

Literacy Narrative Essay

Battles and Books

I used to hate reading. At least that was what I told myself whenever my mother forced me to sit on our old green couch with a Dr. Seuss book in my hands. Reading felt slow and frustrating, especially compared to video games, which were much more exciting and familiar. I preferred speaking Arabic with my cousins and friends, and I never felt the need to improve my English. When my father bought me my first console in second grade, the distance between me and reading grew even wider. My world became games, screens, and controllers, not books and paper. But my mother did not give up easily. One day she made me an offer that she knew I could not decline: "If you read the first Harry Potter book, I'll take you to the store to buy some new games." Being the greedy little kid I was, I immediately accepted.

So, in the summer of 2015, I officially started my reading journey. Even though the first chapters were difficult for me, I kept pushing. I read slowly, sounding out words and stumbling through sentences, often feeling tempted to give up. But before I could even reach the middle of the book, disaster struck. War broke out in Yemen. Schools closed, buildings crumbled, and families scattered across the country. The smell of gunpowder filled the streets, and sonic booms shook the sky without warning. My family had to flee to my grandparents' house because our home was located near a military site that was about to be bombed. In that house, surrounded by relatives and fear, we waited for things to settle. It was during this time that I discovered the place that would change everything for me: my grandfather's library.

My grandfather's library was a small, dusty room, but from the moment I stepped into it, it became my Hogwarts' library. Every shelf was packed with magazines, novels, comics, and history books. It was the only place where the chaos outside could not reach me. Since I was still struggling with Harry Potter, my mother helped me choose beginner-friendly books. We started with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, which made reading feel lighter and more enjoyable. Soon after, I read *How to Train Your Dragon* on my own, and for the first time, I felt proud of finishing a book without help. My mother and I spent many nights reading under candlelight because there was no electricity. The smell of old books mixed with the warmth of her voice made the frightening sounds outside easier to ignore. These quiet nights in the library slowly strengthened my reading skills, and I was finally ready to return to Harry Potter.

When school eventually reopened, I learned how much the war had changed everything. On the first day of third grade, I stood alone in my class line. Out of the thirty students who used to be in my class, only I and one other student remained. The rest had fled, and a few, tragically, did not survive. Even during classes, I often found myself studying with students from other grades. Feeling isolated, I turned even more toward books. I began to compare my situation to Harry Potter's. Just like Harry's first year at Hogwarts, mine was lonely, confusing, and marked

by loss. The war became my version of Voldemort, taking away my home and my friends just as Voldemort took Harry's parents. That year, I finished the first two Harry Potter books.

The next year, more students returned to the school, and life slowly regained some of its rhythm. I started making new friends and naturally matched many of my classmates and teachers to characters from the series. The principal reminded me of Dumbledore, with his calm leadership and presence, and Mohammed Alhaidary reminded me of Draco because he always made fun of me and tried to get me in trouble. But just like in the books, things changed over time. As we grew older, Mohammed became less of a rival and more of a companion.

By ninth grade, I had finished all seven Harry Potter books. Ninth grade in Yemen is one of the most important academic years because the final exam is standardized and determines academic ranking. Preparing for it felt like training for the O.W.L.s, and that comparison made the long nights of studying feel a little more magical. Little by little, life began to get better. The grip that "Voldemort," the war, had on my life slowly loosened. Even Mohammed transformed from Draco into Ron, becoming one of my closest friends. We spent countless hours studying together. I still remember the day before the Islamic studies final, when he and I reviewed the entire subject together. When the results came, we were both thrilled to see the same perfect score on our papers.

Just when I thought the worst was finally behind me, Voldemort returned in a new form: the 2020 pandemic. I was staying at my cousin's house in Ibb when the virus sadly took the life of my aunt. She had always wanted us to pursue education and study outside Yemen. Losing her was one of the hardest moments of my life, but her dream for us became one of my biggest motivations. The best way I could honor her was to study harder than ever.

High school became the chapter where my academic identity fully formed. My physics teacher, who reminded me of Professor Lupin, played a huge role in shaping my future. He once brought a television to class and showed us *Transformers*, and watching robots and machines on the screen made me fall in love with engineering. He also assigned many hands-on projects. My first project was a plastic car made from an empty water bottle, a stick, and rubber bands. I even painted it red and blue to resemble Optimus Prime. My chemistry teacher, on the other hand, reminded me of Professor Snape. She was strict and unpredictable, and her confusing class structure convinced me that chemistry was not the field for me.

Throughout high school, I worked tirelessly to honor my aunt's wishes and to repay my mother for everything she did to support my education. When I finally graduated with the highest GPA in my school's history, I felt that I had defeated Voldemort for good. Armed with the resilience I learned from books and the strength I gained from my family, I now hope to use my education to help rebuild and inspire others in my country.