

The Hebrew Teacher

Maya Arad

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Cultures and generations clash in Maya Arad's insightful novella collection *The Hebrew Teacher*, which follows three storylines whose flows are sometimes concentric.

Ilana is a Hebrew professor. She's been at her school for "forty years and no one has ever interfered in her teaching. This is her fiefdom. It's small, but it's hers." But her situation in her department becomes precarious when Yoad is hired as the new professor of Hebrew literature. The two disagree over what it means to be Israeli. Soon, their uneven power dynamic threatens Ilana's life's work.

Miriam is on her first visit to California to see her grandson. Value-based generational differences soon become evident: Miriam's son Yoram and his wife Maya's marriage is on the fritz because a multimillion-dollar business deal fell through. The situation comes to a head when Yoram suffers a heart attack.

Elsewhere, Efrat internalizes the anxiety of her adolescent daughter Libby, who has trouble making friends in the age of the smartphone. Efrat's own adolescent trauma is triggered, leading her down a path toward catfishing and jeopardizing her daughter's fragile position in the cutthroat hierarchy of middle school girls.

With clarity and insight, *The Hebrew Teacher* dissects divides among Israeli immigrants in California. The American hunt for status collides with the less pretentious Israeli lifestyle. Vertical and horizontal disagreements between generations come to the fore when Ilana and Yoad argue over Israel and Palestine, Yoram and Maya struggle with the age difference in their marriage, Miriam questions Maya over motherhood, and Efrat and Libby butt heads over how to behave in a social media age.

With clarity and insight, the novella trio *The Hebrew Teacher* dissects the challenges of living as Israelis in California.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (March / April 2024)

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