



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

**About the Book of the Month:** This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of *A World of Difference*® Institute, ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

## Refugee

Alan Gratz (Author)

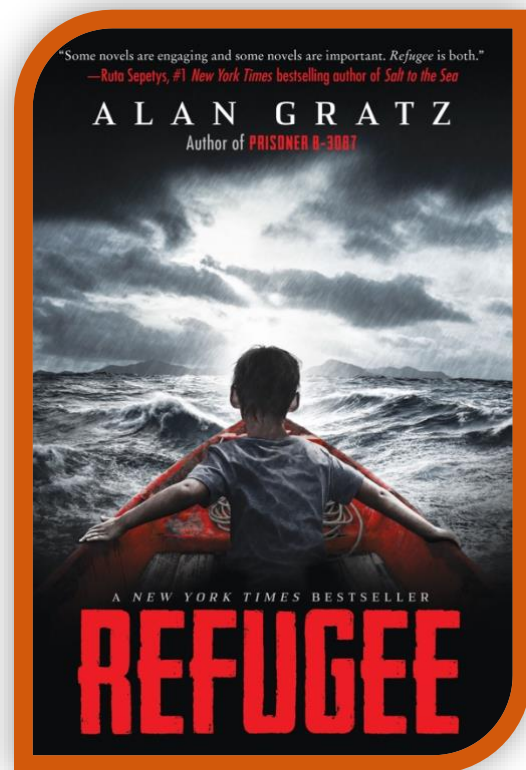
Josef is a Jewish boy living in 1930s Nazi Germany. With the threat of concentration camps looming, he and his family board a ship bound for the other side of the world. Isabel is a Cuban girl in 1994. With unrest plaguing her country, she and her family set out on a raft, hoping to find safety in the U.S. Mahmoud is a Syrian boy in 2015. With his homeland torn apart by violence, war and destruction, he and his family begin a long trek toward Europe. All three young people go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. All will face unimaginable dangers—from drownings to bombings to betrayals. But there is always the hope of tomorrow. And although Josef, Isabel and Mahmoud are separated by continents and decades, shocking connections will tie their stories together in the end.

ISBN: 978-0545880831

Publisher: Scholastic Press

Year Published: 2017

Age Range: 9-12



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## Book Themes

Refugees, Bias and Discrimination, Being Visible/Invisible, Taking a Stand, Feelings and Empathy

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

- |                      |                 |               |              |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| ■ apocalypse         | ■ dubious       | ■ manically   | ■ sham       |
| ■ asylum             | ■ flogging      | ■ Nazi        | ■ silhouette |
| ■ camouflage         | ■ fragile       | ■ oppressive  | ■ slogans    |
| ■ concentration camp | ■ homeland      | ■ pandemonium | ■ smuggler   |
| ■ condemn            | ■ humiliation   | ■ paranoid    | ■ swastika   |
| ■ condolence         | ■ inconceivable | ■ pathetic    | ■ synagogue  |
| ■ deserters          | ■ inevitable    | ■ ransack     | ■ terrorist  |
| ■ detention center   | ■ instinctively | ■ refugee     | ■ visible    |
| ■ documents          | ■ intimidate    | ■ sedate      |              |

## Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts (see “KWL Chart and Research” extension activity below). When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- What are the specific circumstances in each of the main characters' native countries that compel them to leave their homes?
- What does it mean to be a refugee? In what ways do each of the main characters and their families identify as refugees?
- How do the different characters in the book feel about leaving their homes? How do you think you might feel if you had to flee your home?
- When you first meet each of the three main characters (Josef, Isabel and Mahmoud), what do you think about them? How do your impressions of them change throughout the book?
- What different people does each of the families meet in their journey that helps them survive? What impact does this have on the main characters?
- Each of the main characters struggles with, at times, wanting to be invisible so as not to stand out or be noticed (i.e., feel safe), and at times, wanting to be visible so people will know their situation and help them survive. Mahmoud thinks to himself, “If you were invisible, the bad people couldn't hurt you. But the good people couldn't help you, either.” In what ways in the book do visibility and invisibility have both pros and cons? How do each of the characters reflect on this?
- What do each of Josef, Isabel and Mahmoud's stories and situations have in common? In what ways are they different?

