

Keeping up with the Tigers

TOLEDO ISLAMIC ACADEMY

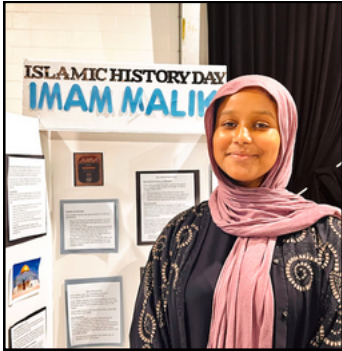
WINTER ISSUE – 2023–24

STUDENT NEWSPAPER

As Toledo Islamic Academy students, we strive in our reporting to uphold and promote the values of our School's Vision and Mission Statements.

ISLAMIC HISTORY DAY

BY KAWTHER FARAH



Hamdi Ibrahim, 10th Grade Participant (Left) Student Displays on Islamic History Day (Right)

PHOTOS BY MR. SHAHER ALSHARIF; HADEEL ALJABOURI

In place of this year's Seerah Day, TIA held its first ever Islamic History Day. According to the Islamic Studies Department, the Islamic History Day was introduced as a way to celebrate and honor the rich cultural heritage, and pivotal historical moments, within Islam. Similar to the annual Science Fair, Islamic History Day was meticulously prepared for by dedicated students who tirelessly worked on their projects for several months leading up to the event. The culmination of their efforts was showcased on February 2, 2024, where both high school and middle school students proudly presented their projects. The atmosphere was vibrant and engaging, with student displays showing remarkable research and organizational skills and an abundance of creativity.

To add to the excitement, a panel of esteemed community members and staff served as judges, evaluating the students' presentations with thoughtful consideration. Mr. Sarsour comments that he felt "proud to see Islamic growth within the school." The students' parents were also invited to attend the presentations. Parents were offered a firsthand glimpse of their children's growth as Muslims; sharing in the Islamic knowledge that our students have acquired

By participating in Islamic History Day, students were provided with a unique opportunity to deepen their connection to their faith beyond the confines of the traditional academic curriculum. This hands-on learning experience fostered a deeper sense of spiritual enrichment and cultural appreciation. Reflecting on this event, eighth-grade student Suniya Qurayeshi states that "it was a really fun experience and I had fun seeing all the other projects." Needless to say, TIA's 1st Annual Islamic History Day was a success, and the student body extends a warm thanks to our Islamic Studies Department, our esteemed community members who participated as judges, and, of course - to our dedicated students; may we all aspire to become scholars insha'Allah.

During Islamic History Day, a diverse array of topics were explored, focusing on Islamic figures ranging from the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) to Ali ibn Abi Talib. The primary aim of these projects was to enlighten and inspire students by introducing them to the Islamic role models and guiding principles that have shaped Islamic history. Through these presentations, students were encouraged not only to learn about these influential figures but also to emulate their virtues and strive for excellence in their daily lives. As each student presented their project, they reflected on the profound impact that their chosen historical figures had on them personally, emphasizing how these role models had inspired them to pursue personal growth and moral development.

**2024 Spelling Bee:
School Champion Represents
TIA at Regionals!**



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SIMRA HASEEB

Simra Haseeb, our 2023-2024 Spelling Bee Champion, represented TIA at Northwest Ohio's Regional Competition on March 9, 2024.

Simra finished in the top-ten!

MISSION STATEMENT

"To develop life-long learners who are responsible and moral citizens within a global community"

VISION STATEMENT

"Empowering students within a healthy, Islamic environment through academic excellence."

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Senior Dinner

By Jude Awwad



The 2024 TIA Graduating Class

PHOTO TAKEN BY AIYA ALQURAIISHI

Every year, our seniors are required to do a senior project. This involves shadowing professions they are interested in and sharing their experiences with parents and the community during Senior Dinner presentations. Mentoring seniors on their senior projects this year, English teacher, Mr. Ruff, discussed his approach to guiding students. In an interview, Mr. Ruff said “I make sure to have our seniors really understand the enormity of the task being laid out in front of them. One of the key things I make known to them, as well, is that the experience is kind of what you make of it.”

