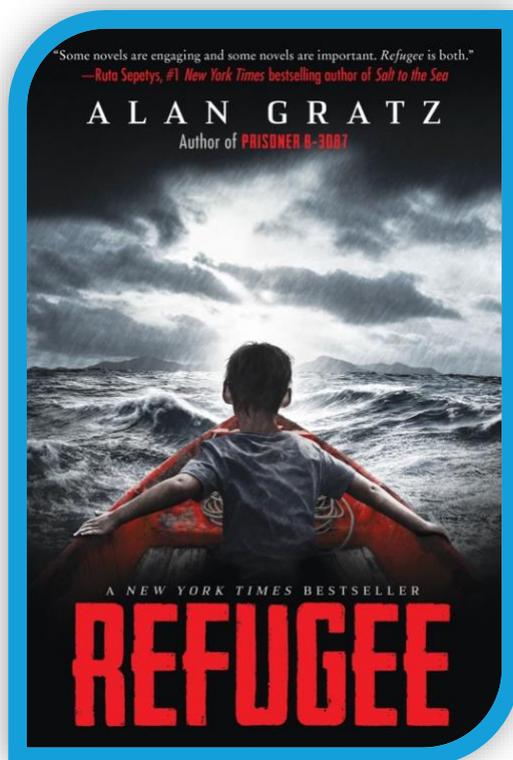


ADL / Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide: 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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



© Scholastic Press

Refugee

Alan Gratz (Author)

ISBN: 978-0545880831

Publisher: Scholastic Press

Year Published: 2017

Age Range: 9-12

Book Themes

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

About the Book

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.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, you can use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the story?
- What does it mean to be a refugee and how do each of the main characters and their families identify as refugees?
- Which of the stories and/or main characters most resonated with you? How so?
- In what ways are each of the main characters' (Josef, Isabel and Mahmoud) stories and situations similar and different from one another?
- What are some of the strongest emotions expressed throughout the book? Why did the characters experience those feelings? Can you identify with those emotions? How so?
- What did you learn about each of those time periods and refugee stories that you didn't know before?
- How do issues of bias, discrimination and injustice play a role in each of the three stories?
- How did you feel about how the book ended? What do you think will happen next with each of the stories?
- Why do you think the author told these stories together and intertwined them with each other?
- What do you think is the overall message of the book?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations that you can highlight to make this a learning opportunity for you and your child.

1. The Refugee Crisis

The book is a work of historical fiction and the stories focus on three 12-year-olds and their families. The characters are based on real-life experiences of refugees during three different time periods: 1930s Nazi Germany, Cuba in 1994 and Syria in 2015. If your child doesn't know the word refugee, define **refugee** as someone who flees persecution, conflict or war. Explain that persecution is when people are continually treated in a cruel and harmful way, often due to their race, religion or political opinions. Talk with your child about the refugee experience, which typically includes three distinct parts that are illustrated in the book: (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. Explain that there is a very serious and large refugee crisis happening today. There are currently sixty-five million people who have been forced to leave their homes which include refugees fleeing Syria (where Mahmoud was from), Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and dozens of other countries. If you want to learn more about the refugee experience and refugee crisis, see these additional resources: [The Refugee Crisis](#) (Newsela) and [Figures at a Glance](#) (UNHCR).

2. Feelings and Empathy

There are a wide range of feelings expressed by the main and secondary characters throughout the book including: fear, sadness, excitement, despair, terror, hope, anticipation and more. Encouraging children to identify and explore these feelings helps them deepen their understanding of how feelings are expressed, expand their vocabulary for describing their own feelings, and build empathy. As you read the book, ask your child how different characters feel and how they have come to those conclusions. Build empathy and understanding by asking children how they might feel in a similar situation. Because the book is about a difficult subject, be sure to ask them how they feel about what they are reading, give them ample time to express their own feelings and be accepting of all the feelings they share. Don't be surprised if either a variety of feelings emerge or very little emotion is expressed. Sometimes feelings can develop later after children have had time to process them. While we can never "walk in someone else's shoes," we can foster empathy by helping children learn to understand the feelings and experiences of others.

3. Social Action and Activism

Sometimes when children hear about bias and injustice in the world, they want to do something about it. Given the current refugee crisis (upon which Mahmoud's story is based), talk with your child about the ways people have been taking action on behalf of refugees through fundraising, volunteering with refugee support organizations, making donations, reading stories about refugees, educating others and writing to elected officials about increasing aid and/or taking in more refugees. Your child may also want to do something to help by themselves, with their school or as a family. Using ADL's Table Talk (parent/family discussion guide) on [Refugees, Reactions and World Response](#) and [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#) together, you could come up with ideas for taking action in their school or as a family. There are several organizations listed that provide support to refugees and you could learn more about what they're doing or get involved in some way. In addition, you can act as a role model and do something yourself, then talk with your child about what you're doing and why.

Other Books You May Like

Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan by Mary Williams,

www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/brothers-in-hope-the-story-of-the-lost-boys-of

Making It Home: Real-Life Stories from Children Forced to Flee by Beverley Naidoo,

www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/making-it-home-real-life-stories-from-children

The Journey by Francesca Sanna, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-journey

We Are Like the Clouds/Somos Como las Nubes by Jorge Argueta, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/we-are-like-the-cloudssomos-como-las-nubes

ADL Additional Resources

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

Curriculum Resources

Identity-Based Bullying," www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying.

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

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

Who Am I? Identity Poems," 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

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

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

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

Table Talk: Refugees, Reactions and World Response

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/refugees-reactions-world-response

Refugees from Syria have been leaving their homes in search of safety and assistance. This table talk provides parents and family members with tips and strategies to engage youth in conversations about the refugee crisis.

Children's Books

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

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)