- Each of the characters and their family's journey varies in terms of time elapsed, mode of transportation, how they are treated and what happens along the way. What stands out most in each of their journeys?
- How does each of the main characters (Josef, Isabel, Mahmoud) take on the role of parent/adult and how do they feel about taking on this role?
- Throughout the book, a range of emotions are expressed including fear, despair, desperation, relief, humiliation, terror, excitement, panic, hope, helplessness, etc. How are these feelings expressed by the characters and how do their emotions change throughout the course of their stories?
- What did you learn about each of the countries (Germany, Cuba and Syria), the crisis situation in those countries and their corresponding dictators (Adolph Hitler, Fidel Castro and Bashar al-Assad) that you didn't know before? What did they have in common and what was different?
- How do issues of bias, discrimination and injustice play a role in each of the three stories and how is injustice addressed throughout the book? What forms of bias and discrimination (i.e., religion, race, etc.) are present in the book?
- Each of the families lose someone during their journey (Josef's father, Hana, Ivan). How do the main and other characters deal with these losses in the book?
- How do some of the characters resist the injustice taking place and stand up for what's right? How do they feel about doing this? What is the impact of taking a stand?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What is your reaction to the endings of each of the three main characters' stories? What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think about how the author wove the stories of Josef, Isabel and Mahmoud together? What was the message in intertwining them together?
- What are the overall themes and messages of the book?

### Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

#### 1. KWL Chart and Research

Have students use KWL ("Know, Want to Know, Learn") Charts before, during and after reading the book.

Know	Want to Know	Learned

Prior to reading, have students identify what they know about the time period/refugee experience addressed in the book (they can select one or choose all three) and record their responses in the "K" column, which represents what they already know. This can be done following a brainstorming session as a class or individually. Next, have students record what more they want to know and additional questions they have about that time period in the "W" (Want to Know) column. As they read and discuss the book, they can continue to add to the "W" column and also record what they learned in the "L" column. When students finish reading the book, they can add final thoughts on what they learned ("L") and what they still want to know ("W"). They can then use what they have

recorded in the “W” column as the foundation for a research project about one of the time periods and countries addressed in the book. You can start by having them read the “Author’s Note” on pages 325–336 to learn more. Depending on how much time you have, provide students in class and homework time to complete the research project, which can culminate in an essay, PowerPoint or piece of artwork that illustrates what they learned.

## **2. Diary Entry of a Character**

Have students select one of the main characters (Josef, Isabel or Mahmoud) or a secondary character from the book. Instruct students to write journal entries for their chosen character, writing 8–10 entries that the character might have recorded before, during and/or after the book’s events. Remind students that the character’s thoughts, feelings and reflections are very important in a journal as well as their reaction to the day-to-day events including what happens to other characters as well as themselves. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas fleshed out. After they have completed the assignment, have them share their journal entries with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.

## **3. Mock Interviews**

Interview Josef, Isabel or Mahmoud: Have students imagine that they are a news or blog reporter and they are going to interview one of the main characters of their choice (Josef, Isabel or Mahmoud) for an article or blog. First, as a class, brainstorm some questions they might ask the characters; these can be general about the refugee experience or specific to each of the characters. Then, have students individually construct a list of questions for the interview as well as the responses the character might give to their questions. Students should base the character’s responses on what they already know, what they learned by reading the book and what they might imagine to be the characters’ answers. If they want to take the interview a step further, they can role play and record (audio or video) the interview by having one person play the interviewer/reporter and another student play the character. These can be shared with the class and possibly included on the classroom or school website.