Taking this into account, I asked the seniors what they thought of their shadowing experience. While many had felt their experience was very interesting, others also felt overwhelmed by their new environments. This is what senior, Jena Elhady, had to say about her time shadowing an anesthesiologist: “It was fun. It was graphic ... [because] I was in the operation room where they do surgeries. There was a lot of graphic stuff, but once you overcome it, it's very interesting.” Danna Malood, another senior, explains that she “had always watched TV shows, to be honest, that had lawyers in it and they always seemed interesting, fun, and cool.” While she had felt that “it was entertaining during the trial period, ultimately,” she decided that she was not going to do it, and that “it was a lot of work. a lot of paperwork, and a lot of desk time.”

While many of us have grown up with an idea of a profession that we may want to pursue, Mr. Ruff explains that “What they [seniors] thought they want really isn't, in reality, what works for them.” Mr Ruff continues, “I let students know that, really, in our lives nowadays, very rarely are we given the time to just sit back and reflect on our experiences and what we've done and what we've learned.”

On his shadowing experience with a neurologist, Senior Abdalla Mahmud said that:“ He, [the neurologist], would teach me different things and different aspects about neurology. I liked [that] he was willing to be patient with me and teach me different terminology and things I didn't know. I didn't like that it was kind of a crammed space. I didn't have much space to maneuver. I don't think I'll go into it [neurology] because it takes too long; but I'll go into the medical field.”

Senior Ahmed Dokhan also commented on his shadowing experience, saying “I liked that I get to work with something that I'm interested in, like cars. I liked the teamwork and dealing with customers” but “I didn't like that it was a lot of work for low pay.” Given how fast pace life can be, especially as a senior, these opportunities can be very enlightening. Dokhan followed up by saying that “we got to do this project and it definitely helped us in the outside world ... making connections, meeting new people, and understanding how to deal with them.”

After shadowing the professions that they were interested in for five days, seniors were then tasked with writing a 5-7 page reflective essay and creating a presentation. These presentations were then given before the community on February 16, 2024 during this year's Senior Dinner. Through their Senior Projects, this year's graduating class was able to experience the enriching opportunity of job shadowing, but they were able to share their journeys and their lessons learned with their community. We ask Allah (SWT) to grant our graduating students success as they chart their paths out into the world.



2024 Senior Dinner

PHOTO BY HADEEL ALJABOURI

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SCHOOL

Student Council

By Sarah Zarour

Student Council plays a pivotal role in shaping the school environment, fostering leadership skills, and representing the student body's interests. Student Council serves as a platform for students to voice their opinions, initiate positive change, and contribute to the overall growth and development of their educational institutions.

Student Council promotes student engagement, leadership, and community-building within schools. One of the primary functions of the student council is to ensure that student concerns are both heard and addressed. By creating a channel for open communication between students and school administration, the members of the Student Council act as advocates for their peers' needs and interests. Through various initiatives such as surveys, town hall meetings, and suggestion boxes, Student Council gathers feedback from the student body and works towards implementing meaningful changes that enhance the overall school experience.

This year's Student Council is led by President Dana Al-Syoof, Vice President Mohammad Abuhamad, Secretary Nabaa Al Quraishi, and Yara Alhajji as Treasurer. Over the past year, the Student Council has been working tirelessly to make this year an enjoyable and fun year for each and every student. For example, the Council has organized Spirit Weeks, a number of Candy Grams, Ice Cream Sales, and Snack Sales in order to raise funds for fun events like evenings at Sky Zone, Funiguns, and the annual trip to Cedar Point.

On her experience as President, Dana Al-syoof commented that "I'd say my job in Student Council is to be there and be the voice [of students] ... to actively listen to students, collect opinions and ideas [that will lead] to school reform, and to be their voice overall." This also includes facilitating the "process of stuff like Spirit Week, Pep Rallies, Fundraisers, and much more." Despite their efforts, however, the student body has noted that some of these plans have fallen through either because of an inability to coordinate effectively with venues or because of a lack of administrative approval. Both, arguably, being issues of communication.

