

# My Personal Story about Living in Gaza



2009

# My Personal Story about Living in Gaza

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I call My Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Guided Activity Workbook for Children & Families

*A simple guide to encourage resilience, learning and coping. Use it to help children, teenagers and families with chronic and acute stresses of life in Gaza, their fears, and difficult feelings.*

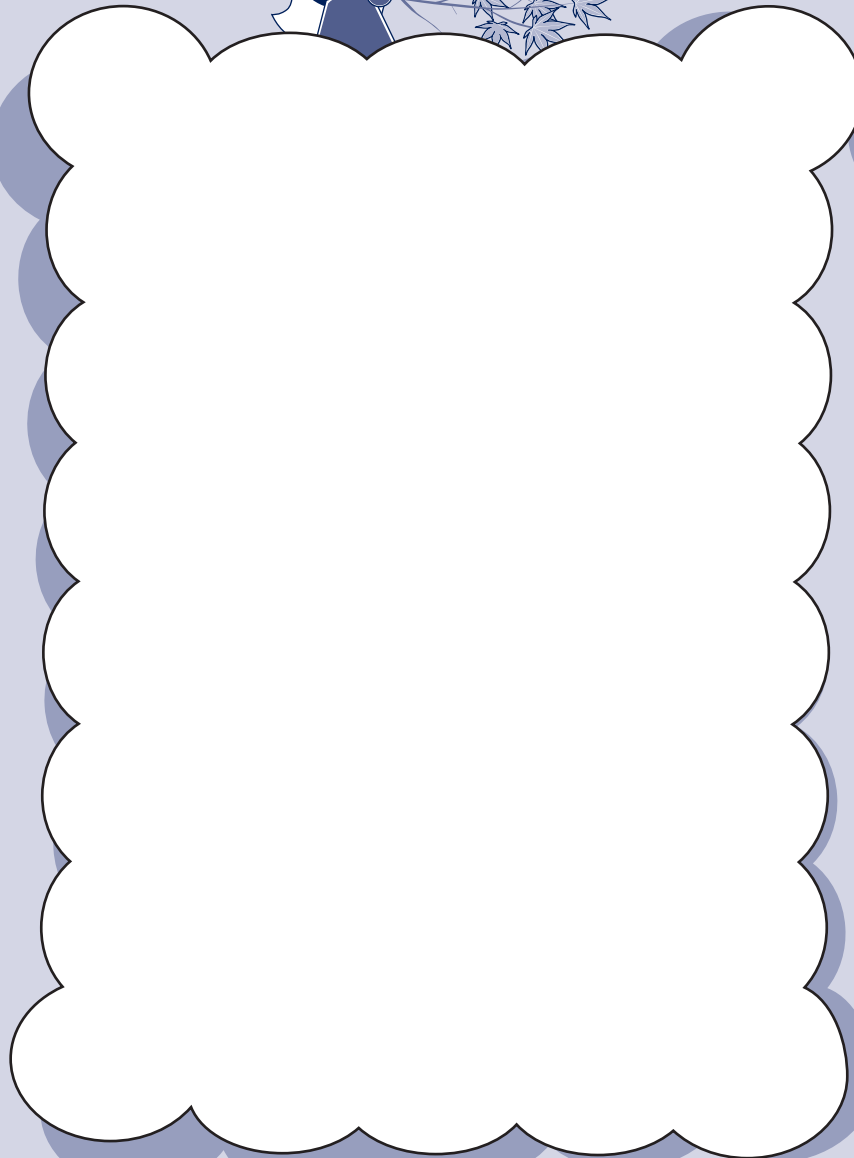
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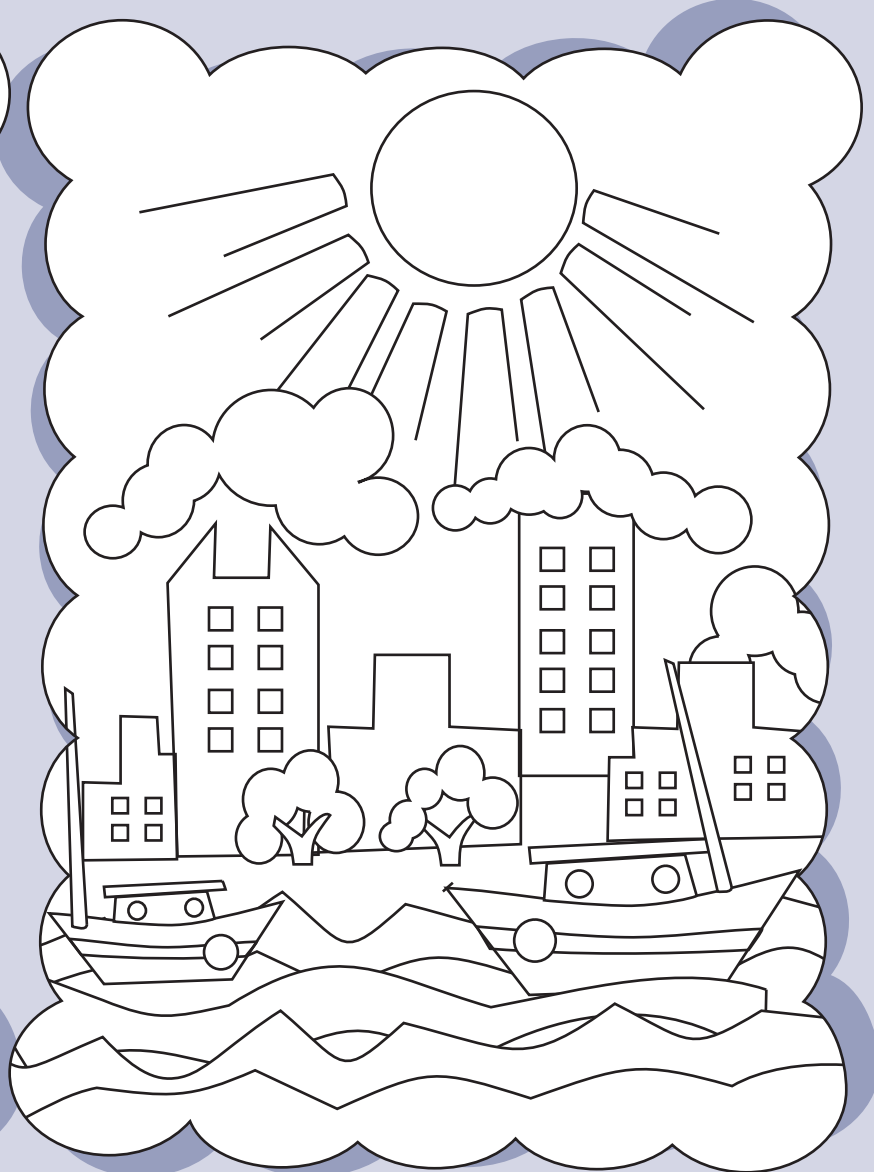
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# COLORING IN PICTURES FOR LIVING IN GAZA



