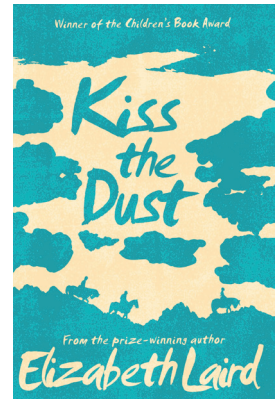


# TEACHING NOTES

## Kiss the Dust Elizabeth Laird



“People often ask me where I get my ideas from. 'They come from the same place as my dreams,' I say. So where do we get our dreams from? They come from the people we meet, the places we know, the things that have happened to us, and, above all, the feelings we experience. *Kiss the Dust* was born out of that mixture of people and places and events. It just needed a flash of inspiration to tie it all together into a story...” - Elizabeth Laird

### About *Kiss the Dust*

*Kiss the Dust* by Elizabeth Laird is an unforgettable, award-winning novel of conflict, persecution and the hardships faced by refugees.

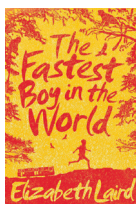
Tara is an ordinary teenager. Although her country, Kurdistan, is caught up in a war, the fighting seems far away. It hasn't really touched her. Until now. The secret police are closing in. Tara and her family must flee to the mountains with only the few things they can carry. It is a hard and dangerous journey - but their struggles have only just begun. Will anywhere feel like home again?

The characters in *Kiss the Dust* are Kurdish people from Iraq and the story is set in the 1970s at a time when Iraqi Kurds were waging a war with their government.

### About Me

Here's a picture of me, just in case you're wondering what I look like. I've been writing novels for more than 30 years now. A lot of them are still in print, and you can find out more about them on my website [www.elizabethlaird.co.uk](http://www.elizabethlaird.co.uk).

I've travelled all over the world in pursuit of adventures and stories, so take a look at my other books if you'd like to know more.



  
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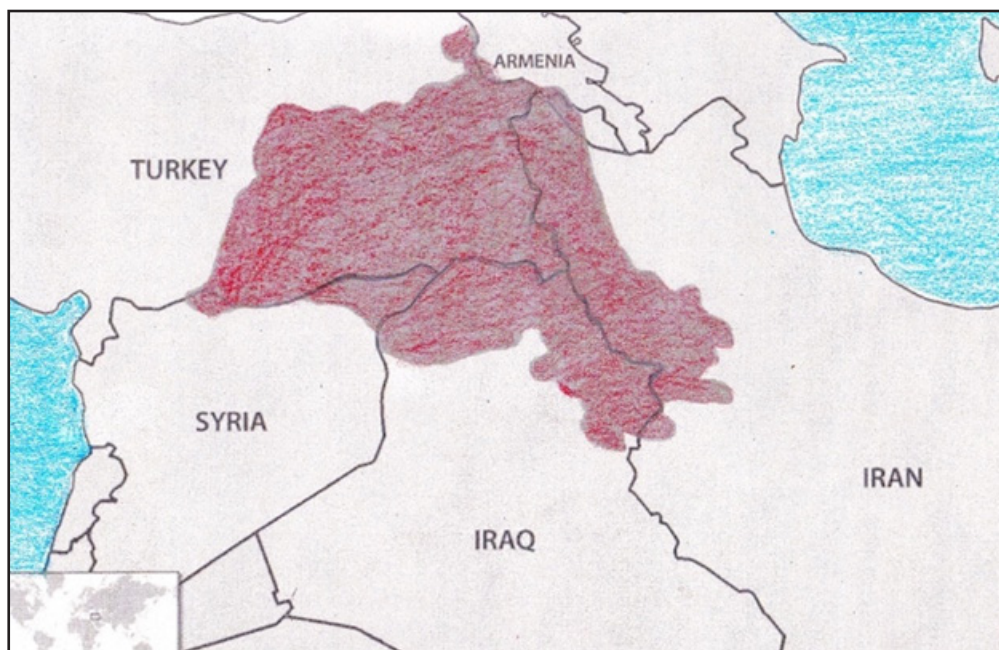
# TEACHING NOTES

## *Kiss the Dust* Elizabeth Laird



## Who Are the Kurds?

- There are over 30 million Kurdish people.
- The Kurds have no country of their own. Their traditional homeland is a large mountainous area spread across parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, so the Kurds are split between four different countries.
- The sharp peaks of the Zagros mountains run along the border of Iraq and Iran.
- Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria all have powerful governments who are suspicious of the Kurds and don't want them to become too strong.
- In modern times, many Kurds have left their homelands to settle in other parts of Turkey, in Europe (including the UK) and beyond.
- Since ancient times, the Kurds have been semi-independent from their powerful neighbours because their mountain home has been so difficult to control. Roads are narrow and winding, and the hillsides are very steep.

