

ROSIE AND WARD

AND THE

BIG TENT

HIAS

# Rosie and Warda and the Big Tent

*(Recommended for Children in Grades 1-3)*

## About This Book

In 2017, the world faces a global refugee crisis that is now the largest in recorded history – with more than 65 million people displaced worldwide, of whom more than 22 million are refugees. Refugees are people who have fled their homelands in search of safety after experiencing violence and persecution because of who they are – because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. For the Jewish community, both our history and our sacred texts compel us to respond to the global refugee crisis. The Torah, Judaism's central and most holy text, commands us to welcome, love, and protect the stranger – obligations repeated more than any other teaching or commandment.

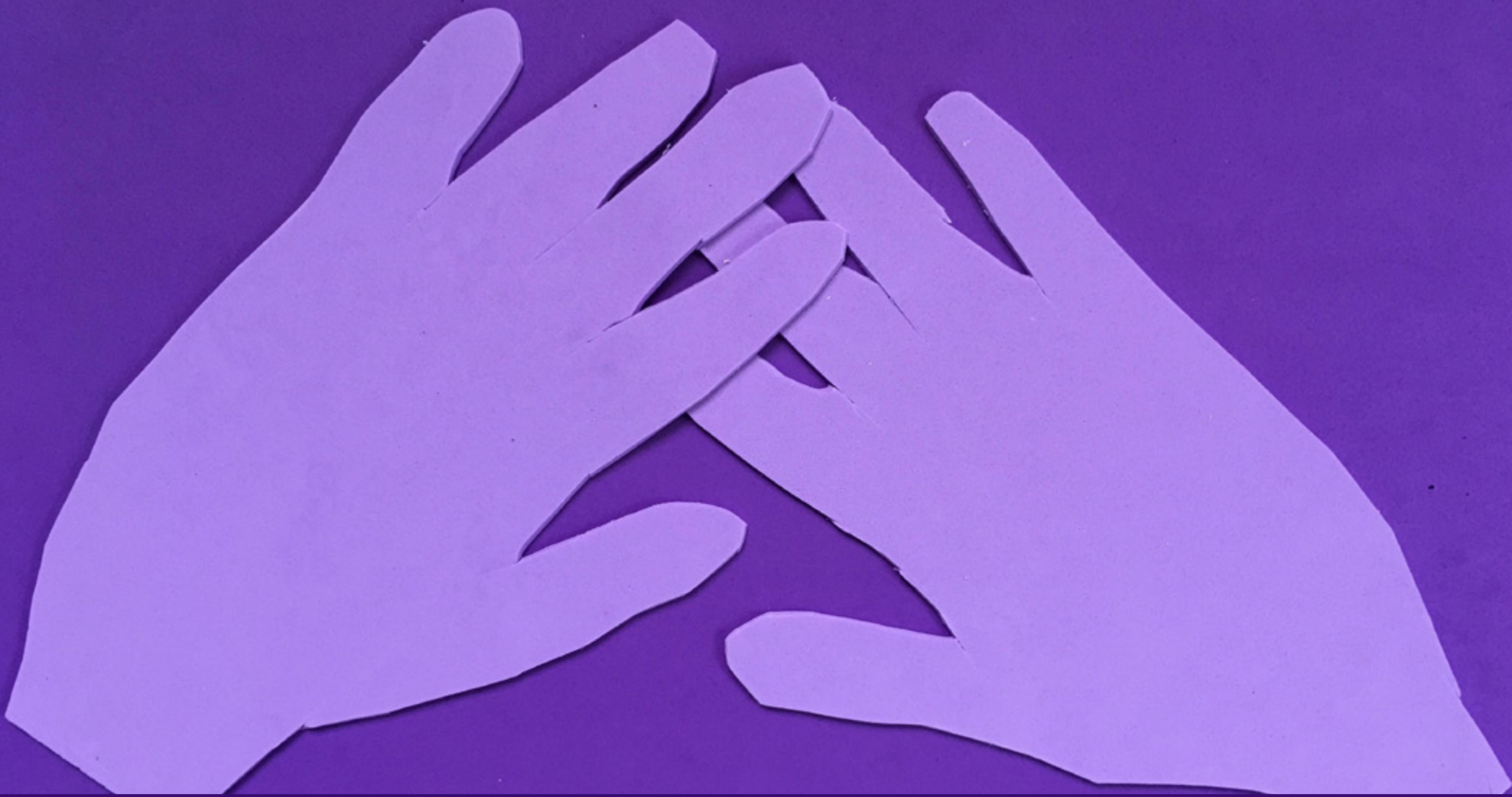
This book seeks to highlight three important issues related to refugees for young readers:

1. Refugees make unique and important contributions to American society.
2. While there may be cultural differences that are important to acknowledge and honor, we also all share much more than we may initially realize.
3. We have a responsibility to welcome refugees into our communities.

Read this book with a child in your life to welcome in Shabbat or at any time during the week. After you read the book, consider having a discussion using one of the questions below as a prompt.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Throughout the story, Warda shares many things she loves and misses about her home in Syria. What are some of those things? What do you love most about your home and the city or town where you live?
2. At the end of the book, Rosie's and Warda's moms realize that their daughters' names both mean "rose." What else do Rosie and Warda have in common? You can give examples from the book and from your own imagination! What are some ways that they are different?
3. Rosie and her family welcome Warda's family to America and thank them for Warda's brave actions on the field trip by inviting them to their home for Shabbat dinner. How could you welcome and be kind to someone who is new to your school or community?