Draw here



3

Color here

## I. INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS & ADULTS

The goal of this workbook is to help parents, teachers and other adults in Gaza help their children cope with the long parts of childhood and adolescence lived under chronic and recently increased severe dangers and stresses. If you are an adult looking at this book, your idea may be the same as ours. You want to enable children's highly stressful, possibly traumatic situations to include some a constructive learning and coping. The workbook will help children and adults talk together about their experiences of war, and their hopes for respect, human dignity, freedom from oppression, and to bring peace with justice.

This book gives children a chance to be authors who give witness to terrible historical events that occurred in Gaza. Palestinian society and its children have been dealing with very hard and stressful events for many years. Since the most recent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in December 2008 and January 2009, however, things have gotten even worse. Families have lived through, witnessed, and heard about air strikes and bombings that leave non-military people homeless, wounded, and dead. There have been many, many funerals, including of children and their loved ones. Many children have had direct personal experiences of the war and everyone knows someone who has died. Gazans all know that more attacks may come, but it is unknown where and when. Living under occupation and in the shadow of blockades, military aggression in the air and on the ground is a heavy psychological task.

To deal with these violent and complicated events, children need the help of adults who care about them. The goals of this workbook are to help children gain strength and learn more about their ideas

and emotions about living in a war zone. Perhaps it can even help them think about ways to create peace, in their own families and communities, and gain justice in the international world. Children need help from adults in changing what can be a traumatic situation into a constructive learning and coping experience. This book offers a format for children to organize and stimulate constructive thinking.

This guided activity workbook format is a simple approach which uses a well-studied method for helping children and adolescents cope with terrible experiences like large-scale disasters and violent conflict. The activity workbook encourages children and adolescents to learn more about their personal and cultural history, as well as their own feelings and values. Designed to be used with children of varying ages and abilities, it includes a guide for parents and teachers and one for children. It has a journal to record ideas and feelings, a scrapbook to be used for a few articles, and pictures.

This workbook emphasizes making colorful drawings that will help the children discuss topics. It provides suggestions for activities, a list of resources, a bibliography, and a children's mental health checklist to help identify children needing more assistance. These guided activities can be used by children of various ages individually, with their families, in the classroom with groups of children, and by mental health professionals as part of therapy.

Under Section 2 titled 'Resources for Adults' are detailed instructions for how to use the workbook with children from preschool through high school ages, how to use illustrations, and more.