Even though there is room for improvement, Student Council does continue to play a vital role in promoting student engagement, leadership development, and community-building within the school. Moreover, it is crucial that we recognize the importance of empowering students and fostering their active participation in School Governance. The role of Student Council remains indispensable in shaping our future leaders and fostering a sense of community within educational institutions.



Girls' Formal Committee Prepares for Culture Night

PHOTO BY FATIMA ALSAEDI

Girls' Formal Committee

By Fatima Wehbi



Girls' Formal:
Decorative Theme honors Palestinian Culture

PHOTO BY FATIMA ALSAEDI

The Girl's Formal Committee is a dedicated group of female students who collaborate annually to organize a special event for girls both within and outside of TIA. Previously, the Girl's Formal was centered around themes like a Masquerade Ball, Retro Night, and Paris. Every year, the Girls Formal aims to bring together girls aged 12-18 for an enjoyable evening of fun, dress up, and dance in a welcoming, inclusive, and healthy Islamic environment.

In light of the ongoing siege on Gaza, The Girl's Formal Committee decided that, in a show of solidarity, this year's event would be planned as an educational culture night honoring Palestinian culture. According to the Committee, the objective of this year's event was to celebrate cultural diversity and unity in the face of adversity. Attendees were encouraged to participate in the cultural exchange of traditional foods, clothing, and folk-art.

Samiha Tarabishi, a member of the organizing committee, emphasized that "cooperation is very important, and we need to know how to work as a team together and help each other out." Tarabishi continues, "this year, especially, it's even more important because the purpose of the formal is more than just fun. Our main purpose is to help Gaza. 50% of our proceeds this year will be donated to the people in Gaza who are struggling."

In describing the event planning, Tarabishi explained that Ms. Roba typically has a detailed plan for the entire process and that the Committee benefits from "the advantage of years of experience." Mrs. Roba, a distinguished teacher from the Arabic and Quran Department, graciously volunteers her time each year to help the Girl's Formal Committee. With the detailed plan put in place, Tarabishi says that "if anyone else needs to take charge, it will be quite straightforward for them."

The Girl's Formal Committee is tasked with fundraising for decorations, catering, photo booths, and other event-related expenses. The Girl's Formal Committee does this by working closely with the Adult Formal Committee each year. The Adult Formal Committee is made up of PTO members who help with the planning, fundraising, and hosting of the event.

The end result of months of planning is a beautiful and joyous evening spent between the young ladies in our community. Each year, the Girls Formal provides our young ladies with the opportunity to come together, share laughter, and create cherished memories.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SCHOOL

TIA Annual Fundraising Dinner

By Hamdi Ibrahim

The Toledo Islamic Academy Annual Fundraising Dinner was a success this year; exceeding the Fundraising Committee's donation goals. Hosted by the Masjid Saad Foundation Fundraising Committee on February 3rd, 2024, the event was sponsored by Lake Erie Nephrology and Hypertension Associates of Toledo, Glass City Specialists Surgical Group, Salem Financial Group, North American Islamic Trust, Carpe Diem Pediatric Therapy, Dr. Hadeel Abaza MD at Pediatric Orthopedic Associates, and Hussein "Tony" Obeid at Jim White Honda.

In an interview with Samiha Tarabishi, a student participant in the dinner event, she shared her insights into the event's success and expected impact. According to Tarabishi, the event exceeded expectations by raising funds well above the initial goal. Although she is not directly involved in the decision-making process of fund allocations, Tarabishi says that she trusts fully that those responsible will see that the funds are used to enhance students' academic development and experiences.

With an impressive attendance of two hundred attendees, the event ran very smoothly, showing the effectiveness of the planning process and the event's coordinated execution. Of course, the event would not have been successful without the exceptional planning and strategic support of our community. In an interview, Dr. Abaza, An esteemed board member and a member of MSF's fundraising committee, explained that "The TIA Annual Fundraising Dinner unites the community through shared goals and collective efforts. This event serves as a vital means to generate funds for diverse educational needs, ranging from covering educational costs, enhancing teacher salaries, addressing unexpected expenses, funding extracurricular activities, organizing field trips, and acquiring classroom technology and supplies."

