



A Knot is Not a Tangle

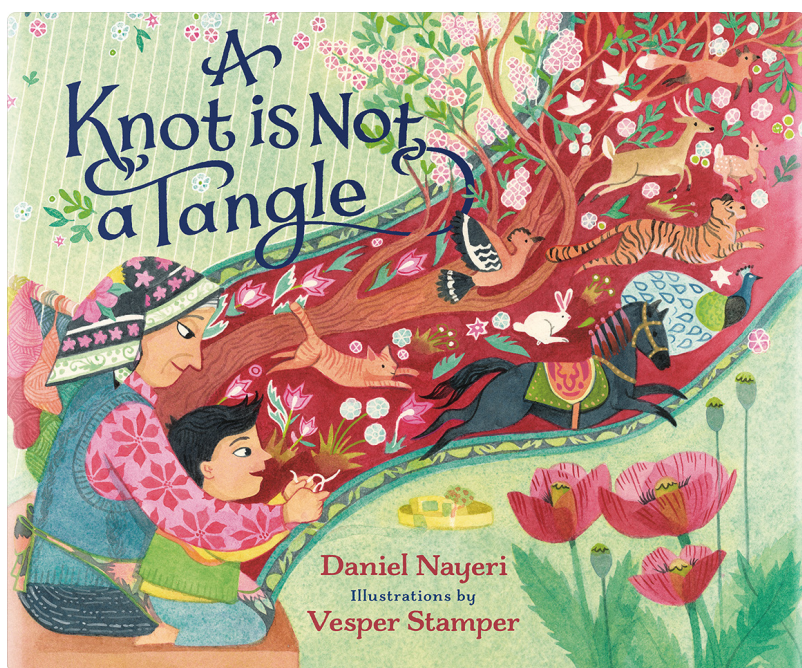
Daniel Nayeri
Illustrations by
Vesper Stamper

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About the Book

Knots are necessary and imperfection is a gift in this poignant picture book about an Iranian boy learning to make a new family rug with his grandmother, from an award-winning duo.

*Here's something to remember:
Even a rug can be a precious thing.*

One morning, a young boy is woken up early by his grandmother. It's time to make a new rug for the family. Together, they wash and dye the wool. When it's time to knot the threads, the young boy grows nervous. He wants to make it perfect. But why aren't the colors right? And why can't he weave as swiftly as his grandmother?

In this lyrical picture book about imperfection, tradition, and togetherness, *A Knot Is Not a Tangle* explores the memories woven into one family's Persian rug, and is a gentle reminder of imperfection's greatest gifts.



About the Author



Daniel Nayeri was born in Iran and spent some years as a refugee before immigrating to Oklahoma at age eight with his family. He is the author of several books for young readers, including *Everything Sad Is Untrue (A True Story)*, winner of the Michael L. Printz Award, the Christopher Medal, and the Middle Eastern Book Award, and *The Many Assassinations of Samir; the Seller of Dreams*, winner of a Newbery Honor. He lives in the US with his wife and son.

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(near Charlotte)

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About the Illustrator



Vesper Stamper is the author and illustrator of several books. Her illustrated picture books include *The Greatest*,

The Most Clever Girl: How Jane Austen Discovered Her Voice, and *Amazing Abe: How Abraham Cahan's Newspaper Gave a Voice to Jewish Immigrants*. Her YA debut, *What the Night Sings*, was a National Book Award nominee, a National Jewish Book Award finalist, and a Morris Award finalist. Vesper has a BFA in Illustration from Parsons and an MFA in Illustration as Visual Essay from School of Visual Arts. She teaches illustration at School of Visual Arts.

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Pre-Reading Activities

Connect: Look at the cover of *A Knot Is Not a Tangle*. We see a grandmother and her grandson embracing, and intricate patterns, animals, and colors. How does the illustration make you feel? What do the colors and patterns remind you of? Talk in small groups or with your partner.

Build Background Knowledge: This story takes place in Isfahan, Iran. Locate the setting on a map. How many hours would it take for you to travel to Isfahan from where you live? The country of Iran is a textured, vibrant place with all kinds of people, landscapes, foods, and culture. Learn more about it [here](#).

