Australia we have a social welfare system that provides people with the basic costs of living if they are unable to work, but that this doesn't exist in all countries or during all time periods. Discuss that in times or places without a social welfare system, people have to turn to their family and friends for support when needed.

Babies and Family Life: *What can you tell me about having a new baby in the house?* Discuss that having a new baby in the house can add financial pressure to the household and priorities may need to be rearranged to make sure that the baby and mother have everything they need.

Opportunities: *What are opportunities? Do we make our own opportunities or do they come*

to us through luck or chance? Discuss that an opportunity is a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something. Explain to the students that some opportunities come to us by chance whereas other opportunities we create through hard work and good choices. Brainstorm examples of opportunities and divide them into those that have happened by chance and those that have been created through application.

Using Money/Resources Wisely: *What is meant by the proverb: "waste not, want not"?* Discuss that the proverb means that if you do not waste or use too much of something now, you will have some left later when you need it. Discuss that individuals and families need to choose and plan how best to use the resources they have. Brainstorm examples of using money and other resources wisely.

Text and Illustration Based Inquiry Questions

Cover: Look at the cover and read the title. *What is a fortune?* Discuss that the word *fortune* has more than one meaning. It can refer to chance or luck; or it can mean a large amount of money. Explain that Damascus is a very old city in Syria. *What do you notice about the couple?* (The woman is highly pregnant and looks unhappy. The man looks hot and stressed and is carrying their belongings, which look old and damaged. They look like they have a long way to walk.) *Do you think that this story is set in the past or in the present?* (It is set in the past.)

The Fortune in Damascus/Spotlight on Syria

Teacher's Notes continued

Title Page: Look at the illustration of the pot of gold coins and ask the students to predict what will happen in the story.

P. 2: Revisit the opening paragraph and look at the illustration. Ask, *How has the illustrator shown us that Tarek and Bana are very poor?* (The walls and floor of their house are cracked, they have very few possessions and those that they have are damaged, they have no food in their bowls.) Brainstorm things that Tarek might be saying to Bana e.g. "I am sorry, Bana, but I cannot find work. I have no money for food." Discuss that in this time and place it was usual for only men to go out and work. Ask, *How do you think Bana is feeling?* (worried, hungry, disappointed)

PP. 4–5: Revisit the opening sentence: *One day Tarek saw a camel caravan.* Explain to the students that in this context the word *caravan* refers to a group of people, especially traders, travelling together across a desert. Share with the students that travelling across a desert is very dangerous and that in the past people used to travel together for safety and companionship. People have used camels for carrying loads across deserts for thousands of years as camels can go for a long time without food or water. For this reason, camels have been called "ships of the desert". Revisit the sentence: *He felt sorry for the poor man.* and note the word *poor*. Explain that the word is used in this sentence as an adjective to describe both a person who is lacking in money and belongings and an unfortunate person who is worthy of pity. Revisit the final paragraph and discuss that cities often contain more opportunities than the countryside and that both in the past and today people move to big cities to find work or other new opportunities.

PP. 6–7: Review the text and note that Tarek and Bana have conflicting concerns that are both valid. Invite the children to engage in the story and share their opinions by voting on who thinks that Tarek is right that they should seize the opportunity and leave the next day for Damascus and who thinks that Bana is right that it is too dangerous to go on a long journey while she is highly pregnant.

PP. 8–9: Review the text and illustration and note that Tarek got his way. Point out that as Tarek and Bana are poor they have been travelling on foot. Ensure that the students know that a merchant is a person who buys and sells goods. Ask, *Do you think Tarek is trying to trick the merchant out of money or simply delay the payment date so he has time to find a job?* Ask, *Does Bana look very happy? Do you think she approves of what Tarek is doing? Why/why not?*

PP. 10–11: Review the text and illustration and point out that Tarek and Bana have received good fortune. Ask, *How are Tarek and Bana feeling now?* (happy, relieved, fortunate)

PP. 12–13: Review the first paragraph and reinforce that Tarek is happy that he has a child but stressed due to his responsibility to provide for his family. Introduce the word *breadwinner* and invite definitions from the class. If needed, define a breadwinner as a person who earns the money that his/her family needs to survive. Review the rest of the text and note that Tarek is being resourceful and using every opportunity that presents itself.

PP. 14–15: Review the first paragraph and point out that Tarek and Bana have, once again, been very fortunate. Ask, *Where do you think the money came from? Do you think Tarek and Bana deserve the money? Why/why not?* Review the rest of the text and point out to the students that Tarek is planning on using the money wisely to buy things that they need. By buying a shop, he will be providing himself with the opportunity to keep on earning money in the future and to be self-employed, or in charge of his own fortune.

P. 16: Review the text and illustration and point out that it shows a future scene where the family is happy and secure in their business. Tarek and Bana did indeed find fortune in Damascus. Introduce the proverb: *Fortune favours the brave* and explain that it means that a successful person is often one who is willing to take risks. Share that the lesson in this folk tale is that people who encounter difficulties with courage can achieve great success.

The Fortune in Damascus/Spotlight on Syria

Teacher's Notes continued

Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Challenge the children to learn more about camels and write a report or an animal factfile on their findings.

Encourage the students to write their own folk tales about what might have happened to Tarek and Bana if they had not decided to seek their fortune in Damascus. Remind the students that the outcome may have been fortunate or unfortunate.

Invite the students to imagine that their family came into a fortune e.g. by winning Lotto. What would they spend the money on? How would they use their resources wisely.