**Rosie clapped her hands when the teacher finished speaking. This sounded like the best class trip ever!**

**The second grade at Pleasant Woods Elementary School would be going to the Ahwahnee Nature Forest to see the birds and flowers and trees there. They would learn new ways to take care of the planet earth. Best of all, they would eat melted marshmallows with chocolate after dinner and stay overnight in a tent.**





Rosie looked over to the desk next to her and noticed that her new friend, Warda, wasn't smiling and clapping. Rosie thought Warda looked like she was about to cry. Rosie had no idea why.

Rosie was right that Warda was upset. Warda's family had just arrived in the United States during the summer. Warda didn't understand why the children in her class seemed so happy to spend the night in a tent. Warda certainly didn't want to do that!

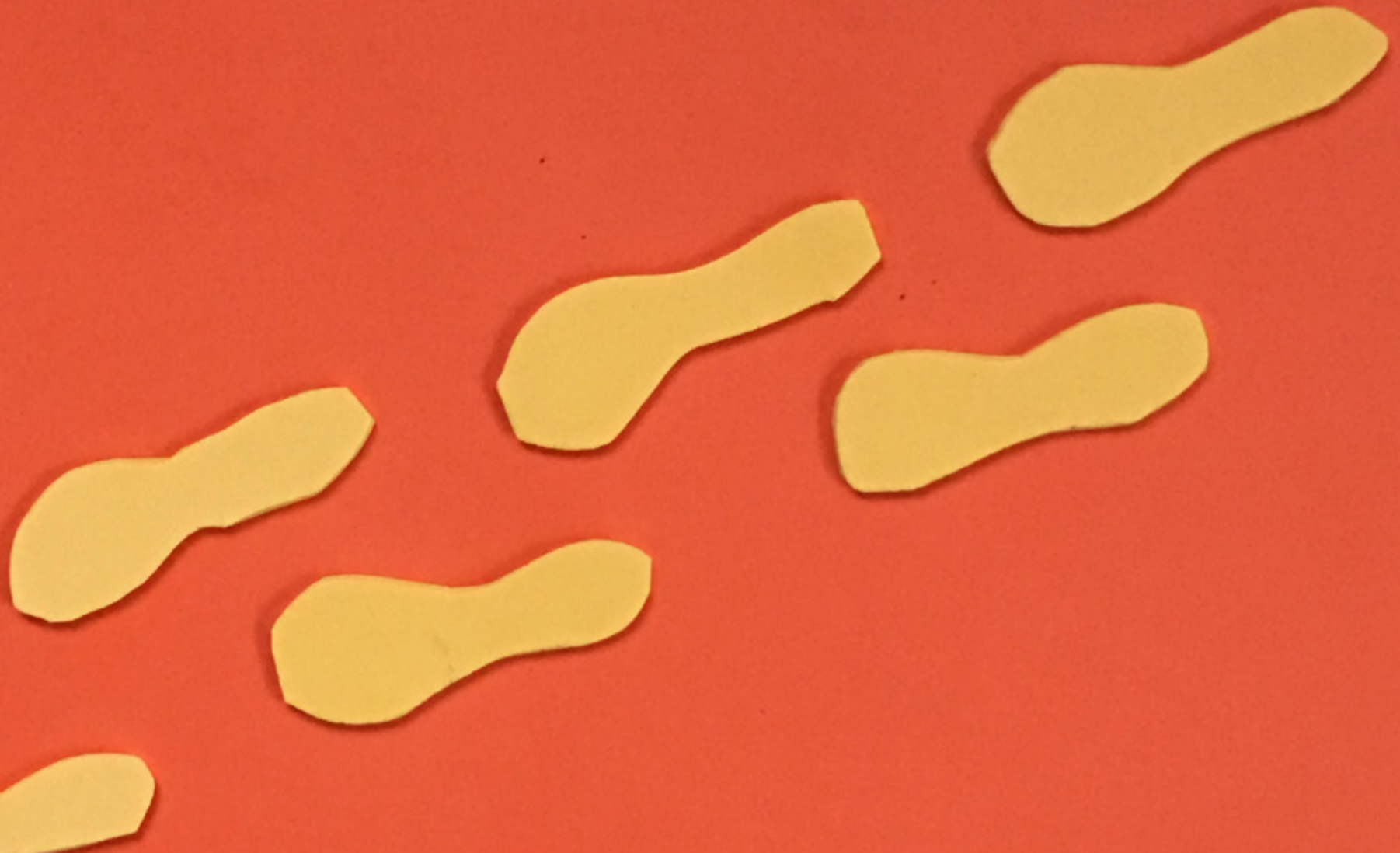
When Warda was very little, she lived with her family in a nice house with a garden in the backyard filled with flowers in Aleppo, Syria. But, when she was four years old, there were big problems, and people began fighting each other with guns and bombs. Her family had to leave their home in a hurry and leave all their things behind.