## Key points for parents, teachers and other caring adults before using this Workbook:

- Before you start to use the workbook, read the whole book and the workbook, including instructions and sections with additional resources. Use your judgment about what might not be wise to use with your children.
- If you plan on using the workbook with children who can't read it themselves, read the section "Guide for Children and Teenagers" out loud to the children. That will help you answer questions the children may have.
- Plan to work up to 45 minutes at a time maximum. Working on this book may take several months because it is important for children to deal with difficult feelings at their own pace. Sometimes, the feelings can be overwhelming. Sometimes bad things will have just recently happened, and children may feel less grownup than usual. Be flexible in your work with your child or children and know what you do will be helpful.
- Let the children know that, while they are completing their workbook at the CBO center and you will help them to save it carefully between sessions, it is theirs to keep when they are done.
- The entire book does not have to be completed for the book to help.
- Some parts may not be relevant to every situation. Never force a child to listen to or work on a section of the book if the child lets you know it is too upsetting or hard. It can be very helpful to allow children to select which parts of the book to work with first and even to decide not to work on a section, or not to finish a section. Stop using the book whenever the child wants, even though it may not have been completed. It's okay if a child's writing or drawing is not his or her best. What matters is the talking and thinking that a child does with an adult who is accepting, not the product.
- It is okay to go out of order in the book; children may feel more comfortable doing different parts of the workbook at different times.
- It is very helpful to stop every 10 minutes or so, or if you notice the child becoming anxious, tearful, angry, or physically agitated or overly active. Ask the child if he or she would like to stop or take a break, and if there is anything the child would like to tell you about what he or she is feeling. This may be your signal that it is time to let the child stop before he or she becomes overwhelmed.
- Children, no matter how big, how smart, how obedient, and how well raised they are, cannot tolerate having painful feelings for as long as an adult. They also do not have the same amount of understanding that adults have, because they have not lived long enough and because their brains are still immature, even if they are very intelligent.
- Use the Mental Health Checklist at the end of the book for some guidance as to how serious the child's reactions are right now.

## INTRODUCTION FOR TEENAGERS AND OLDER CHILDREN LIVING IN GAZA

What is psychological trauma? Trauma probably happens to almost everyone at one time or another in their life. Trauma is what happens to people's feelings and thoughts when terrible things happen to them and to the people and community they love. Trauma can be seeing other people get hurt or killed, even if you are not hurt yourself. It can also be realizing that things that mean a great deal to you are violated because of what other people do to you or to people you love (like the value of human life, or your religious beliefs, including the importance of helping other people or respecting your elders).

Some of the worst traumas that happen to children in Gaza come as a result of years of on-and-off war, violence, occupation, and worry. Many children in Gaza have lost people they love, as well as people they remember, as a result of the full-scale war with Israel and of the years of violence that preceded it. All children have been affected by the blockades that have stopped families from getting all the food, medicine, supplies, and electricity they need, as soon as they need it. Many children have become homeless as a result of the war and the violence that preceded it. Some children have family members who are directly involved in fighting the Israelis, and they may worry a lot about those loved ones.

Some young people have parents and older siblings with big worries related to the war, and those worries can lead to older people being impatient. That can happen sometimes, when feelings get too big to handle without help. These problems affect children too. Some Gazan children have family members who are

sick or who have been badly injured as a result of the violence, or the children have become ill or severely injured themselves. These events can also cause trauma.

Most children and adults in Gaza have experienced at least some of the big problems we just described. And most people have emotional reactions at least some of the time. That is very understandable, and even to be expected. It is especially understandable because the terrible events that cause trauma are slow to go away in Gaza. There is still violence. There are still sometimes bombings and shelling, and there is usually a blockade enforced by Israel. It's often not possible to get necessary food, medicine, electricity, and supplies. Because of that, these big problems are not going away quickly. But children, adolescents, and families can still do many things that can help them lead better lives, even when their communities need a lot of help to be safe and happy. That is what this workbook is about – helping young people to live stronger lives that are filled with love and the comfort of having family, friends, and whole communities of caring people. It is also about helping children and teenagers to cope with the difficult feelings they may have some of the time, or even a lot of the time, because of the bad things that have happened to them, to their families, and to their people. When we cope better, with help from trusted adults, we can make better choices, help other people more, and accept other people's support better. When children are helped to cope better with difficult events, they can help rebuild the physical safety and psychological strengths of their families and neighborhoods.

*Different people can have different reactions to the same terrible events. Sometimes children and even adults get frightened, upset, worried or angry after a trauma. Some children get over bad events without feeling badly hurt by those events. Not very many children seem to do just fine when the events go on for years. Sometimes children have trouble sleeping or have bad dreams. They might be afraid to leave the house or go to school, or they may have headaches, stomach aches or other problems because they are so worried. They might not be able to stop thinking about a terrible event they saw in person, on TV, or that they heard someone describe. They might not even know that they are worried about something. They may have trouble remembering what happened, or sometimes remember bad things that they would rather not think about at all. They might be afraid. They might not even realize they have any feelings at all, as if they were numb. They might stop being able to pay attention to parents and teachers so they can learn. They might cry a lot, or act like they are younger than they really are, such as by losing control of their previous toilet training. They may get angry over things that would not usually bother them at all.*

*It helps children to know there are people who can help with these reactions: Adult relatives, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins can help. So can teachers, religious leaders, doctors, helpers from international organizations who work in Gaza, mental health practitioners, and older friends and others who work with children. This is another list that could go on forever. Talking to trusted helpers, friends and writing about*

*your feelings can help you feel better. It can also help you learn more about what to do to be safer.*

### **About Using This Book**

*Talking to grownups and other kids about your feelings or worries and about what happened can help you feel better. You can also do things yourself to help other people in your family and in your neighborhood. This book can help you think more about some safe ways to help other people living in Gaza.*

