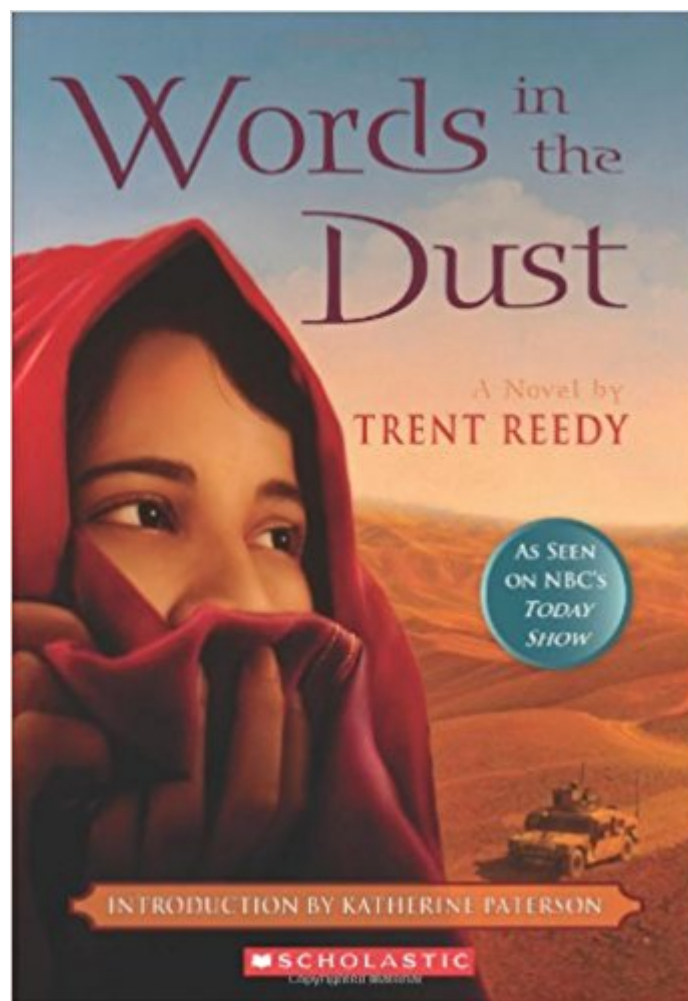


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# Words In The Dust



## Synopsis

Winner of the Christopher Medal and a "heart-wrenching" Al Roker's Book Club selection on the Today Show. Zulaikha hopes. She hopes for peace, now that the Taliban have been driven from Afghanistan; a good relationship with her hard stepmother; and one day even to go to school, or to have her cleft palate fixed. Zulaikha knows all will be provided for her--"Inshallah," God willing. Then she meets Meena, who offers to teach her the Afghan poetry she taught her late mother. And the Americans come to her village, promising not just new opportunities and dangers, but surgery to fix her face. These changes could mean a whole new life for Zulaikha--but can she dare to hope they'll come true?

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 670 (What's this?)

Paperback: 272 pages

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ISBN-10: 0545261260

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Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.2 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 65 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #39,795 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in [Books > Children's Books > Religions > Islam](#) #17 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Explore the World > Middle East](#) #298 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Girls & Women](#)

Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

## Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8-Zulaikha's life in Afghanistan is not easy. She is teased constantly for a facial deformity and although the Taliban is no longer in power, it has violently taken her mother from her, and the 13-year-old is left keeping house for a busy, traditional father and his bad-tempered wife. She is trapped by the confines of her culture as well as by her own fears, but things begin to change when she meets a mysterious woman who wants to work with her on her writing and teach her about poetry. When American soldiers roll into town and offer her the chance to fix her cleft palate,