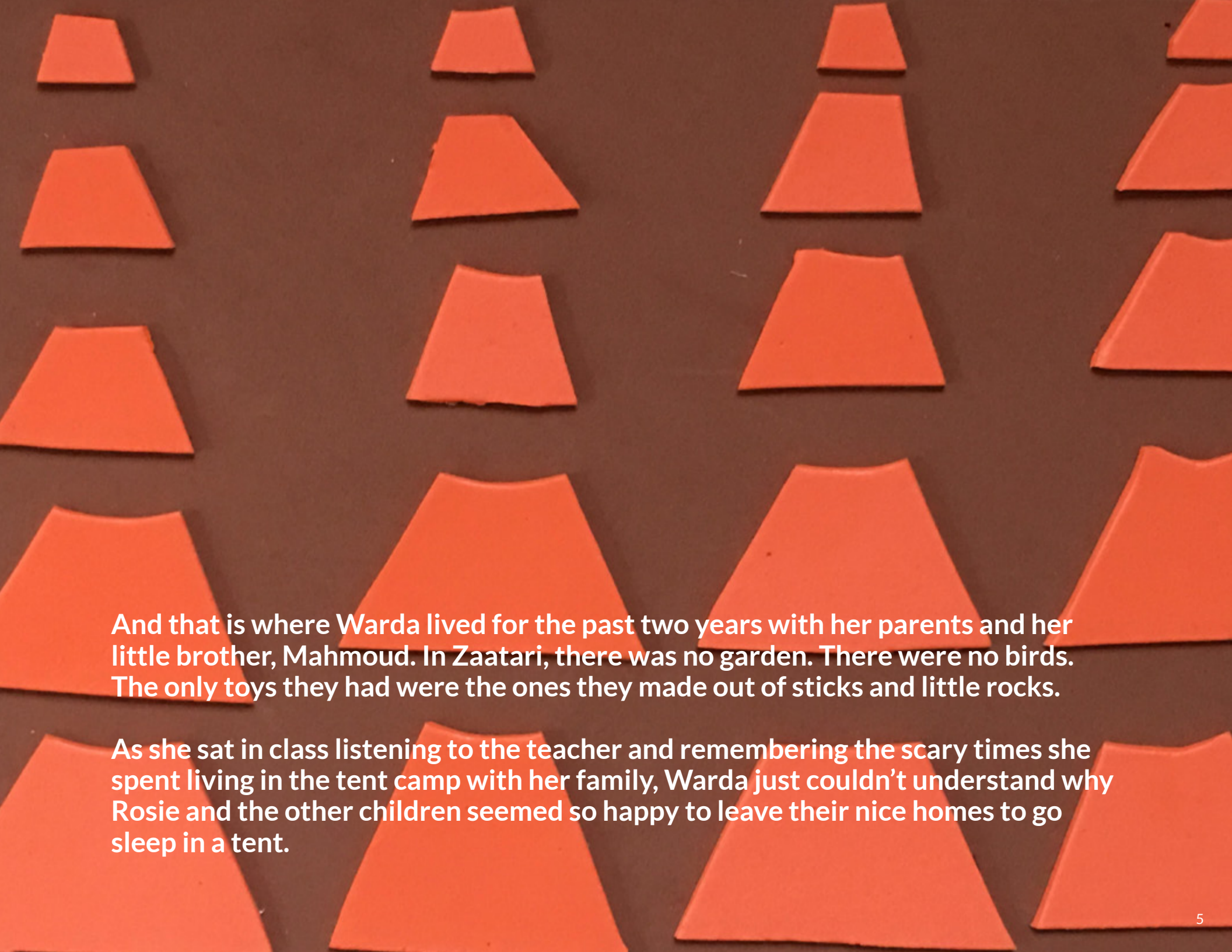




They walked and walked for many, many days, all the way from Syria to Jordan. For a long time, they were walking in a desert, where they saw only sand and nothing else. Then, suddenly, there were rows and rows of tents, with hundreds – maybe thousands – of tents.

These tents formed a kind of village, called the Zaatari Tent Camp.





And that is where Warda lived for the past two years with her parents and her little brother, Mahmoud. In Zaatari, there was no garden. There were no birds. The only toys they had were the ones they made out of sticks and little rocks.

As she sat in class listening to the teacher and remembering the scary times she spent living in the tent camp with her family, Warda just couldn't understand why Rosie and the other children seemed so happy to leave their nice homes to go sleep in a tent.







At home, Warda told her parents about this strange school trip.

“Do you want to go, Warda?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know if this is a good idea,” said her father.

All at once, Warda knew she really wanted to go on the trip with the other kids in the class.

“Please, Mama and Baba,” Warda said. “Please let me go. I want to learn what it is like to be an American, even if it means sleeping in a tent again.”

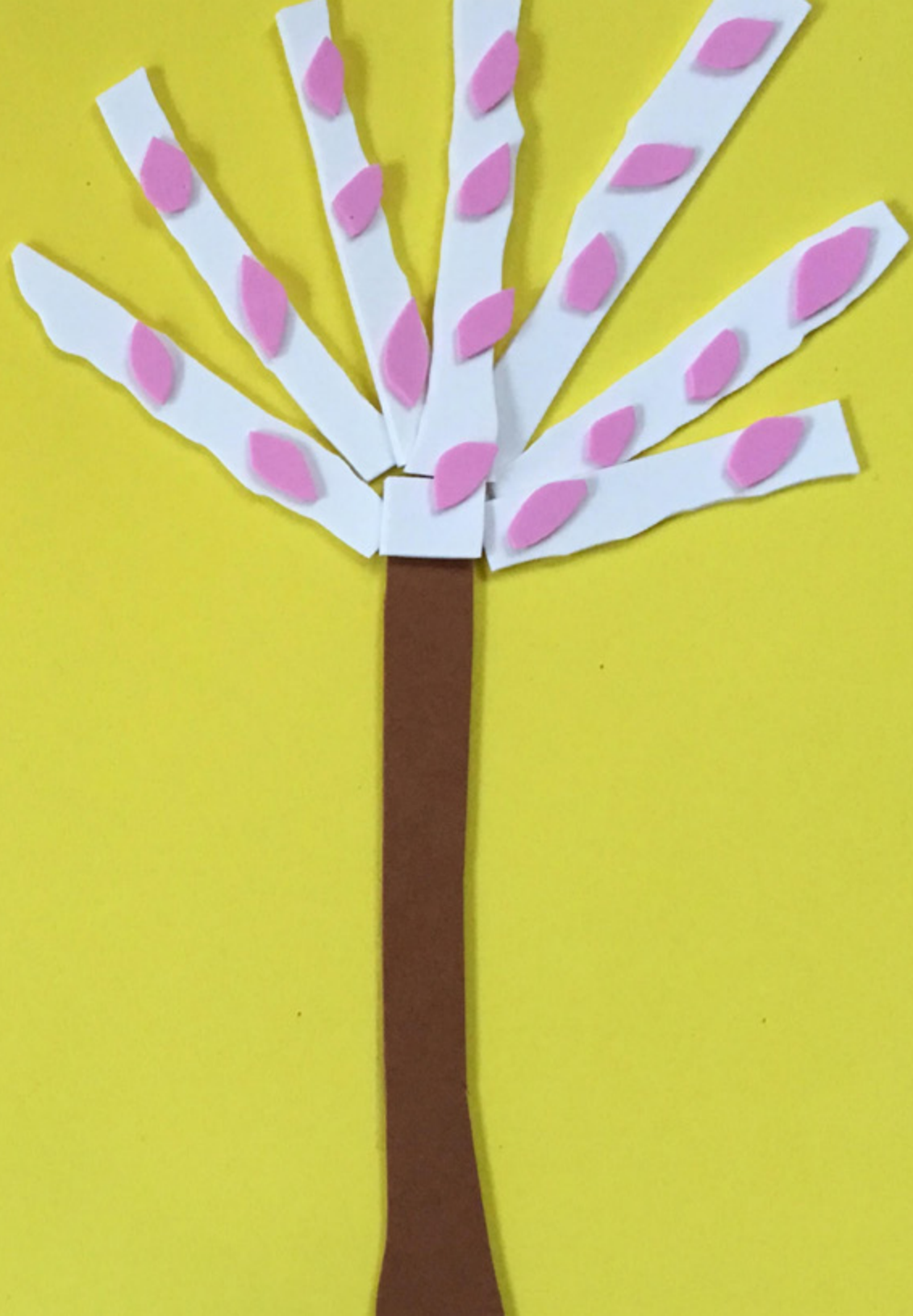
Warda’s parents talked quietly to each other. She heard Mama talking very fast and saw her nodding her head up and down. Finally, Baba smiled at Warda and said, “OK, Warda, we give you permission to go. You are a very smart girl and a very good girl. When you go, you must remember all we have taught you and make us proud of you.”