*Using this book may help you to talk to others, and it may help you in other ways. Other children using similar workbooks to help them remember have found that it has made them stronger - by writing down, drawing pictures and doing other activities to remember and think about their thoughts and feelings. This workbook is intended to help you be stronger.*

### **You Are a History Maker When Using This Book**

*Use this book to make your own personal history book – your record of what happened in Gaza. Include good and bad things that only you know about to give the true history of your own life in Gaza, for future Gaza people and future generations in the world who don't know what you went through.*

*If you can use this book by yourself, or with help of a parent or a teacher, maybe you can feel stronger and keep learning more. And maybe you could help others, too, if you choose to share what you know and what you learn.*



## HOW TO GET STARTED

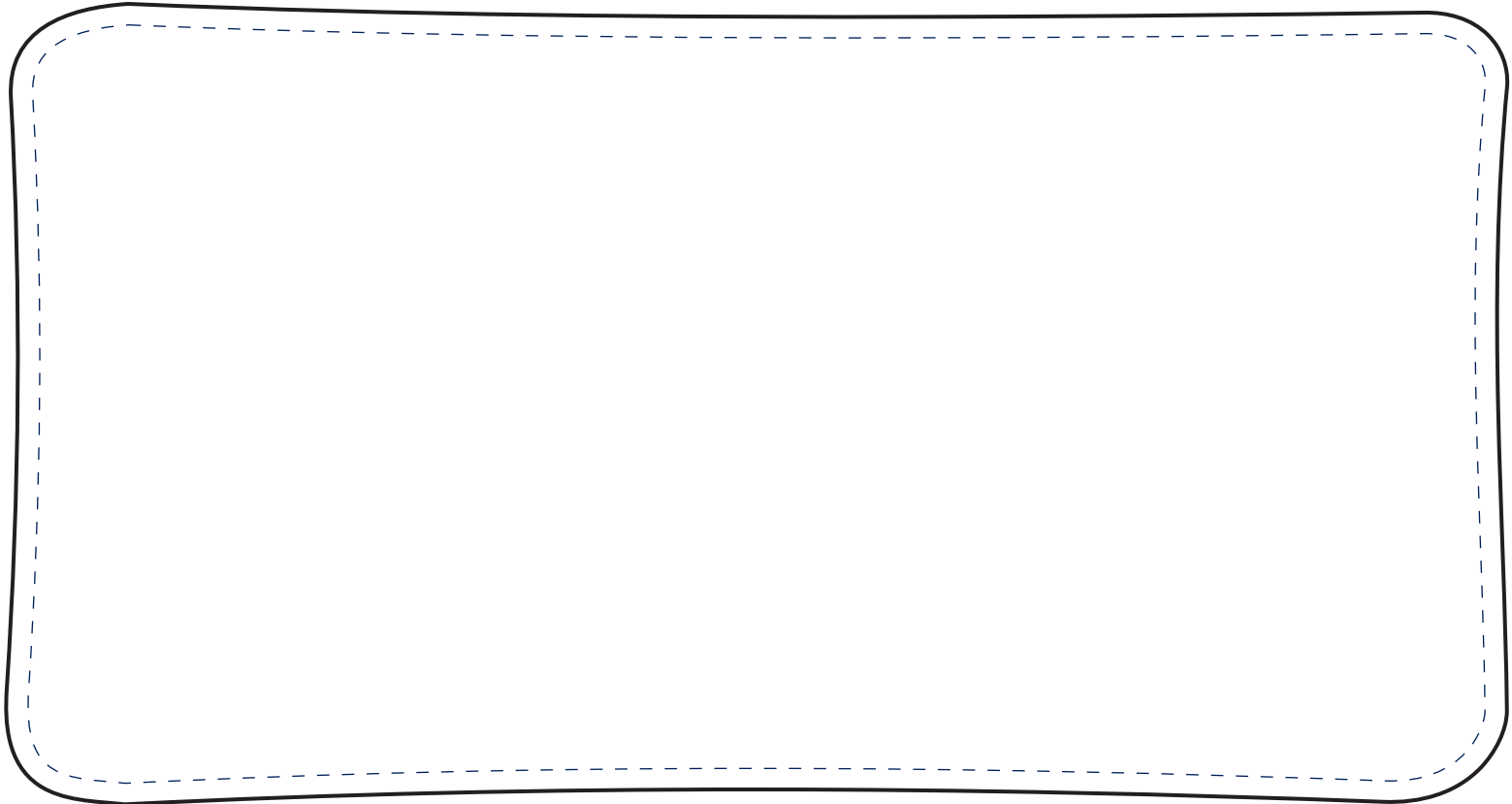
- Look through this book and begin wherever you want.
- Fill in as many of the blank spaces as you can. You can add extra pages if you need extra room for photos or drawings or if you need more room to write.
- Ask for help if you need it to understand the questions or to write down the answers.
- Try drawing pictures or coloring the pictures that are already in this book.
- You can also make a scrapbook out of this book by stapling in extra pages. Use extra pages mainly to hold personal photos and essays; especially include good things that people did for you and others.
- Take your time. You can skip anything that makes you upset and come back to it another time. Or just leave it alone, if that feels right to you or any grownup who might be helping you.
- There may be parts that do not exactly apply to you. Feel free to skip or change anything you like.
- Don't just dwell on upsetting parts. Keep in mind that happy memories and good events are also very important.
- Remember, you should definitely talk to a grownup if you become upset or worried, and also share what you have learned.
- This book is your book. You are a personal witness and personal reporter about important things you lived through in Gaza.