During the event, students are given the opportunity to volunteer by taking on roles such as selling tickets, setting up, and serving the guests. Amongst other benefits, this volunteering opportunity helps instill a spirit of community service within the student body. In a heartfelt statement, Dr. Abaza said that "we are very grateful to our sponsors, donors, parents, community members, principals, teachers and students for their invaluable contributions in reaching our goal. Achieving our goal wouldn't have been possible without their generous support".

Community support is invaluable not only in that it helps our school continue to provide academic excellence within a healthy Islamic environment, but also invests directly into our future generations.



Guests enjoying laughter and good cheer during this year's event.

Photo by Mr. Shaher AlSharif



5th Grade performance of Islamic Nasheed held during the Fundraiser.

Photo taken by Mr. Shaher AlSharif



This year's Silent Auction helped TIA meet its Fundraising Goal.

Photo taken by Mr. Shaher AlSharif

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

SILENT GENOCIDE: THE TRAGIC TALE OF THE CONGO'S FORGOTTEN CONFLICT

By Sukaina Aboganah



Living conditions of displaced families in the Congo.

Photo by Michel Lunanga

In the troubled landscape of Eastern Congo, a silent genocide is unfolding, largely unnoticed by the international community. This violent conflict, primarily started by the armed rebel group M23, has thrown the region into chaos once again, leaving millions of people struggling for survival. Aid organizations are sounding the alarm, fearing a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions as the conflict escalates, displacing over a million people in just three months.

The roots of this crisis run deep, intertwined with a complex web of historical issues, ethnic tensions, and global interests. Eastern Congo, with its vast mineral resources, has long been a sought after prize for numerous armed groups. The most prominent among them, M23, is composed mainly of an ethnic group named Tutsis who broke away from the Congolese army over a decade ago. M23 is believed to be supported by neighboring Rwanda (according to strong evidence from the United Nations and the U.S.). The ties between the militant group and Rwanda can be traced back to the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s. M23, notably, has been the cause of a repeating cycle of violence and displacement in the Congo.

Recently in Goma, a major city in the North Kivu province, M23 forces have seized control; triggering mass movements of terrified civilians. The city, home to around 2 million people, has endured decades of conflict, symbolizing the region's suffering. Reports from the ground paint a grim picture of indiscriminate violence, with brutal massacres and heinous acts of violence becoming tragically common. The struggle of the Congolese Tutsi community, whom M23 claims to defend against remaining Hutu aggressors, is exploited to justify their actions. However, beneath these claims lies a stark reality of greed, as armed groups fight for control over the region's vast mineral wealth.

The international response to this crisis has been muted, with minor punishments imposed on Rwanda despite allegations of its support for M23. Political complexities and the hesitance of Western powers to confront Rwandan leader Paul Kagame have slowed action. Meanwhile, the Congolese people are left to fend for themselves in the chaos, with little hope of survival.

The consequences of this silent genocide are grave, as innocent lives are lost, families torn apart, and communities shattered. The risk of a wider regional conflict grows large, and yet the world's attention remains elsewhere, diverted by crises in more geopolitically significant regions. As the suffering in Eastern Congo deepens, it serves as an important reminder of the international community's failure to address the root causes of conflict and protect the most vulnerable populations.