Zulaikha allows herself to wish for a better and different future. Reedy was inspired by a girl he met during his tour of duty in Afghanistan, and Zulaikha's character is based loosely on her experiences. Infused with poetry, and wrought with hardship, the story gives a bleak, but ultimately hopeful, portrayal of girlhood in Afghanistan. It is full of hard truths, painful lessons, beautiful human interaction, and the promise of possibility. -Sharon Senser McKellar, Oakland Public Library, CA (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Born with a cleft lip, Zulaikha struggles to feel worth in a society that values women by their marriage prospects: "What bride-price would Baba get for me? Maybe one Afghani?" Then, by chance, Zulaikha meets Meena, a former professor, who begins to teach her to read and write just as American soldiers arrive, bringing the chance for both more education and surgery to correct Zulaikha's birth defect. Reedy based his debut on real people and places he encountered while serving with the National Guard in Afghanistan, and the extensive detail about Afghani customs gives the story the feel of a docu-novel while also creating a vivid sense of place and memorable characters. Reedy skillfully avoids tidy resolutions: the grim fate of Zulaikha's sister, who is married to a much older man, offers a heartbreaking counterpoint to Zulaikha's exciting new possibilities. A glossary of Dari phrases, an extensive author's note, suggested-reading lists, and an introduction by Katherine Paterson complete this deeply moving view of a young girl caught between opportunity and tradition in contemporary Afghanistan. Grades 5-8. --Gillian Engberg --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I love reading books about other cultures, other places, and other times. But sometimes these stories can be really gut-wrenching. In this book, the main character, Zulaikha, is an Afghani with a cleft palate. Not only does this make eating, smiling, and talking difficult, but she is treated poorly by both neighborhood boys and her stepmother. It seems that her chances of making a good marriage are about nonexistent. When Zulaikha meets an old acquaintance of her mother, her desire of learning to read starts to bloom. Then the opportunity to have her mouth fixed arises and learning to read becomes secondary. At the same time, Zulaikha's sister, Zeynab, is preparing for marriage. Just when it seems all will work out, a devastating blow falls on Zulaikha, and she has to decide what she wants the most. I won't say any more than that because I don't want to give away the whole plot, just know that Zulaikha must make some hard choices. The book is very well presented and written. I was pleased at how well Reedy presents the hopes and desires of a girl from another

culture. Some of the events in the story are difficult to read about coming as I do from a culture where men and women are valued more equally, but I cheered for Zulaikha in her efforts to find a balance between her family and her growing desires for an education. There were parts where I also grieved with Zulaikha when disappointments and heartache occurred. For me, when I connect with a character the way I did with Zulaikha to the point of crying, it's a sign that the author did what he/she set out to do. Highly recommended, but be sure to keep tissues handy. Note: some of the things mentioned in the book make it more appropriate for the more mature middle grade reader. The book could also very easily be used with high school as well.

In his book "Words in the Dust," author Trent Reedy brings the distant land of Afghanistan to life through the story of a young teenage girl afflicted with the disfigurement a cleft lip, which creates an obstacle to finding a husband. Her struggles with coming of age while being tormented by her peers makes her real while drawing the reader into her culture and religion. Her story takes place during the American occupation in 2005 and depicts American soldiers as having good intentions while not always knowing local customs. This story educated me about Afghan culture, the struggle of women under Taliban rule and traditional Islam, with a few surprising twists along the way. I would recommend this book for young adults and older. I couldn't put it down!

My son and I read this book together. Not only was it a chance to explore a new culture and gain a greater understanding of the plight of the Afghani people, but it was an excellent means for us to discuss the huge differences that exist for children in different parts of our global community. This book held great meaning to us, not only for the tender connection between the two sisters, but for opening our eyes to the burdens of females in war-torn Afghanistan. Bravo, Mr. Reedy, for bringing us a well-written and thought-provoking book!

Reedy research this book very well and created a realistic view point of what women of Arabic countries deal with everyday in their life. A must read for young people to learn about Arabic culture.

Terrific book

I was really surprised when I realized this was written by an American soldier. I think he did a great job presenting such a different perspective from his own experience. I am glad that it didn't shy away from some difficult/disturbing topics, but at the same time, it keeps me from recommending it

for younger kids. I would suggest that parents preview this first, to see if your child is ready.

The writing was pretty good, especially for this authors first attempt. Glad I bought it and would recommend it. The girl featured in book has a moving story and a harsh life exaggerated by her birth defect, but the author who turned to writing from soldiering has a compelling story as well. His inspiration was children's book "Bridge to Terabithia".

Having spent many years in Afghanistan with my family I can tell you that this book is a wonderful story of life there. I congratulate Mr. Trent Reedy to be able to deeply understand the culture and life there. His story is very touching and so true as far as human life is concerned. Especially women's life.

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