“Thank you, Baba. Thank you, Mama.” Even though the field trip was more than a week away, Warda already started thinking about the melted marshmallows and wondering what they would taste like.





The day of the field trip arrived, and the children excitedly boarded the big yellow bus to take them to the forest. When the children arrived at the park, the park ranger met them at the gates to begin their tour. He talked to them about the different trees and the shapes and colors of the leaves on each tree. He talked about how trees make oxygen, which we all breathe. The ranger talked about the maples, the oaks, the elms, and the beeches.





Warda remembered the beautiful orange trees and almond trees and date palms in her backyard in Aleppo. She smiled as she thought about how much fun she had with her brother Mahmoud picking the oranges and the dates and the almonds!

She could almost taste the delicious almond cookies and the date cookies that they would all bake together with Mama, using the fresh fruits they had just picked off the trees.



The park ranger taught the children how to be very quiet and listen for the sounds of the birds. They found robins and cardinals and woodpeckers. Warda thought about the birds she used to see near her home – the egrets, the plovers, the bulbul, and the sunbird. She missed hearing them chirp and counting the colors in their beautiful feathered coats. Suddenly, she felt a little sad.





That night, Rosie and Warda sat next to each other during dinner. They each took out the bag with the meal their parents had packed for them. Rosie's dad packed her peanut butter and jelly on whole wheat bread. Warda's mama sent her pita filled with hummus, with yogurt and some vegetables on the side.

The two girls glanced at each other's dinner.

"I've never tasted peanut butter," Warda said shyly to Rosie.

"What!? How can that be? You have to try it!" said Rosie. "Here, you can have half of my sandwich."

Warda was so excited. "And you can have some of my vegetables," she said, handing over a plastic container with yellow, orange, and pink shapes inside.





The peanut butter felt stuck in Warda's mouth.

"Hmmm," she struggled to say. "I need some water."

Her mouth was so sticky with peanut butter that Rosie could barely understand her. Both girls started laughing.

"Maybe the melted marshmallows with chocolate will be a better American treat," Rosie said giggling.

Now it was Rosie's turn. She looked at the vegetables and saw something so pretty and so pink.

"Oh, I'll try these" she said. "Pink is my favorite color, and these look so sweet." Before Warda could say anything, Rosie popped three small pieces in her mouth.