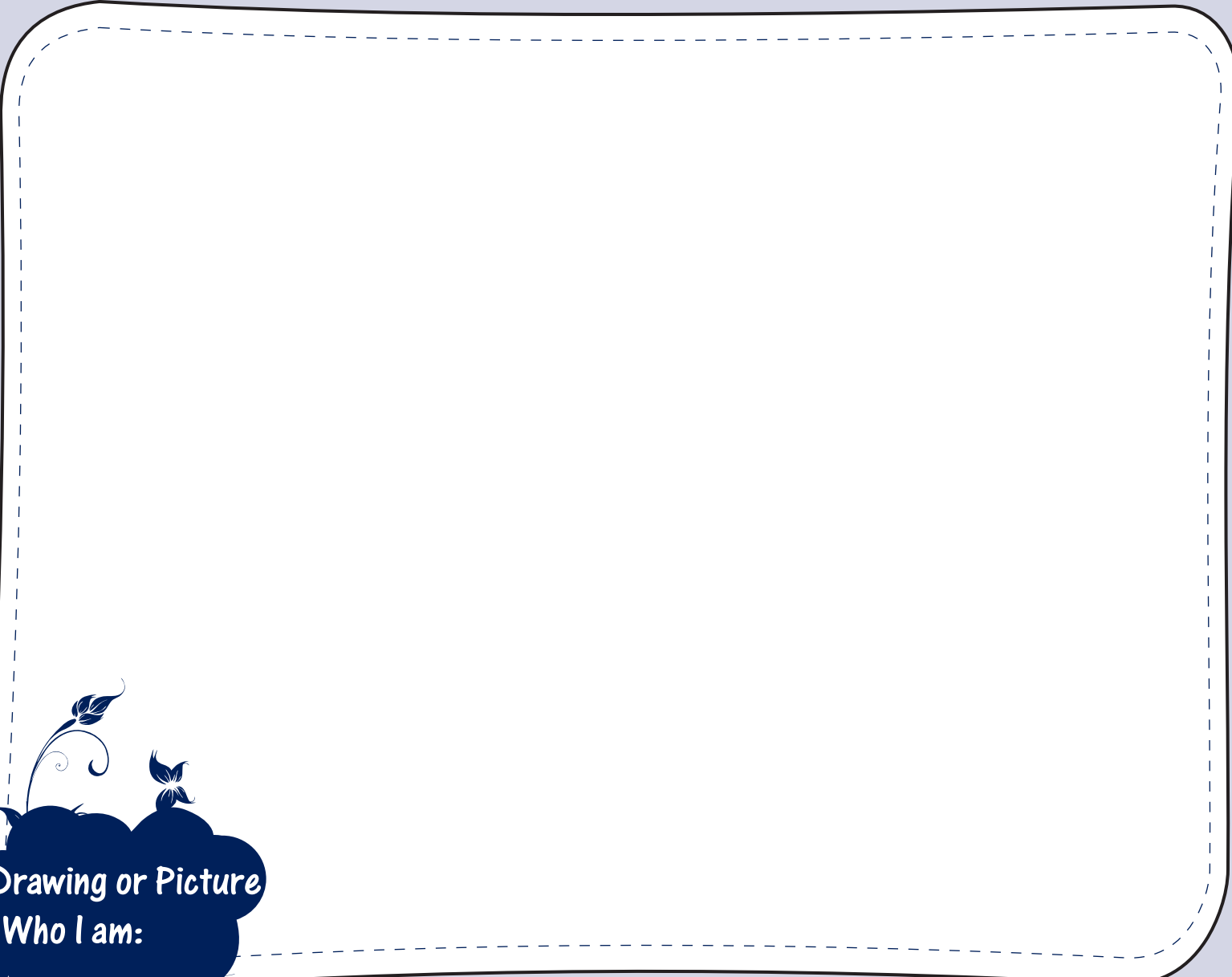
Here's a Photo  
or Drawing of Me:

## My Personal Story about Living in Gaza

Subtitle: .....



I started this book on .....



**A Drawing or Picture  
of Who I am:**



## Who I Am

I am a ..... with ..... sisters and ..... brothers.

Usually I live in (what kind of building) ..... in (name of town, camp or city) .....