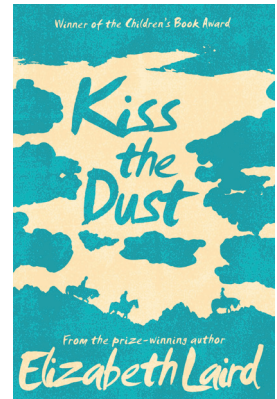


Map of Kurdistan (in red). The black lines show the borders of the different nation states the Kurds live in.



# TEACHING NOTES

*Kiss the Dust*  
Elizabeth Laird



## *Kurdish Life and Culture*

The Kurds feel different from the Arabs in Iraq and Syria, the Turks in Turkey and the Iranians in Iran. They have their own languages, culture and history.

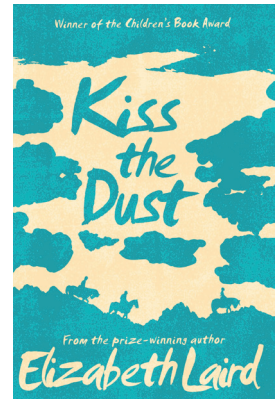
Most Kurdish people are Muslim, but there are some Christian Kurds too, as well as people known as Yazidis. They don't all speak the same language and not all Kurds share the same ideas about how they should be governed. But Kurds are proud of their culture and their way of life. On special occasions, like their Spring festival, Nawruz, they love to dance, wearing their traditional clothes. The women wear beautiful, brightly coloured, floating dresses and the men wear turbans and wide sashes round their waists.





# TEACHING NOTES

*Kiss the Dust*  
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The people in these pictures are wearing traditional Kurdish clothes. The women are looking down on their village which lies on the steep mountainside above the beautiful valley. You can step out of the door of some houses right on to the roof of the house below!

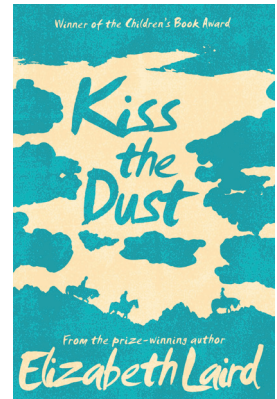
## *Why Have So Many Kurdish People Fled Their Home?*

The governments of Turkey, Iraq and Iran have always been suspicious of their Kurdish populations, afraid that they'll gang up with each other to challenge their central governments. Sometimes Kurds have tested the central government of their country, trying to get more power and independence. When this happens, the central governments arrest the Kurdish leaders and put many people in prison. In the past, the Kurds felt safe in their mountains. The roads are steep, winding and narrow and it was difficult for an invading army to move about. But modern planes, bombs and helicopters have made the Kurds much less secure.



# TEACHING NOTES

## *Kiss the Dust* Elizabeth Laird



From the 1970s, a powerful dictator called Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq. He ruthlessly killed or imprisoned anyone in the country who disagreed with him. The mountains that had always protected the Kurds could not save them from Saddam Hussein's air force, which rained down poisonous gas on Kurdish villages. Thousands of people were killed in these attacks.

The United States and Britain invaded Iraq in 2003 and captured Saddam Hussein, but they left chaos behind them, and a brutal civil war broke out in Iraq. This has caused dreadful suffering to the Iraqi people.

Since 2003, Kurds in Iraq have had their own government, but many of them don't like it. Their lives could be in danger if they protest, and many Kurds have fled to find new homes in the UK, in Europe, the US and other countries around the world.

## *The Peshmergas*

The peshmergas are traditional Kurdish soldiers in Iraq who have tried for a long time to protect their homeland. The name 'peshmerga' literally means 'those who face death'. They fought bravely against Saddam Hussein, who treated them with great cruelty, but to the Kurds, the peshmerga leaders, like Tara's uncle Rostam, were heroes. It's no wonder that her brother Ashti wants to join them.