The silent genocide unfolding in Eastern Congo demands urgent attention and united action from the international community. It is a tragic reminder of the human cost of conflict and the consequences of neglecting the cries of those caught in the crossfire. Only through sustained efforts to address the root causes of conflict and hold perpetrators accountable can the cycle of violence be broken



Drone Footage of Displacement Camps

PHOTO BY ALEXIS HUGUET



Coltan: Conflict Mining in the Congo

PHOTO BY ESDRAS TSONGO

To learn more about the conflict in the Congo and explore the sources used in writing this article, please visit the websites listed below:

[Resurging Violence in DRC](#)

[Humanitarian Crisis in Congo](#)

[Crisis in DRC](#)

[The Neglected Crisis](#)

[Freedom in the World - Annual Report](#)

[UN Report on Congo Genocide](#)

CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Book Review:

Wild Thorns by Sahar Khalifeh

By Heba AlJabouri

“ Wild Thorns” is a Palestinian novel written by Sahar Khalifeh and published in 1976. The novel is centered around the impact of the Israeli occupation on the lives of Palestinians. Written in 3rd person, the novel follows the story of a young man named Usama who returned to Palestine after living and working in the Arab Gulf for 5 years. Usama returns to his family in Palestine in 1972. At the time of his return, Palestine was under Israeli occupation and Usama was left with a mixture of emotions. Despite being happy to see his family, a lot had changed. There are Israeli forces everywhere controlling the country and, to Usama, it somehow feels smaller. “He felt that the West Bank had now been reduced to the size of a genie’s magic bottle... only hallucinations filled his mind now, and words that droned on with endless monotony ... Yes, heaven was here beneath his feet and before his eyes. But he was now a prisoner in the genie’s bottle.”

Upon his return, Usama meets his cousin Adil, his friend Zuhdi, and Abu Sabir who now work in Tel Aviv for better pay. Abu Sabir even loses his fingers in an Israeli factory. Even though all of the characters that Usama encounters are all struggling under Israel’s occupation, Usama comes to the realization that most Palestinians are resigned to their circumstances because they want to keep their families safe.

Not being able to accept things the way that they are, Usama decides to take drastic action. Little does Usama know, however, that his younger brother Basil, a high school student, is also planning to take part in the same act of resistance. In the face of powerlessness, both Usama and Basil choose to take part in a plan to blow up the buses that take Palestinians to work in Israeli factories.

As a work of fiction, this book does a good job of drawing the reader in and helping the reader experience the lives of Palestinians living under occupation. *Wild Thorns* also helps to shed light on the circumstances that lead up to the drastic acts of resistance that the characters felt forced to resort to.

As a reader, I was completely emersed in the novel. I was able to visualize and feel everything. I felt Usama’s passion and force of will, and I felt Adil’s helplessness and fear. As a reader, I also became familiar with the hardships of the daily lives of those living under occupation; things I would not have otherwise imagined. Written by a Palestinian, Khalifeh’s experiences and the experiences of her family lend a depth and a reality to the story that both educates the reader and entangles them in the lives of the characters.

To view more book reviews on “Wild Thorns” visit the following websites:

[Queen’s College: QTE Review](#)

[The Markaz Review](#)

[Living Between the Impossible and the Absurd](#)

CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Discovering Lebanon

By Yasmineen Smidi

Lebanon, a small country in the Middle East, is rich in both culture and history. Its culture is a blend of many different influences, including Arab, Mediterranean, and Western. It was once a part of the Roman Empire, later became part of the Ottoman Empire, before finally gaining its independence from the French in 1943. Despite its small size, Lebanon has played an important role in the region's history and has been shaped by various civilizations and cultures over the centuries.

Food is a big part of Lebanese culture. Lebanese dishes are famous for their delicious flavors and fresh ingredients. Some popular dishes include hummus, falafel, tabbouleh, and kebabs. Lebanese people love to gather with family and friends to share meals, and food plays an important role in celebrations and gatherings. But does Lebanon have a national dish? Yes and it's kibbeh, a tasty dish made with minced meat and spices. Lebanon is also well known for its olive oil, which is widely exported and used in meals all around the world.

Folkart, like music and dance, are also important in Lebanese culture. Traditional Lebanese music often features instruments like the *oud* (a uniquely shaped guitar), the *darbuka* (a drum played with the hands), and the *nay* (a long flute). Lebanese people also enjoy traditional dances like the *dabke*, a line dance performed at weddings and other special occasions.