Photo or Drawing of My Family doing something



*Drawing of a Girl who is a friend*

*Drawing of a Boy who is a friend*

Here  
are Drawings  
of My  
Friends

**My friends are:**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

*Drawings of other good friends*





Some of the things I usually like to do with my friends are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

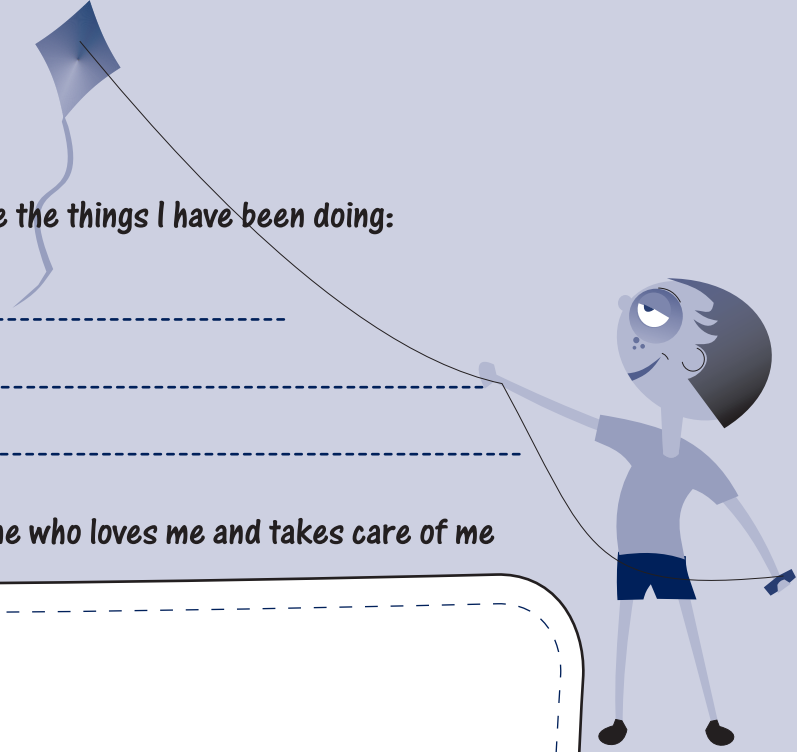
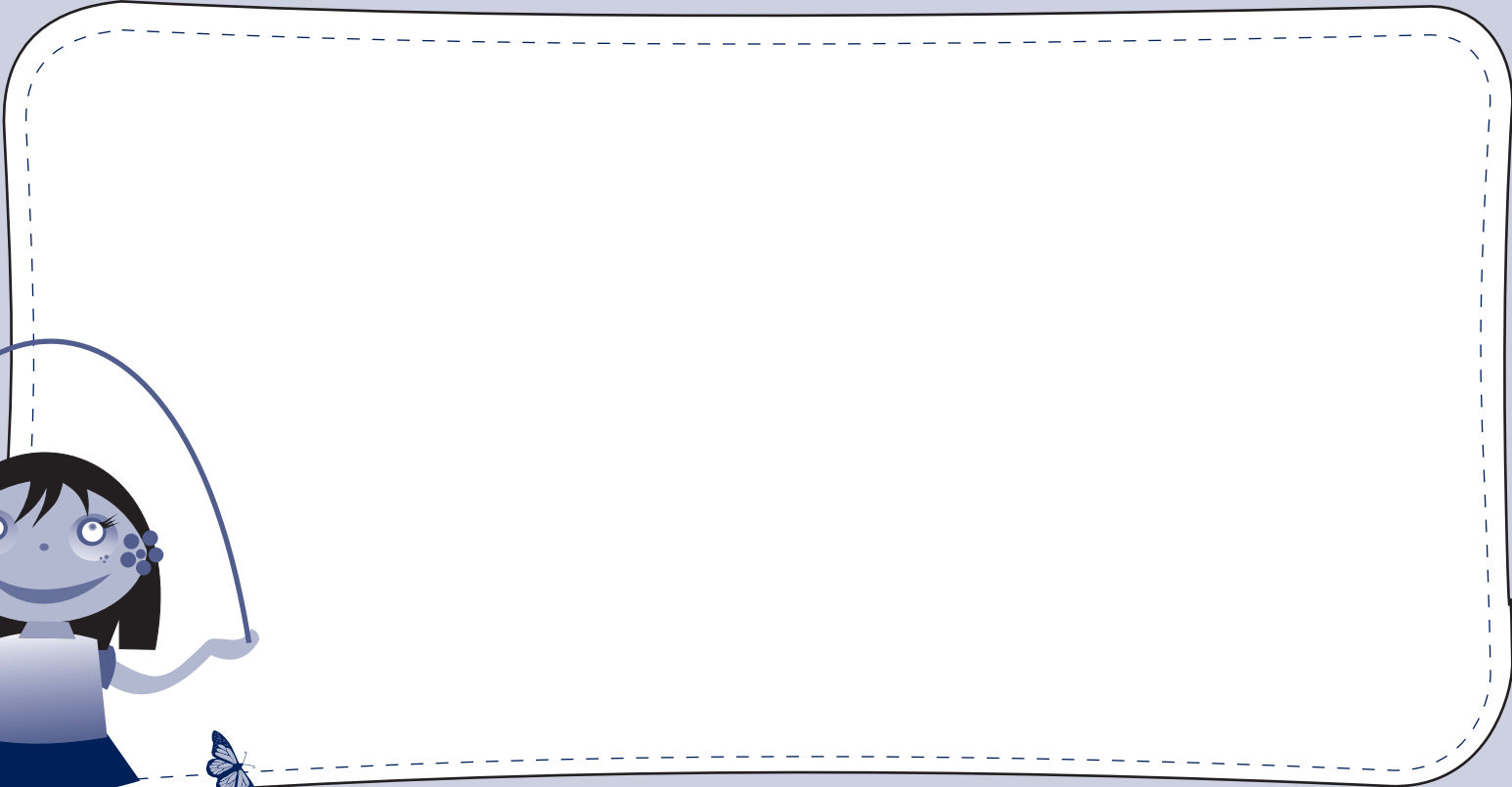
Drawings of some of the things I like to do with my friends