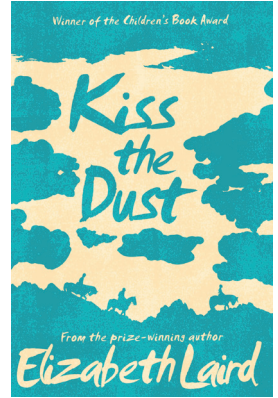


Since 2003, the peshmergas have been fighting new enemies, but their aim still is to keep their region under Kurdish control. Nowadays, women fight alongside the men in the peshmerga forces. This photo shows Iraqi Kurdish women training to be peshmergas.



# TEACHING NOTES

*Kiss the Dust*  
Elizabeth Laird



## How I Came To Write *Kiss the Dust*

I lived in Iraq for several months during 1975. Saddam Hussein had just come to power, but he was already trying to control the Kurdish people. He had sent in his army to empty Kurdish villages, taking the women and children away from their mountain homes and making them live in camps on the plains below.

When my husband and I visited Kurdistan, we passed a huge convoy of around seventy lorries transporting some of those villagers back to their homes after the Iraqi government were satisfied that the Kurds had been defeated. Here's how I described the sight in my diary:

*Going up the mountain road into Kurdistan, we passed an immensely long convoy of heavy army lorries. We counted more than seventy-five. The open backs were filled with families and their belongings. Old ladies sat on large bundles, chairs were lashed upside down to table tops, cupboards rattled insecurely, their doors tending to burst open, children sat tight, holding on to sticks of furniture or the nearest adult as the trucks bumped and lurched on the mountain roads.*

*It was an extraordinary sight. There was no sign of jubilation or excitement. The people were probably wondering if anything was left of the villages they were returning to. The soldiers driving the trucks in their sealed off cabs had no communication with their passengers. The returning refugees were mainly women and children. The men we passed, harvesting together in a fields, let their sickles hang from their hands and watched with expressionless faces. Women with children on their hips or with water pots on their shoulders stopped and looked on solemnly as the trucks passed.*

I was very moved by the sight of those lorries, and by the kindness of Kurdish people who invited us into their village home and insisted on giving us far too much to eat.

# TEACHING NOTES

## *Kiss the Dust* Elizabeth Laird



### *The Characters in Kiss the Dust*

Some years after I'd left Iraq and was living in England, serious fighting broke out again in Iraqi Kurdistan, and refugees began to arrive in the UK. I met several families and individuals, and they told me the same story. One girl in particular described her family home in Suleimaniya, her school and her school friends, and how hard it had been to leave it all behind. Like Tara's father, hers was supporting the peshmergas, and when he had a tip off that the secret police were coming to get him, the whole family had to flee to the mountains, leaving everything behind.

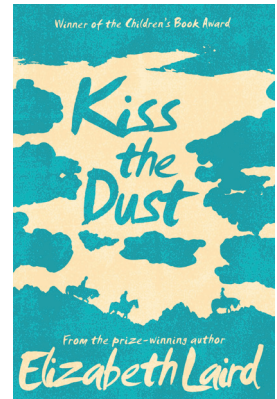
Several people described the night journey across the mountains, moving in the dark to avoid being seen by the soldiers guarding the passes. The paths were steep and dangerous. They used horses, and wrapped rags round the horses' hooves to stop the sound of clinking stones alerting the listening soldiers. They told me how difficult it had been to keep small children from crying and giving them away. Those who made it over the mountains went on down into Iran where they were put into refugee camps. Some managed to leave Iran and seek asylum in Britain and elsewhere.

I put together those stories and the people who had told them to me to create the characters and plot of *Kiss the Dust*.



# TEACHING NOTES

## Kiss the Dust Elizabeth Laird

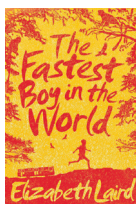


### Things You Can Do

1. Have you ever had a frightening experience? Describe what happened, and how it made you feel.
2. Find out how to say, 'Hello, how are you?' in one of the main Kurdish languages.
3. Do you think Tara changed during the course of the book? In what way?
4. Tara's father isn't a peshmerga. 'Pens rather than swords,' he says to his son Ashti. What do you think this means?
5. Tara and her family have to leave their home forever with only a few minutes' notice. If that happened to you, what would you quickly pick up to take with you?
6. How many things in your home rely on electricity to work? How would you cope if you were living somewhere without electricity or running water?

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