Art is an important part of Lebanese culture. It is used to reflect the country's rich history and popularly takes the form of paintings, sculptures, theaters, galleries, cultural events, and architecture. Some celebrated pieces of art include "The Martyrs' Statue" in Martyrs' Square, which honors Lebanese nationalists, and the "Sursock Museum," known for its impressive collection of modern and contemporary art.

Some landmarks to visit in Lebanon include the ancient city of Baalbek, with its huge Roman ruins, and the beautiful Jeita Grotto, a series of limestone caves filled with stunning rock formations.

Religion also plays a significant role in Lebanese culture. Lebanon is home to people of multiple religious backgrounds, including Christians, Muslims, and Druze. The majority of the Lebanese population, however, are Muslim at over 60% while the second largest practiced faith in Lebanon is Christianity. Religious holidays and traditions are celebrated throughout the year, such as Eid Al Adha, Eid Al Fitr, and Lebanese Independence Day.

The Lebanese Independence Day, a national holiday celebrated on November 22nd, marks the day that Lebanon gained independence from France in 1943. People come together to celebrate with parades, fireworks, and delicious food. Another favorite celebration is Eid al-Fitr, the festival that marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting for Muslims. During Eid, families gather for special meals and give gifts to each other.

As a Lebanese-American, one thing that I really love about Lebanon and its culture is the strong sense of community that Lebanese people have. People always come together to support each other during both the good times and the bad. The tradition of gathering with family and friends to share meals is especially important to me because it brings everyone closer together and creates lasting memories. Lebanese culture is vibrant, inclusive, and filled with love, making it truly special to me.

Lebanese culture reflects the country's long history and unique blend of influences. From delicious dishes to traditional music and dance, family values, and religious traditions, Lebanon's culture is bright, fun, and lively and Lebanon is a fascinating place to visit and learn about.

LESSONS IN ISLAM

Observing Ramadan

By Sarah Hamad

Ramadan is one of the most sacred months for Muslims. It contains the holiest night in Islam, Laylatul Qadr, when the Quran was revealed. In this month, Muslims fast for the sake of Allah (SWT). This month is not just about fasting, it is also about getting closer to your deen and closer to your Lord. Ramadan is filled with constant *duaa*, *salah*, and *dhikr*.

What's so beautiful about this month is that it heals souls and changes mindsets, often coming to the believer exactly when they need it the most. Another reason this month is so special is because it allows for people to achieve a higher level of faith. During Ramadan, believers are able to reach higher levels of *iman*, in part, because the *Shaitan* is locked away. Without the distractions of the Shaitan, believers can focus on their deen - giving their *iman* room to grow.

In Ramadan, Muslims are also blessed with *Laylatul Qadr*, and as Allah (SWT) mentions in the Quran (97:3):

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ .

This means that laylatul Qadr is more significant than 1000 months of worship. As such, the believer should view this night as a gift and take advantage of the opportunity to make *duaa* and strive for closeness to Allah (SWT). This is something that we should not take for granted - but also ask Allah (SWT) for whatever it is that we want. In making *duaa*, we should remember to have *tawakkul* in Allah (SWT) and Sabr in hopes that our prayers may be answered insha'Allah. If we make the right intentions before we make *duaa*, maintain *tawakkul*, and have *sabr* after we make *duaa*, our prayers are more likely to be answered.

Ramadan is also a month that brings us closer to our Islamic Community, especially with everyone sharing meals for *iftar* and gathering nightly for *taraweeh*. Personally, I believe that gathering together and performing *taraweeh* as a community is a very special part of Ramadan. Another special part of Ramadan is the *qiyams* that the Masjid holds. During these nights, the community gathers, especially the youth, to read the Quran together, make *duaa* together, pray together, and have *suhuur* together. When you have people you love around you worshipping Allah (SWT) with you in the middle of the night, you feel more motivated to continue.

Insha'Allah we all encourage each other to develop good habits and acts of worship that we will retain long after the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan is one of the biggest blessings upon Muslims from Allah (SWT), and we should take advantage of every second of it!