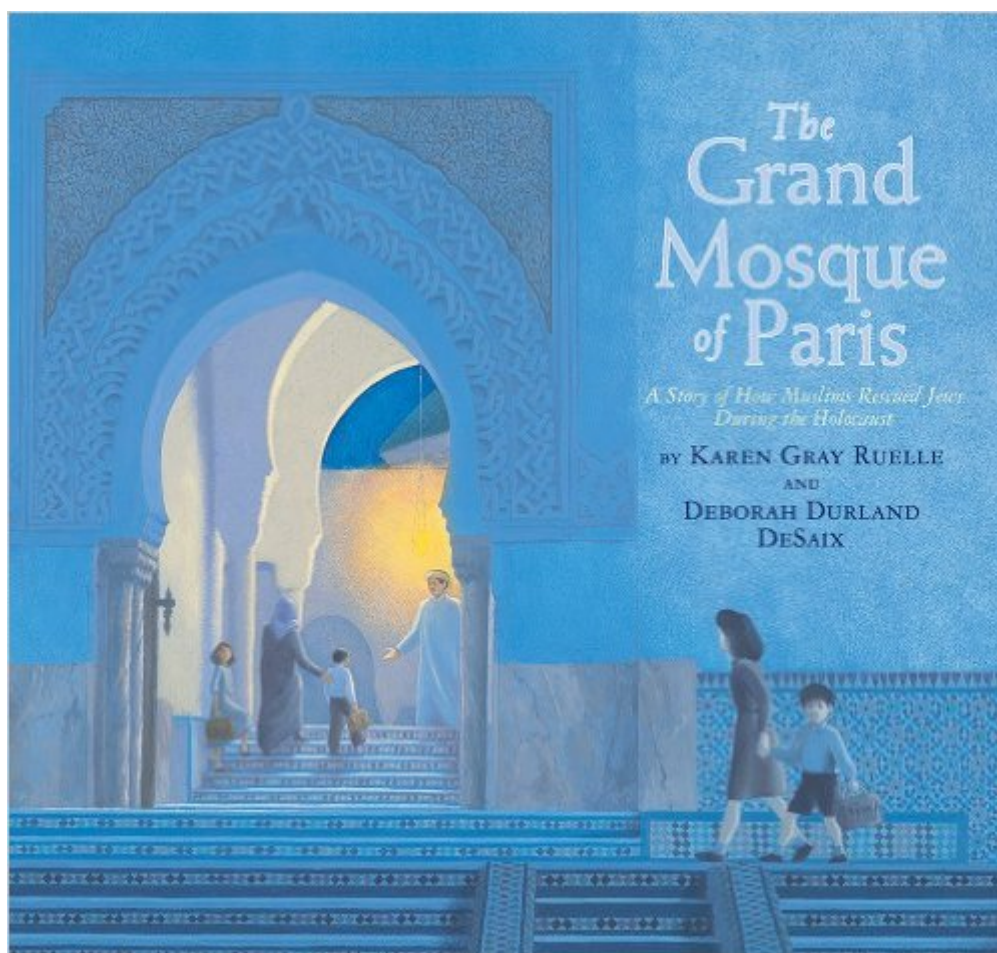


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# The Grand Mosque Of Paris: A Story Of How Muslims Rescued Jews During The Holocaust



## Synopsis

When the Nazis occupied Paris, no Jew was safe from arrest and deportation. Few Parisians were willing to risk their own lives to help. Yet during that perilous time, many Jews found refuge in an unlikely place--the sprawling complex of the Grand Mosque of Paris. Not just a place of worship but a community center, this hive of activity was an ideal temporary hiding place for escaped prisoners of war and Jews of all ages, especially children. Beautifully illustrated and thoroughly researched.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 11 years