Since the attacks started to get worse in December 2008, here are the things I have been doing:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Here is a drawing or photo or group of photos of me with someone who loves me and takes care of me





Here is a picture or drawing of me with someone who loves me



**For many people the attacks have made big changes.**

*Some of my family or friends who were harmed or made homeless by the attacks:*

*Relationship and what happened to them:*



**I Remember**

In October 2001 the Al-Aqsa Intifada started. Since 2001 we have been dealing with the escalation of violent Israeli attacks that hurt or killed many civilians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The most recent very serious violence started in December 2008, when a truce between Hamas and Israel ended. Since then, very bad things have been happening to people in Gaza. I personally know some things that happened.

When this recent increase of attacks started, I was ..... years old.  
So that I can remember exactly what I personally went through since the recent war began, I will write some of the things that I can remember about that time.

The weather was like .....

Things I remember that were happening in Gaza and in my school and family around December 2008 were:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

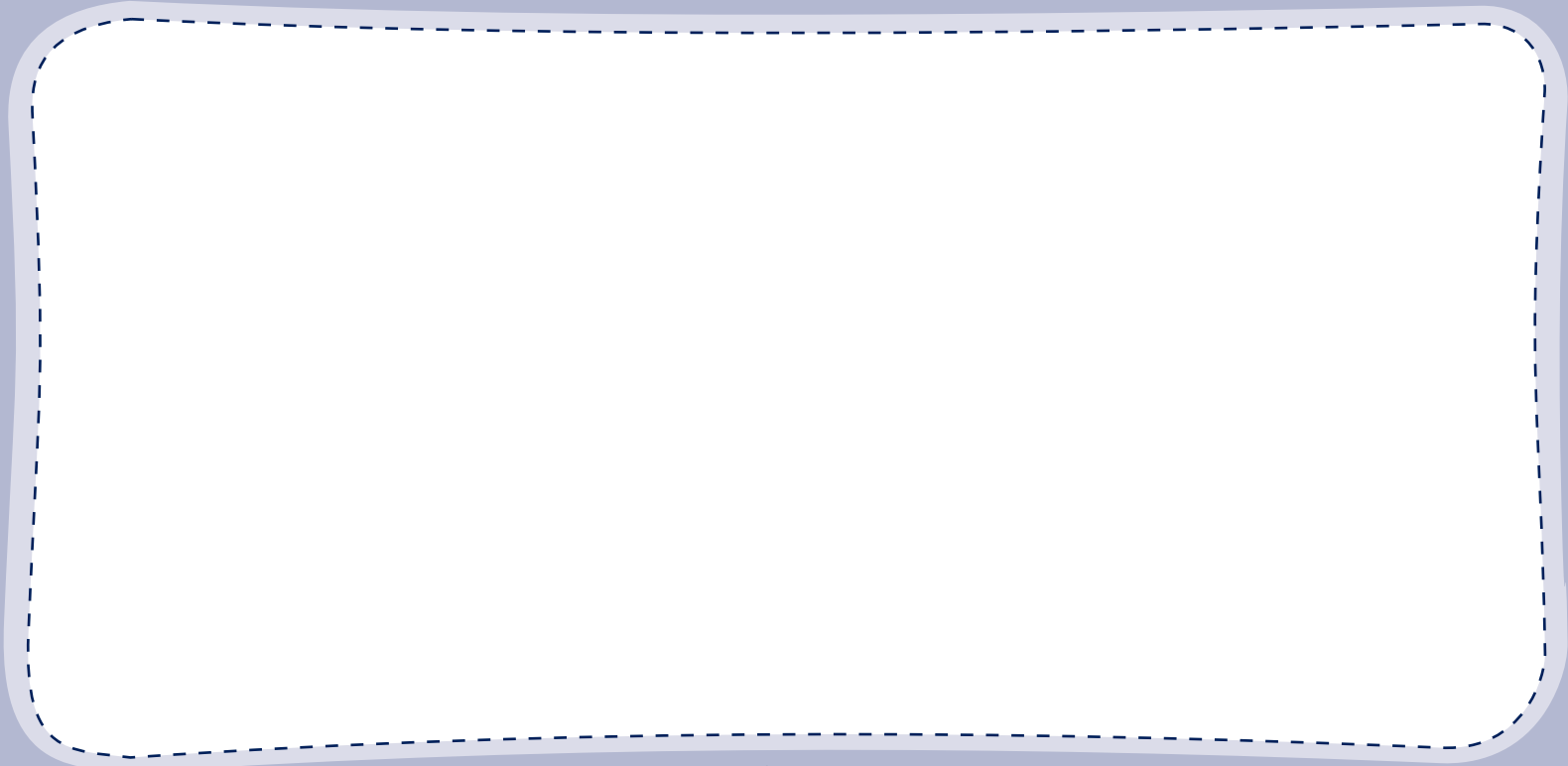
**My Personal Story  
about the War since  
December 2008**