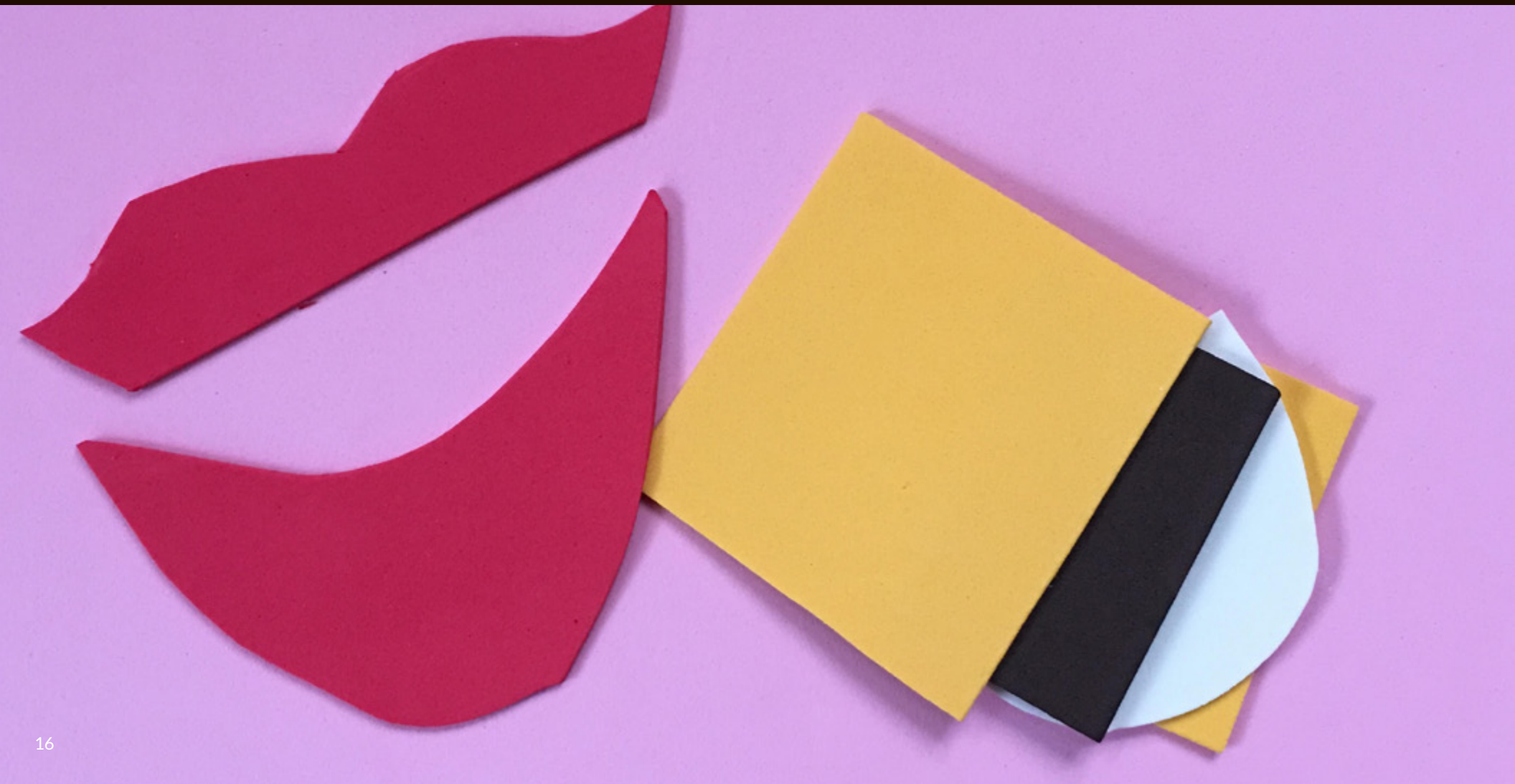
"Aaarggggh ... what is this?" Rosie asked in surprise. "I thought these pink things were sweet."

Now it was Warda's turn to giggle. "Those are the pickled turnips my Mama makes. They are very good, but they are not sweets! Here, you can have one of my pieces of baklava. *That's* sweet."

"Mmmm," said Rosie.

**After the children finished their dinners, Ms. Sussman, their teacher, showed them how to safely make a campfire, and they roasted marshmallows with chocolate, which they put between two graham crackers.**

**“Mmmm,” said Rosie and Warda together. “Mmmm, mmmm, good.”**







**While the fire was still glowing, Ms. Sussman took out her guitar and taught the children a song she said was her very favorite. It was called, “This Land is Your Land.”**

**The children all sang, “This land is your land, this land is my land . . . this land is made for you and me.” Some kids got up and began to dance in a circle, holding hands and twirling faster and faster.**

**As the stars started appearing in the dark night sky, the teacher told the class that it was time to go to sleep. It was very dark in the park. The wind started to blow. Rosie felt afraid.**

**“What if the tent falls down?” Rosie whispered to Warda.**

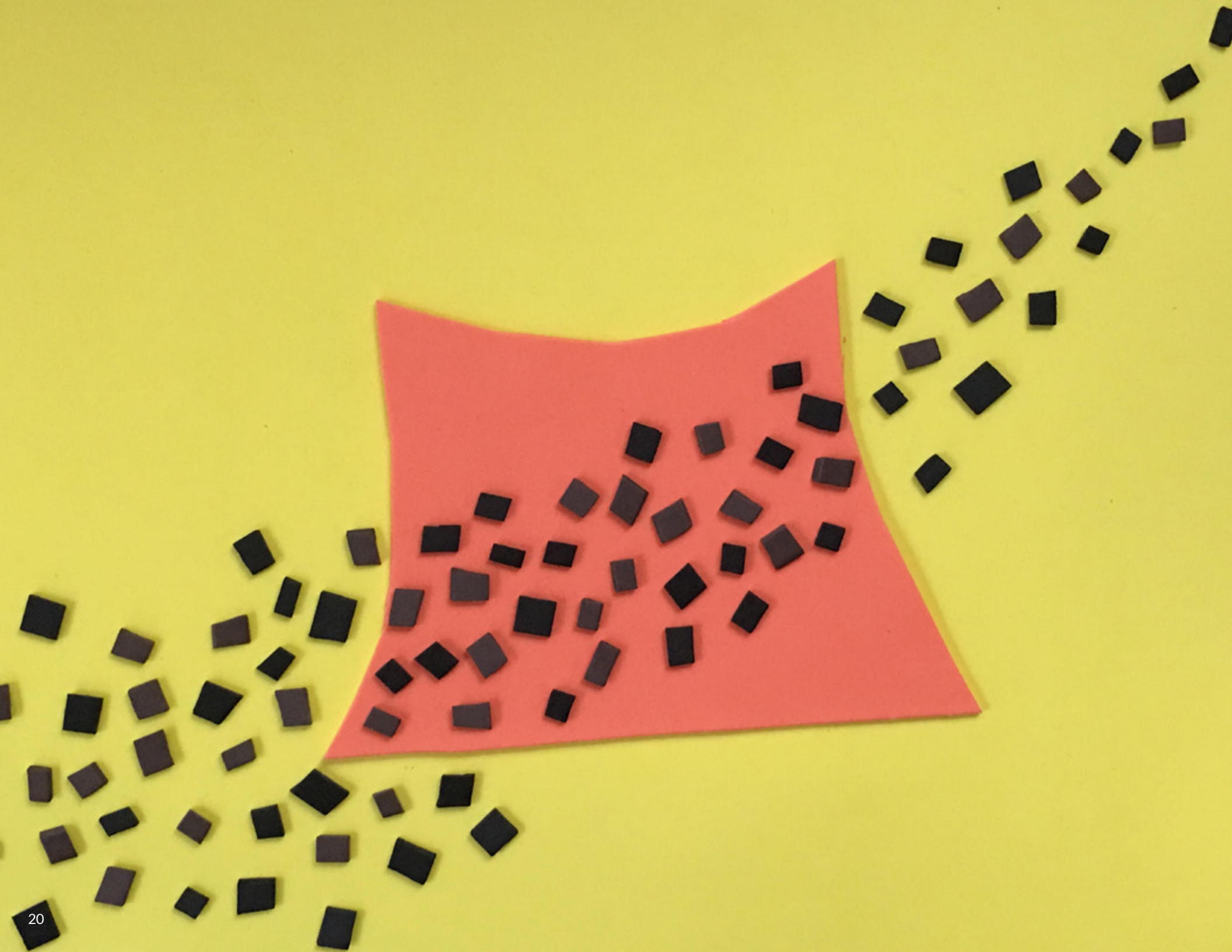
**Warda tried to sleep. The wind seemed like a song to her. “Don’t worry,” she told Rosie. “It’s just the wind singing a lullaby.” That was what her Mama and Baba told her in the tent camp in Jordan when the wind kept her awake at night.**

