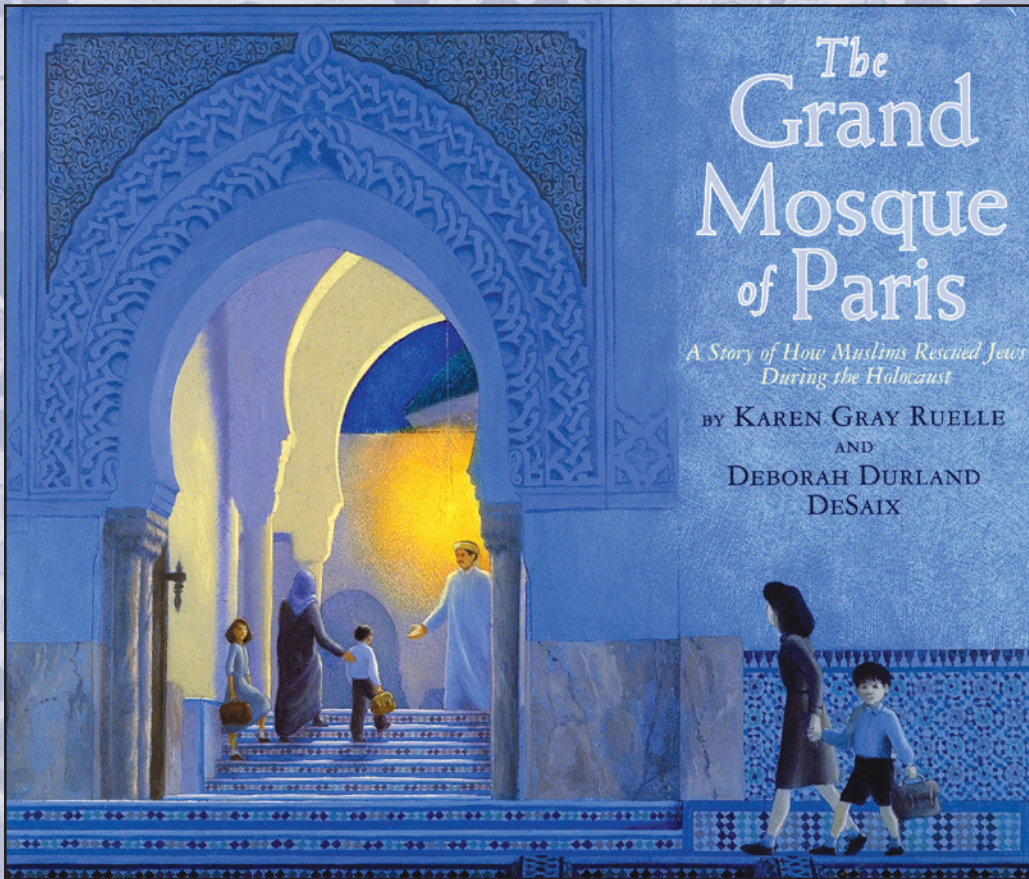


Holiday House Educators' Guide

An ALA Notable Children's Book
An Orbis Pictus Award Recommended Title

"This . . . seldom-told piece of history . . . will expand . . . interfaith relations."—*The Bulletin*



Themes

- *Anti-Semitism/Bigotry*
- *Courage*
- *Fear*
- *Survival*
- *Danger*
- *Hope*

Grades 3 up

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The Grand Mosque of Paris

A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust

written and illustrated by Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix

About the Book

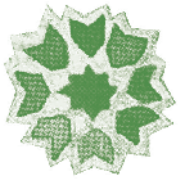
The Grand Mosque of Paris proved to be an ideal temporary hiding place for escaped World War II prisoners and for Jews of all ages, including children.

Paris had once been a safe haven for Jews who were trying to escape Nazi-occupied Germany, but in 1940 everything changed. The Nazis overtook the streets of Paris, and the city was no longer safe for Jews. Many Parisians were too terrified themselves to try and help their Jewish friends. Yet during that perilous time, many Jews found refuge in an unlikely place: the sprawling complex of the Grand Mosque of Paris. Behind its walls, the frightened Jews found an entire community, with gardens, apartments, a clinic, and a library. But even the mosque was under the watchful eyes of the Nazis, so it wasn't safe for displaced Jews to remain there very long. Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix tell the almost unknown story of this resistance and the people of the Grand Mosque and how their courage, faith, and devotion to justice saved the lives of so many.

Pre-Reading Activity

Divide the class into four groups and ask each group to pick one of the following topics to read about and summarize for the class: The Third Reich, Rescue and Resistance, The Holocaust, After the Holocaust.

Refer them to the Holocaust Encyclopedia on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/.



Thematic Connections Questions for Classroom Discussion

Anti-Semitism/Bigotry—Ask students to discuss the meaning of anti-Semitism. How is anti-Semitism a form of bigotry? Why did France seem like a safe haven for the Jews who fled Germany and Hitler's rule? Discuss the anti-Semitism that the Jews experienced in France after the Vichy government was formed.

Courage—Engage students in a conversation about the meaning of courage. Discuss the courage of Si Kaddour Benghabrit, the rector at the Grand Mosque. How did he instill courage in the Muslim community of Paris? Dr. Ahmed Somia was a hero to many Jews. Discuss his acts of courage. Why should all Jews that lived through World War II deserve a badge of courage?