## **4. Timeline Creations**

Divide students into small groups of 4–5 students each. Instruct the groups to select one of the characters’ stories in the book from which they will create a timeline that illustrates that character’s experience as a refugee. Explain to students that the refugee experience includes three parts: (1) leaving home and escaping the tragedy that has driven them from their homeland, (2) the dangerous journey they take in search of refuge/safety and (3) starting their life in a new home and adjusting to a foreign land. The timeline should include all of these parts of their experience as well as their predictions about what they think may happen next to the character. Students should use the details and significant events from the book such as: when/why the character left home, who was with them on the journey, modes of transportation they used, what happened to them and the secondary characters (family, friends), obstacles they faced, feelings they experienced and illness and death on the journey. They can use the maps from the book that illustrate each character’s journey (pages 318–323). The timeline itself can be created electronically or it can be a large visual representation of the experience. Students should use both words and illustrations (drawings, photos) in creating their timelines which will culminate in each group sharing their timeline with the class.

## 5. Social Action/Activism Projects

Talk with students about Mahmoud's story, which illustrates the refugee crisis happening in Syria. You can share the following information:

*Roughly 11 million people from Syria have left their homes in search of safety and assistance since the country's civil war began in 2011. The current refugee crisis around the world has involved more than 65 million people forcibly leaving their homes. One in every 122 people is currently a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum. There are refugees fleeing Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria, and dozens of other countries. The refugees have been fleeing civil war, persecution and terror—traveling at great lengths and great risk to survive.*

After providing some background, engage students in a discussion about what they can do about the refugee crisis and the different kinds of advocacy and activism in which they can participate or initiate. As a class, brainstorm different ways they can get involved using ideas from [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#). Have students come up with 4–5 possible actions they can take to do something about the current refugee crisis which may include: educating other students and community members about what's happening, holding a fundraiser to support organizations that are helping refugees, writing letters to elected officials in support of increasing aid or taking in more refugees. When you have a few ideas that everyone feels good about, divide the students into groups and have each group take on one of the ideas. Alternatively, you can choose one idea as a class and have students work in small groups on different aspects of the idea. Consider ways to involve the rest of the school and community in these efforts.

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on refugees, bias and discrimination and acting as an ally.

### Curriculum Resources

'Migrant Caravan' and the People Seeking Asylum, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/migrant-caravan-and-the-people-seeking-asylum](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/migrant-caravan-and-the-people-seeking-asylum).

Refugee Crisis in Europe: How Should the World Respond?, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/refugee-crisis-in-europe-how-should-the-world-respond](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/refugee-crisis-in-europe-how-should-the-world-respond).

We Were Strangers Too: Learning about Refugees through Art, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art).

Who Am I? Identity Poems, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems).

### Websites

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-in-activism](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-in-activism)

A list of ideas for bringing social activism into the classroom and outside of the school walls. These strategies can be acted upon individually, organized together as a group and young people can join with a larger effort that is taking place locally or nationally.

### Be An Ally: Six Simple Ways

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways)

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

### Holocaust Education

[www.adl.org/educational-programs-training/holocaust-educations](http://www.adl.org/educational-programs-training/holocaust-educations)

Provides educational programs and resources offered by ADL to help educators and students study the history of the Holocaust.

### Listen to the Voices of Immigrant and Muslim Youth

[www.adl.org/blog/listen-to-the-voices-of-immigrant-and-muslim-youth-1](http://www.adl.org/blog/listen-to-the-voices-of-immigrant-and-muslim-youth-1)

This blog encourages people to listen to the voices of young immigrants in order to understand their fears, their experiences, their plight and their humanity so that we can promote school communities that respect, protect and fight for them.

### Myths and Facts about Immigrants and Immigration

[www.adl.org/education/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration)

A list of common myths about immigrants and immigration and the facts.

### Safe and Inclusive Schools for All

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all)

This resource provides information about how to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive school community.

### Table Talk: Family Separations and Detentions at the Border

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/family-separations-and-detentions-at-the-border](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/family-separations-and-detentions-at-the-border)

This table talk provides parents and family members with tips and strategies to engage youth in conversations about the issue of family separations at our border.

### Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Bias, Discrimination & Hate: Anti-Immigrant, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[178\]=178](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[178]=178)

Genocide & Holocaust, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-4=1&tid\[183\]=183&tid\[184\]=184&tid\[185\]=185&tid\[186\]=186&tid\[187\]=187](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-4=1&tid[183]=183&tid[184]=184&tid[185]=185&tid[186]=186&tid[187]=187)

People, Identity & Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[207\]=207](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[207]=207)