Have a class discussion about needs and wants. Define a need as something you must have to survive, such as healthy food, water, and a home. Define a want as something that is nice to have but you can manage without it, such as ice cream or a new bike. Brainstorm a list of products and services e.g. chocolate, clothes, TV, skateboards, school bags, hair dryers, vegetables, beds, couches, devices, power, massages, and hair cuts and divide them into needs and wants.

Share-read other folk tales from Syria, such as *The King and His Three Daughters*, *The Bewitched Camel*, *The Three Spinners*.

Invite the students to build model houses from boxes, craft sticks, modelling clay, recycled bottles, paper mache, or other materials.

Session 2

Using the Big Book, share-read *Spotlight on Syria*, stopping at natural points for discussion. Draw on the students' prior knowledge of Syria and Syrian culture, capital cities, deserts, camping, historic buildings, Middle Eastern foods, and war.

Possible Starter Questions for Discussion and Inquiry

Syrian (Arabic) Greeting: *Does anyone know how to greet someone in Arabic? It is as-salamu alaykum.*

Cover and Contents Page: Look at the cover of *Spotlight on Syria* and ask, *What is the woman doing?* (hanging washing on the line) Point out the richly patterned fabric on the cover and the image of a textile shop on the Contents page and tell the students that Syria has been famous for its textiles for thousands of years. Point out the beehive-shaped buildings on the cover and ask, *What do you think these are?* Tell the students that parts of Syria are well known for these "beehive" houses made from mud, dirt, straw, and stones. The unusual houses have been built for thousands of years and are still in use today. They are cool and dark, which is useful in Syria's very hot climate.

Location of Syria/Geography: Look at the map on P. 1 of *Spotlight on Syria* and note the location of Syria in relation to Australia and New Zealand. Tell the students that Syria is located in the Northern Hemisphere. Share with the students that Syria contains both mountain ranges and a large area of desert. The desert is called the Syrian Desert and covers parts of Syria and the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Explain that a desert is a dry, barren area of land where there is very little rainfall. Plants and animals that live in the desert have adapted to survive the harsh conditions. Share with the students that summers in Syria are long, hot, and mostly dry and winters are mild and wet. If any of the children come from Syria or have visited it, invite them to share their experiences if appropriate.

Capital Cities: Ask, *What is the capital of Syria?* then turn to P. 1 of *Spotlight on Syria* and note the location of Damascus on the map. Ask, *What is a capital?* Explain that a capital is the town or city where the government of a country is located. It is usually a large city, but in some countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, it is not the largest city.

The Fortune in Damascus/Spotlight on Syria

Teacher's Notes continued

Ask, *What is the capital of New Zealand? What is the capital of Australia?*

Reread PP. 2–3 of **Spotlight on Syria** and point out the text: *Damascus was once surrounded by walls.* Ask, *What do you think the walls were for?* Explain that in the past walls were built around many cities to provide defence. There were seven historical gates in the wall around Damascus, each dedicated to the sun, moon, or a planet. An eighth gate was added later. Share with the students that in recent times important historic buildings in the old city of Damascus have been badly damaged by war.

Ask, *If Damascus is on the edge of a desert, why would it be a good area for growing produce?* Tell the students that Damascus was built on the foothill of mountains which means that it gets more rainfall than some other parts of Syria. That fact and that traditionally the Barada River has provided a source of irrigation for a wide green belt is why Damascus is well known for its produce.

Syrian Culture: Reread PP. 4–5 of **Spotlight on Syria** and ask, *How are traditional Syrian houses different to traditional Western houses?* (They are built around a courtyard.) *What would be the advantages of this style of building?* (It would be easy to move from outside to inside, your outside area is private, your outside area is shaded, it would be easy to access water from your fountain.)

Nomadic Peoples: Reread PP. 6–7 of **Spotlight on Syria** and introduce the word *nomad*. Tell the students that a nomad is a member of a group that moves from place to place, usually in search of grazing for their animals, and has no permanent home. Traditionally Bedouin have led a nomadic life. Ask, *What would be the advantages of a nomadic lifestyle? What would be the disadvantages? Why do you think that some Bedouin tribes have adapted their traditional lifestyles?*

Syrian Food: Reread Fact 2 on P. 4 and P. 8 of **Spotlight on Syria** and say, *Food is very much for sharing in the Syrian culture. What are the similarities to how we eat in New Zealand and*

Australia? What are the differences? Who has tried Syrian food such as hummus and kebab meat?

Invite the students to share their knowledge and experience of shared meals.

Further Discussion and Inquiry Extension

Challenge the students to research and learn about animals of the Syrian Desert. What animals live in the Syrian Desert? How have they adapted to survive in the harsh desert environment?

Encourage the students to learn more about Damascus and the Silk Road? What was the Silk Road? Why was it important? What were some of the goods traded in Damascus in the past?

If appropriate, do a class study on the Syrian refugee crisis. Possible questions to consider could include: What is happening in Syria? Why are Syrians leaving their homes? What is a refugee? Where do Syrian refugees go? How do the governments of New Zealand and/or Australia help refugees? Is there anything we can do to help?

Invite members of the local Syrian community into the class to share aspects of their culture with the students.

Challenge the students to see how many of the world's capitals they can learn and locate on a map. This could be run as a fun class competition!

Using PP. 2–3 of **Spotlight on Syria** as a model, invite the students to make and present a photo essay on their own capital city or another international capital city.