**But the wind got stronger. It was very loud. The tent they were sleeping in began to sway.**

**Rosie grew more afraid. She began to cry. “I want to go home,” she said. “I am so scared. What if the tent falls down on us?” Her tears fell faster and faster, making big wet splotches on her cheeks.**





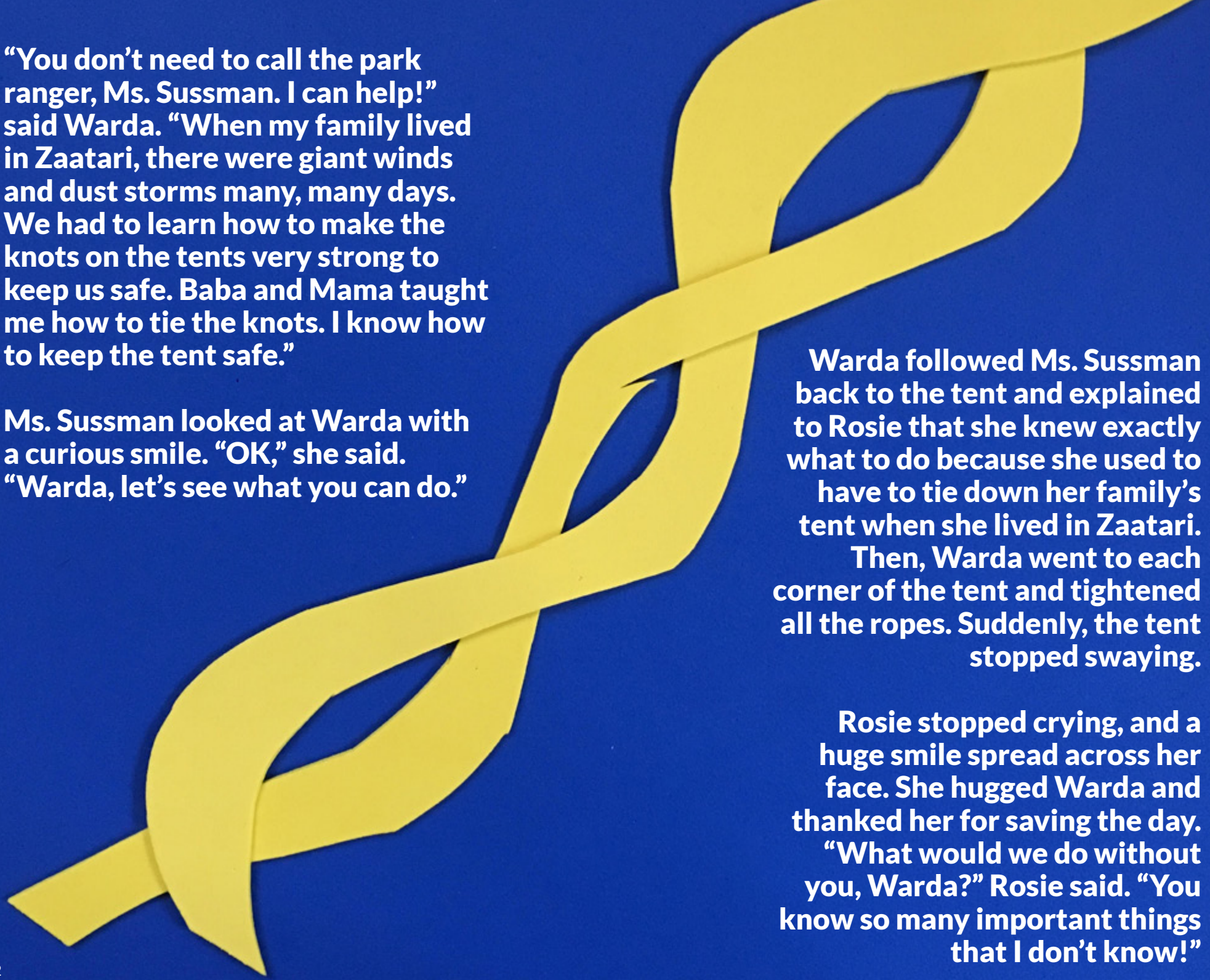


**Warda listened to her friend cry. She knew what it was like when a big storm came and scared everyone. When she lived in the tent camp, many nights the wind was so strong that there were sand storms in the tent camp. The wind blew the sand so hard that it filled the air in Warda's tent and she could barely see Mama and Baba, who were sleeping right next to her. This happened on many, many nights, and, each time it happened, Warda felt afraid. She really understood how Rosie felt.**