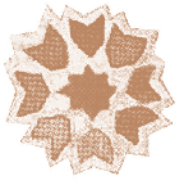
Fear—What is the relationship between fear and courage? Discuss how fear ruled the lives of the Jews who came to France to escape the Nazis. How did it take courage for the Jews to leave their homeland?

Explain how the illustration on page three conveys fear. Study the illustration on page four, and discuss the fear that the mother is experiencing. To whom is the mother speaking? Why is she shielding her little boy with her hand?

Survival—Ask students to explain why convents, schools, farms, and hospitals were good places to hide Jewish children. There was an entire community within the walls of the Grand Mosque. What did this community contribute to the survival of some Jews? Why did Albert Assouline and Yassa Rahal seek refuge in the Grand Mosque?

Danger—Even though Jews were welcomed at the Grand Mosque, they remained in danger. Nazi and Vichy officials could enter the mosque if they suspected Jews were hidden there. Discuss the measures that Si Benghabrit took to shield the Jews from the officials. Why was the women's section of the prayer room an especially good place for the Jews to escape danger?

Hope—How did the Grand Mosque become a symbol of hope for Jews? Explain how the tombstone on page 13 symbolizes hope for some Jews and fear for others. Discuss the symbolism of the open door in the illustration on page fifteen.



Curriculum Connections

Language Arts—Ask students to explore the Anne Frank House website and to find information about Holocaust Remembrance Day. Then have them write a tribute to Si Kaddour Benghabrit and Dr. Ahmed Somia that might be read on this day.

Dr. Ahmed Somia was part of a group that set up an underground network, which helped North African prisoners of war. His efforts might be compared to the conductors on the Underground Railroad in the 1800s in the United States. Read about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Then write a brief essay called “The Underground” that compares the movements by Dr. Somia in Paris during World War II and Harriet Tubman in the United States in the 1800s.

Social Studies—The Vichy government passed anti-Semitic laws during World War II. Have students research these laws and make a handbook that the Vichy government might have distributed to the Jews in France. The following website may be helpful: www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005429.

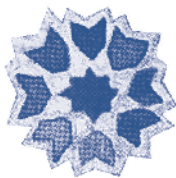
Have students research the Jewish and Muslim cultures. What do they have in common? What are their basic differences? Read the letter written by a Kabyle worker in Paris during World War II (p. 23). How does this letter represent a strong bond between Jews and Muslims? Instruct students to write a brief section for a social studies textbook that explains this bond.

Art Analysis—Illustration is considered nonverbal communication because the artist uses color, composition, line, and shape to convey emotion and extend the text. Ask students to examine closely the illustrations in the book. Compare the illustrations on pages three and thirty three. How do they symbolize a beginning and an end, fear and hope? Windows and doors are used throughout the book. What do they represent? Explain why the illustrator uses the color yellow for the sky and for the Seine (p. 31). Ask students to write a one-line caption for each illustration that best conveys the mood and the meaning of the story.



Vocabulary/Use of Language

There is a glossary in the back of the book to help readers with words specifically related to the content of the book. Ask students to jot down other unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context. Such words may include: *collaborators* (p. 5), *perilous* (p. 6), *oasis* (p. 6), *mirage* (p. 8), *authenticity* (p. 16), and *clandestine* (p. 34).



Reviews for The Grand Mosque of Paris

“This is a fascinating, little-known piece of history.”—*Booklist*

“Full of small details and thought-provoking episodes. . . . This is a seldom-told piece of history, and it will expand the picture both of humanitarian action during the Holocaust and interfaith relations.”—*The Bulletin*

“A must read for today’s multicultural curricula.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

From the Afterword to The Grand Mosque of Paris

“This is a little-known story that is shrouded in mystery. Writing about clandestine events that took place at a time of turmoil involving people who had an oral rather than a written tradition, and with many of the participants having now passed away, presents many difficulties. There is very little written about the brave acts of the Muslims of Paris during World War II, and almost nothing in the official archives. Because these activities were clandestine, the authorities would not have documented them anyway—unless they had failed. However, there are some stories that have been preserved, and we’ve tracked down as many of them as we could.”

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Web Links

La Grande Mosquée de Paris

www.mosquee-de-paris.org

The official site of the Grand Mosque of Paris (in French). To read the site in English, do a search for the Grand Mosque of Paris, then click “Translate this page.”

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/

The Holocaust Encyclopedia on this site contains a number of articles on Paris during World War II.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005429

Information on France and the Vichy government

About the Authors/Illustrators

Karen Gray Ruelle is a former librarian and now works full-time as an author and illustrator of children’s books. Her titles include the Harry and Emily easy readers as well as picture books and works of nonfiction. Karen lives in New York City.

Deborah Durland DeSaix is a former college professor who now devotes her time to painting, ceramics, and writing and illustrating children’s books. She lives in Asheville, North Carolina.

In addition to *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust*, Karen and Deborah have collaborated on *Hidden on the Mountain: Stories of Children Sheltered from the Nazis in Le Chambon* and *The Tree*.

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