*Here's more of my personal story and my family's story (I might be the only one to know about these things from one of the attacks). There have been many attacks on Gaza, but first, I will tell about the attack that influenced me the most:*

*I will never forget this particular attack because: .....*

.....

*Here is my drawing of the attack*





Where I Was

During that attack I was in \_\_\_\_\_

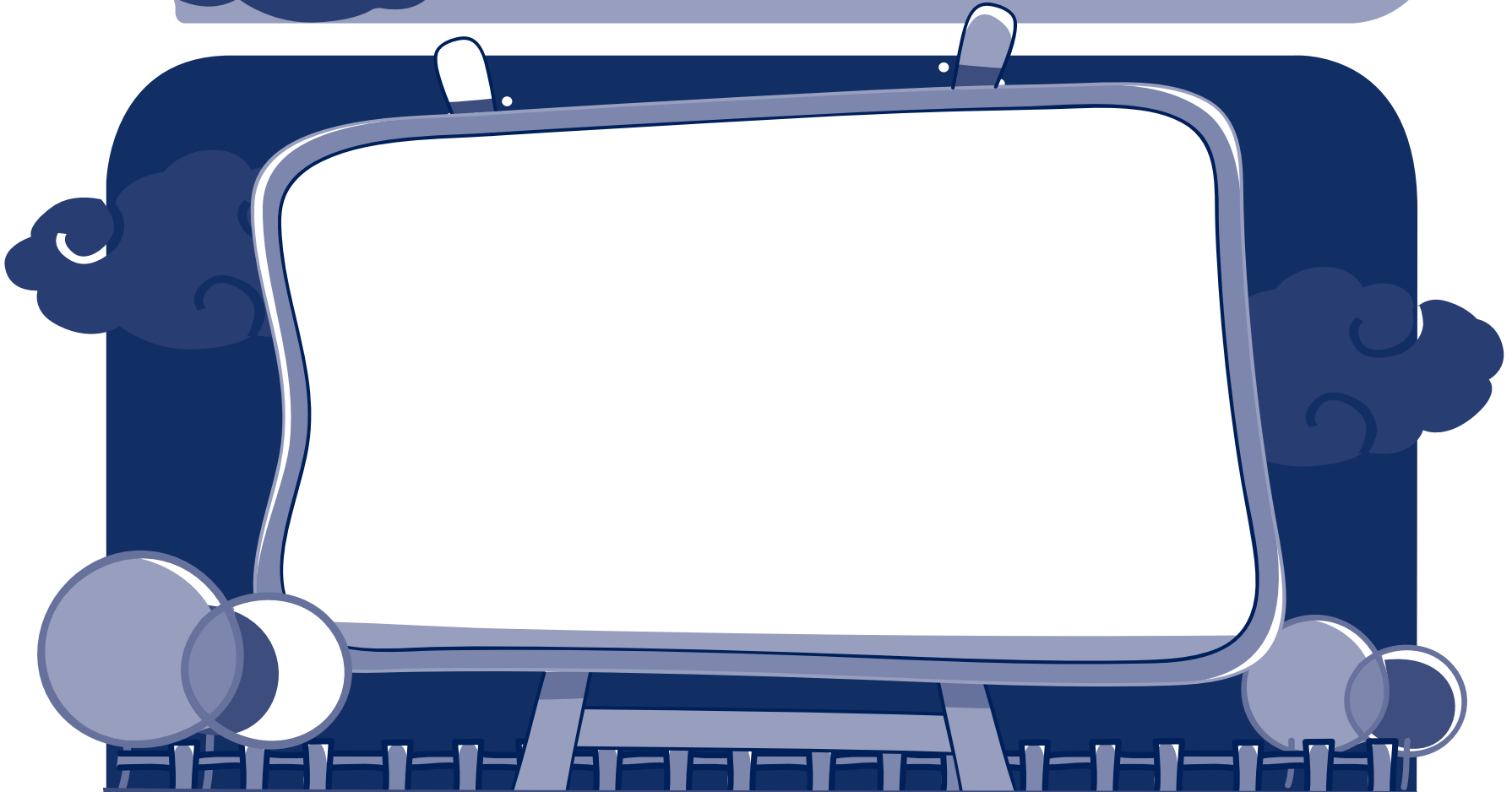
Who I Was With: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What I Was Doing

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*Here is a picture or drawing of where I was when at the time of this attack*