**Warda found Ms. Sussman and told her that Rosie was crying because she was worried their tent might blow over in the wind.**

**"Oh my!" said Ms. Sussman. "Thank you, Warda, for coming to me. You are a good friend. I will contact the park ranger to see what we should do."**





**“You don’t need to call the park ranger, Ms. Sussman. I can help!” said Warda. “When my family lived in Zaatari, there were giant winds and dust storms many, many days. We had to learn how to make the knots on the tents very strong to keep us safe. Baba and Mama taught me how to tie the knots. I know how to keep the tent safe.”**

**Ms. Sussman looked at Warda with a curious smile. “OK,” she said. “Warda, let’s see what you can do.”**

**Warda followed Ms. Sussman back to the tent and explained to Rosie that she knew exactly what to do because she used to have to tie down her family’s tent when she lived in Zaatari. Then, Warda went to each corner of the tent and tightened all the ropes. Suddenly, the tent stopped swaying.**

**Rosie stopped crying, and a huge smile spread across her face. She hugged Warda and thanked her for saving the day. “What would we do without you, Warda?” Rosie said. “You know so many important things that I don’t know!”**



**When Rosie got home, she couldn't wait to tell her parents about her adventure.**

**"Warda saved the day!" Rosie told her parents. "When the big storm came and blew through the park, she knew how to fix the tent so it wouldn't fall on our heads."**

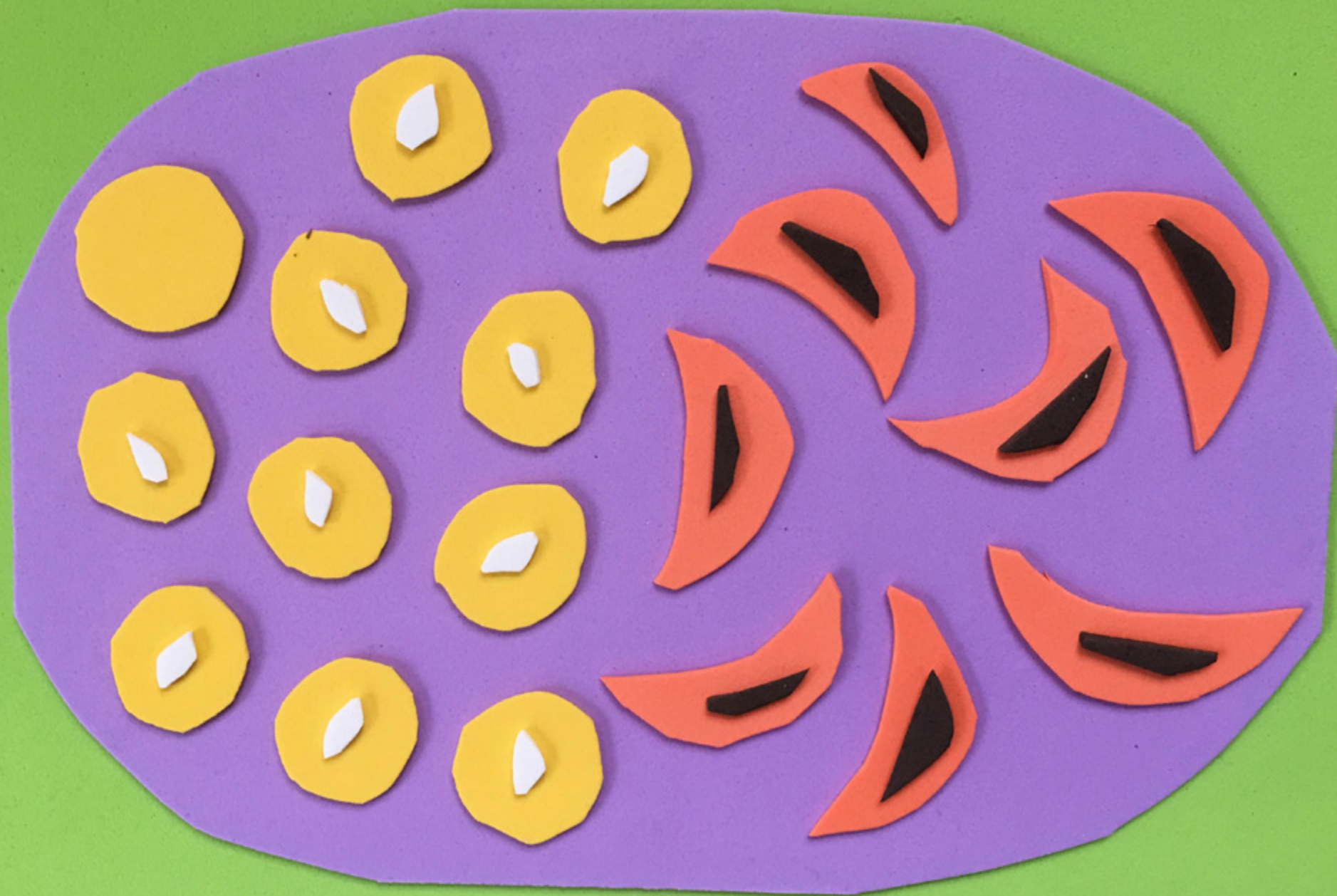
**"It sounds like Warda is a very smart girl and a very good friend," said Rosie's mom. "Why don't we have Warda and her family over for Friday night dinner?"**

