

# A Is For Arab, in New Brazilian Dictionary for Brazilian Children

Contributed by Débora Rubin  
Thursday, 15 June 2006

Brazilian children have just won an ABC to the Arab culture. In the book "ABC do Mundo Árabe", meaning "ABC of the Arab World" (by publishing house Edições SM), by Paulo Daniel Farah, it is possible to know, by every letter in the alphabet, new words, important characters in literature, historic explanations of cities like Baghdad and even the origin of delicacies enjoyed by Brazilians, like the kibbeh.

With beautiful illustrations by Alê Abreu, the book targets children between 9 and 13 years old and is a great instrument to be used in the classrooms.

In A, for Arab, the young reader gets to know that Arabs are all of those who speak the Arab language and, especially, consider themselves Arab. After this first, and extremely important, lesson, the reader moves on to the letter B, for Baghdad, and learns that this city, currently very much under discussion as it is the capital of Iraq, is one of the most important birthplaces of eastern culture.

There, in the year of 832, was inaugurated the House of Wisdom, where the ancient books were translated into Arabic. In C, the author shows the camel, one of the main means of transport in the desert. Amongst the Arabs, there is a legend that right after God created man, he created the camel and the date palm.

Thus, letter after letter, Farah show us little curiosities and important details of that people. A Keffia, for example, many children must have already seen on TV. But only few know that this is the name of the cloth worn on the head, especially by the Palestinians.

With the letter G, the children will get to know who was Gamal Abdel Nasser, an Arab leader, born in Egypt, nation of which he was the first president, who preached the union of the Arabs in a single country. In the letter L, Farah opted for Lebanon, in homage to the great quantity of immigrants who came to Brazil.

Farah also explains what is Islam, the Ramadan and the Suq, popular market where there is a little bit of everything to buy. The reader learns also why the carpets are so important for the Arabs and that the color green is one of their favorites - it was the favorite color of the prophet Mohammad.

Farah also introduces Naguib Mahfuz, contemporary writer, Egyptian, Literature Nobel Prize in 1998, author of the book "Midaq Alley", translated to Portuguese by Farah.

The book took two years to be done. As well as the numerous options of words, Farah, who is a specialist in the Arab universe, made the illustrator Alê Abreu also dive into the theme. There were eight months of work for him to do the first illustration.

Many drawings were made a few times over, until the exact spirit Farah wanted to give the book was grasped. The choice of words was also thought over in detail.

"I didn't want to restrict myself to one topic alone, I wanted it to have a bit of art, of geography, of literature, of linguistics, of history and even culinary," says the author.

## Teaching Material

The book is a project by Farah himself, who has translated for SM on Palestine and Afghanistan, as well as having written history chapters of collections by the publishing house. Now is preparing to do a similar work, but for youngsters in middle school.

To take the book "ABC of the Arab World" into the schools, Farah prepared a Guide for the Teacher with 10 activities to do in class. Amongst them, they may paint the flags of the 22 countries of the Arab League or even do artistic work on the book's illustrations. According to Farah, the idea is to bring the Brazilian child closer to the Arab world, losing the stereotypes that a lot of them have.

"The majority has that image that an Arab country is a great desert, very backward and with violent cities," he says. "With the book, many of them will find themselves. A Yasmin may discover the meaning of her name, and those that know they are descendants of Arabs will be able to understand their origins better."

Paulo Daniel Farah is a professor at the School of Philosophy, Languages and Human Sciences at the University of São

Paulo (USP), where he directs the Center of Arab Studies. He lived for six years between Egypt, Kuwait and Syria, where he took is postgraduate studies.

ABC do Mundo Árabe  
Edições SM  
25 reais (about US\$ 10.90)  
[www.edicoessm.com.br](http://www.edicoessm.com.br)

Anba - [www.anba.com.br](http://www.anba.com.br)