Discussion Questions

Nuts and bolts of storytelling



This is a story about a little boy learning how to make a traditional Persian rug with his grandmother. He is the **protagonist** of the story, the main character. Talk (or write) about the plot. What happens at the beginning, middle, and end of the story? This brief recap is called a **synopsis**.

What **genre** is this story and how do you know?

The back of the book has **nonfiction** facts about rug making and the knotting methods that rug weavers use. What makes that page nonfiction? Name one fact that you learned after reading it.

Memory-keeping

In a sense, this story is about meaningful old objects and the stories they carry. Daniel Nayeri, the author, writes: “We eat together on the old rug. It’s fraying now. She tells me that she made the rug many years ago with her grandma. Now it’s our turn.” The word *fraying* means unraveling or being worn at the edges. What do you or your family have that is old and fraying or worn-out that also carries important memories?

Memories from the past are often fuzzy, especially if they’re from long ago. Sometimes time feels elastic—days feel long, and weeks feel short. Our memories might be unreliable. In the text it says: “All of this takes weeks, but in my memory, it’s one long wonderful day.” Think about when time felt stretchy to you. What happened on that day or moment? Write or draw it.



Process over perfection

The book says: “I take my turn. My fingers are too clumsy. It’s all wrong and I don’t like it.” Think of a time when you’ve tried to do something that didn’t feel easy. What have you been clumsy about that didn’t at first feel okay? What did you do to push past it? What does the boy in the story do?

The final product—the Persian rug—is not necessarily the most important result. Instead, in the story, we learn that the act of making the rug is what is meaningful. The process yields happiness and positivity for both the grandmother and boy. This is true for a lot of

things that we make and do. What *process* do you enjoy engaging in, with a result that doesn’t really matter?

The author writes: “A Persian rug is an imperfect thing. But its purpose is to make a precious memory.” Often, the memories that are stickiest for us are those that evoked strong emotions—either happiness, sadness, fear, or anger. Using the organizer below, think of moments when you felt these strong emotions. Then think of the story that caused it. If you were to depict (or show) that story on a rug, what would you draw?

Feelings	Small Story Moment	Rug Elements

Making and Convening with Care

In the story, the grandmother insists that making something with care is more important than making something that's perfect. What does that mean to you?

What have you seen that is made with care—either at home, at school, or in the community? How do you know it's made with care?

In the text, the grandmother refers to the meals they've shared on the rug. Meal time is often when we feel nourished both physically and also emotionally, as we sit with loved ones in community. What's a favorite meal you share with your family? Where do you convene, and how does care show up?

Extension Activities



Create: Design your own Persian rug. Will you make yours symmetrical (same on both sides) or asymmetrical (different on each side)? Will you include objects that tell a story, like animals, trees,

books, or anything else? What stories do you want to memorialize in tangible form? What memory do you have that you don't want to forget? What colors will you use?

Collaborate: Create a story with a partner and design a rug that tells it. Share with the class or a larger group.

Learn More: What is a loom? What are the various weaving techniques of rug making? Read and watch the resources below to learn more, and write the facts you learn as you go.

- [How a Simple Loom Works](#)
- [How a Persian Carpet Is Made](#)



Author's note: We'll want to be cognizant of our student community to ensure that no child feels inadvertently alienated when we discuss memories about families, gathering for meals, and family artifacts. Some of our students might have trauma associated with these conversations. For example, for me, it's triggering to hear when friends have old family items, because my father's family artifacts were all destroyed in the Iran-Iraq war. Be thoughtful about your language and try to expand questioning stems whenever possible to be as inclusive as possible of all children's experiences.

About the Guide Writer

Nawal Qarooni is a teacher educator and consultant for school districts across the country in literacy and family engagement. She and her team of coaches at [NQC Literacy](#) provide professional learning for teachers in foundational skills, culturally sustaining pedagogies, and literacy curricular work. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan, holds masters degrees from Syracuse University and Brooklyn College, and is a member of the Library of Congress Literacy Advisory Board. She is the author of *Nourishing Caregiver Collaborations: Exalting Home Experiences and Classroom Practices for Collective Care*.



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