**"Yes, let's invite them," said Rosie. "That will be so much fun!"**

**When Friday night came, Warda and her parents and her little brother, Mahmoud, came over to Rosie's house. They knocked on the door.**

**"Welcome!" said Rosie's parents together. *"Shalom Aleichem."***

***"Assalam Alaykhum,"* replied Warda's parents together. "We are honored to be your guests."**



**Warda's Baba brought some rope to teach the children how to tie knots if they went camping in the future.**

**Warda's Mama brought beautiful pink flowers.**

**Mahmoud held a basketball, hoping that Rosie and her brother, Simon, might want to play.**

**And Warda had the best treat of all – a big plate of date and almond cookies that she baked with Mama and Mahmoud.**

**“Those cookies smell delicious!” Rosie shouted with a big smile, as she took the cookies into the kitchen. “They taste delicious too,” she said after she snuck one to eat.**

**Warda's family enjoyed the special Shabbat dinner with Rosie's family.**

**“This reminds me of our holiday, Eid al-Fitr,” Warda said, “when we get to stay up late and eat sweets.”**

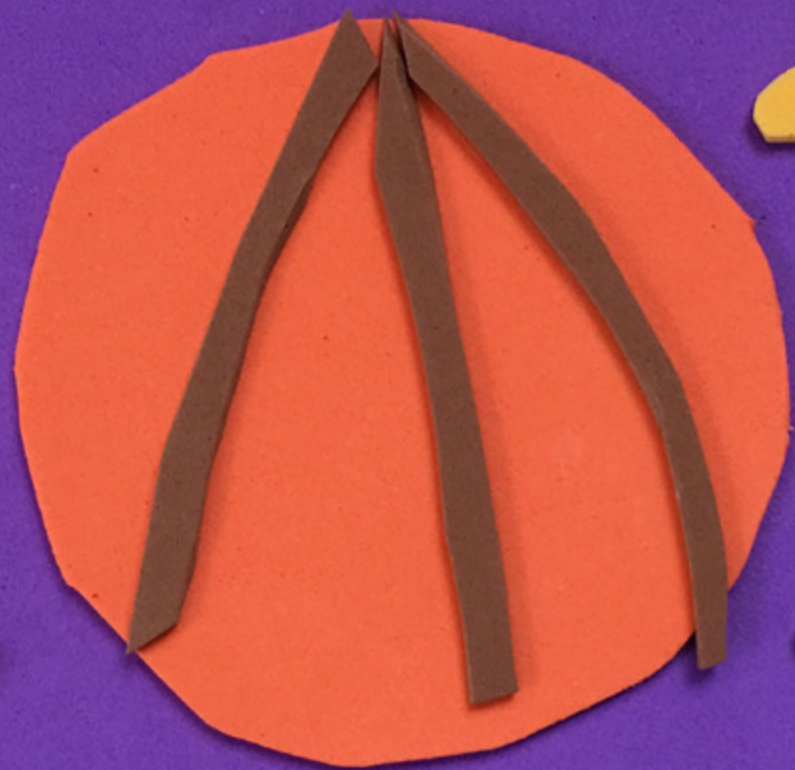




**After dinner, Rosie's Mom thanked Warda's Mama for the lovely flowers.**

**"How nice that you brought roses to our family," she said. "We love roses because they remind us of the happiness we have with our daughter, Rosie, whose name means rose."**

**Warda's Mama smiled. "I brought roses to your family," she said, "because they remind us of the happiness we have with our daughter, Warda, whose name also means rose."**



**Rosie and Warda laughed and laughed some more. They ate almond cookies and brownies. The four children played basketball together until the moon rose in the sky.**

**Even though Warda's family had come from far away and experienced many scary things that Rosie and her family could not even dream of, as the children played and talked and laughed, they realized just how much they shared.**

**It was the beginning of a great friendship.**





## Resources for Further Learning

**HIAS Resource Page ([www.hias.org/resources](http://www.hias.org/resources)):** Here you will find a variety of resources created by HIAS to help you learn about and respond to the global refugee crisis. Whether through Jewish sources, grassroots advocacy, holiday celebrations, or generally building your understanding of refugee issues through fact sheets and FAQs, we hope you find these resources meaningful and useful.

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)):** UNHCR is the UN agency mandated with the protection and support of refugees worldwide. UNHCR issues an in-depth yearly report containing many useful statistics concerning the global refugee crisis. For resources to teach children ages 6 and older about the global refugee crisis, visit [unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-resources.html](http://unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-resources.html).

## About HIAS

HIAS, the world's oldest, and only Jewish, refugee organization, rescues, resettles, and advocates for refugees so they can live in safety and with dignity. We work with refugees in eleven countries and through our resettlement network in more than 20 U.S. locations. We also mobilize the Jewish community to respond together to the global refugee crisis.

For ways to take action for refugees, visit [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org).

## About the Author

Nechama Liss-Levinson, Ph.D. is a psychologist, an author and an activist. Her books and articles, which help children and adults to develop resilience when facing difficult times, include *When a Grandparent Dies: A Kid's Own Remembering Workbook for Dealing with Shiva and the Year Beyond* and *When the Hurricane Came*. She believes each person has a responsibility to help make the world a better, kinder, more peaceful place.

## About the Editor

Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer is the Director of Education for Community Engagement at HIAS. A graduate of Columbia University, Rabbi Meyer was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. She is the author of an essay that appears in the book *Seven Days, Many Voices: Insights Into the Biblical Story of Creation* (CCAR Press).