Grade Level: 3 - 6

## Customer Reviews

The Grand Mosque of Paris is the story of the Muslim community of Paris during the Nazi occupation of World War II and their efforts to rescue Jews. The mosque constructed in 1926 had space for a community center, library, restaurant, clinic and apartments for the functionaries. It was built upon a labyrinth of subterranean tunnels and rooms, areas that had been excavated for building stones for the city of Paris. These underground passages and catacombs served as hiding places and escape routes for those hunted by the French police and Gestapo. The rescue and escape of Jews was under the leadership of the Rector, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, a sophisticated Algerian-born diplomat, who was considered the most powerful Muslim in France at the time. The clerics provided sanctuary, certificates of Muslim identity and safe passage for those who sought

their help. This well written, concise history is enhanced by the beautiful double page oil paintings, which are most effective in conveying setting and mood. There is no personal narrative although this historical story has all the elements for a compelling novel as evidenced by the few examples given. It is noted that at least 100 Jews, downed Allied airmen, Resistance fighters and escaped prisoners of war, were also spirited to safety. These righteous saviors deserve to be honored and their deeds told. This book is appropriate for elementary school students who are studying WWII and/or the Holocaust, but would also interest older students and adults. An afterword, glossary and extensive bibliography is very informative and sheds light upon this important and little known story of the Holocaust. For ages 10 and up. Naomi Kramer

Gorgeously illustrated, the book tells the story of how Muslims at the Grand Mosque saved Jews from the holocaust. Both authors speak French and did extensive interviewing in France; this follows on the heels of their much more ambitious joint undertaking, "Hidden On The Mountain: Stories Of Children Sheltered From The Nazis In Le Chambon". This book is impressive on many levels. It is intended as a children's picture book, but to me this only adds to its power and beauty. The essential lesson of "The Grand Mosque" is the fact that Jews and Muslims in recent history worked together for survival and considered each other brothers--a story much in need of remembrance in today's world. The authors went to great effort to seek out documentation that in many cases almost impossible to find. At one point they bring the reader into the detective process regarding an old letter found recently in a Paris café: "Was this letter read out in the café? Did it circulate among the Kabyle workers of Paris...? These anecdotes that Ruelle and DeSaix have helped resuscitate from near oblivion are a moving tribute to humanity's capacity for compassion and valor, especially in the worst possible circumstances. The book celebrates the Mosque itself, in addition to the kind acts of its World War II Rector, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, and his congregation. Each illustration in "The Grand Mosque" is in itself a work of art, and many of them are a respectful tribute to the beauty of Islamic architecture. A glossary of Islamic terms helps to further the author's goal of bettering our understanding of what is sacred to Muslims. In the back with the bibliography is an annotated list of recommended books and films related to this subject. First among these is Derri Berkani's documentary, "Une Résistance Oubliée", which inspired the book and is also used in anti-racism education across Europe. The film comes highly recommended by the authors.

This is a heart-wrenching, truly beautiful account of Muslims who put themselves in harm's way in order to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. The pictures are stunning, but the story goes far beyond

anything I have read in this age category on this topic to date. The Afterword is almost more fascinating than the book itself. Every public and school library needs this book.

What a sweet story! My daughter teaches Freshman English and her students were reading a book about the Holocaust a couple of months ago. We were talking about that book when she suddenly remembered this book and shared briefly the story with me. I knew then that I had to get the book. There is so much enmity and polarization among "religions", but this story brought tears to my eyes as the heart of humanity in selfless giving was expressed in such a caring and careful manner. This was a true case of practical spirituality manifesting itself under extremely trying and dangerous circumstances. Even though it is written primarily as a children's book, it crosses effectively into the adult book arena, due to the nature of the content and the authors' style of writing.

Finding enough historical facts to create a complete picture is oftentimes impossible. Nevertheless, writers remain persistent when they feel a story needs to be told. Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix fall into this category. After gathering a sufficient amount of facts to support their contention that the Muslim community protected the Jews in Paris, they wrote this multicultural picture book. Starting with an overview of what happened after the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, upper elementary and middle school readers will learn how the French Jews were affected by World War II. After a few pages, the story shifts to the lofty presence of the Grand Mosque of Paris, a notable landmark. The stories of the people who found refuge in the mosque are told in a narrative format alongside paintings that illustrate the mosque's beauty and the ways that some of the people were rescued. Relying on firsthand and secondhand references as well as Derri Berkani's documentary, *Une Resistance Oubliee: La Mosquee* and Robert Satloff's book, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*, the authors meticulously unveil some clandestine activities that occurred in the mosque. The actions of these brave Muslims saved the lives of an unknown number of Jews and non Jews. This book, along with others in this genre, help to shed light on the people (righteous Gentiles) who were willing to risk their lives during the Nazi era. This book is one of many resources that can be used to teach upper elementary and middle school students about the Holocaust.

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