

Refugee

This gripping novel follows three children in different time periods, as they flee their homelands during times of crises: Josef, a Jewish boy, escaping Nazi Germany in 1938, Isabel a Cuban girl in 1994, and Mahmoud, a Syrian boy, in 2015. Each sub-story depicts the characters' desperation as they seek safety for themselves and their families. Despite being from distinctly different times, the author weaves all three together at the end. Suitable for read-aloud, novel study, or lit circles in grades 5-7, it will spark discussion of oppression, hope, rejection, survival, discrimination, immigration, refugees, responsibility, and sacrifice. Teacher guidance highly recommended.

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

Extensively

THIS PRODUCT SUPPORTS THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF THE BC CURRICULUM:

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

Refugee extensively supports the Language Arts curriculum, "Exploring stories and texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to the world." Grade 5 teachers will find connections to immigration and multiculturalism. Grade 6 teachers will find provocations for global issues and governance: "Systems of government vary in their respect for human rights and freedoms." Music competencies are demonstrated as one

character links identity, culture, and belonging to her beloved Cuban music (clave), and seeks to express her journey metaphorically through its rhythms.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

The novel can be used as a full class read-aloud, novel study, or for lit circles. Teacher guidance is highly recommended due to the seriousness of the issues covered, and the levels of discrimination, injustice, and violence portrayed. In addition to conducting inquiries into government systems, migration, and global issues, students can keep reflection journals on the characters' circumstances. Students can explore common elements of the three characters' stories. Students can respond to a key quote: "I was waiting for the world to change, Chabela: It didn't. Because I didn't change it." As the character does, students can reflect on Isabel's interpretation of her journey as a song.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Multiculturalism:

The main characters encounter discrimination, injustice, and violence because of their cultural identities. For example, one of the prison guards refers to the Syrian refugees as "filth" and "parasites". Some minor characters were required to implement discriminatory acts while others embraced the opportunity.

Ability:

One protagonist, Joseph, slaps his mentally ill father and falsely threatens him with a return to prison, in order to keep his father quiet during a health inspection. Joseph was afraid that the health inspectors would bar the Jewish family from immigration to Cuba, and return them to Nazi Germany if the mental illness was revealed.

Belief System:

Joseph and his family are persecuted because they are Jewish. He and his mother are killed in a concentration camp during the holocaust. Mahmoud is a devout Sunni Muslim. He notices that non-Muslim people look "uneasy" and "frown" when he and the other Syrian refugees engage in traditional

prayer. Mahmoud interprets these looks as a message that he is "doing something wrong." In response to being fenced out of Hungary, some of the Syrian refugees cry out, "We're not terrorists!" Anti-communist policies contribute to the poverty Isabel lives with in Cuba. Prayers from different faiths are said during burials at sea.

Socio Economic:

Joseph and Mahmoud come from professional families with some wealth. Joseph's mother buys his sister's freedom with a pair of diamond earrings, but does not have enough to save Joseph or herself. Mahmoud's family encounters bribery and extortion in their flight from Syria to Germany. While their money helps the family make certain parts of their journey possible, it does not guarantee survival. Isabel and her family are too poor to hire a proper boat when they flee Cuba. Their homemade boat is so leaky the passengers must take turns swimming to reduce the weight on board, and Isabelle's friend is killed by a shark during his turn in the water.

Violence:

The refugees encounter much violence, including barrel bombs, missiles, beatings, and shootings. Mahmoud's friend is beaten by Sunni children for being a Shiite. A man is shot in the head right next to Mahmoud, and Mahmoud later suffers from a tear gas attack when caught up in a crowd of refugees trying to cross the Hungarian border. Josef's father recounts the intentional drownings of prisoners each night in his concentration camp. Josef's mother is forced to choose which of her children will escape death.

Ethical:

Some refugees engage in bribery and are prey to extortionists. Mahmoud seeks to stay "invisible" rather than speak up for his rights, especially after he is beaten for trying to help a Shiite friend. Some protagonists encounter the injustice of the Nuremberg laws. Some mention is also made of Germans who were shamed or mistreated if they did not support the Hitler Youth Party. Isabelle's father joins a riot and throws a bottle at the Cuban police. Isabelle's family attempts to avoid the American coast guard so that they can gain refugee status in the United States. Joseph joins a ship mutiny.

Humour:

Isabelle's father uses gallows humour when he suggests the refugees call their leaky boat "The Floating Coffin."

Safety:

The refugees, in their desperate attempts to flee their homelands, enter into many unsafe environments and engage in a number of unsafe activities. For instance, Mahmoud and Isabelle, along with friends and family, both flee their homelands in highly unsafe, overcrowded boats, while Joseph joins a mutiny that, if successful, would have left his boat without a proper crew. The refugees also attempt to challenge and/or evade officials in order to cross between countries.

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?

Extensively

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS COMMENTS:

This historically accurate book is full of oppression and the struggle to survive. It depicts danger and cruelty in plain language but this is representative of real peoples' stories. It is important that this book be approached thoughtfully as the content may distress sensitive students. The novel will help students empathize with the human face of current and previous refugee crises. Students will gain an understanding of those who face oppression and feel that their best chance of survival is to flee their homelands.

GENERAL CONTENT

CONTENT

Is the resource engaging?

Extensively

Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?

Extensively

THIS RESOURCE SUPPORTS THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ABORIGINAL WORLDVIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES:

- Connectedness and Relationship
- Awareness of History
- Emphasis on Identity
- Language and Culture

AUDIENCE:

Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

Extensively

Can reading level be adjusted?

Moderately

Is the level of detail appropriate?

Extensively

Is the content of particular interest to male students?

Extensively

Is the content of particular interest to female students?

Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

The novel follows three children in different time periods, as they flee their homelands during times of crises. The story rotates chapter by chapter between protagonists. While some may find the multiple storylines challenging, the chapters are short and the action moves briskly, clearly linking shared experiences, and the three voices and time periods give a broad perspective. There are many opportunities for students to reflect and think critically about historical and current conflicts, and the human response to crises. The novel is available in alternate formats (e.g.

audiobook or CD) supporting adaptation. Students can also be assigned just one storyline to follow.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

Extensively

Is the location of illustrations appropriate?

Extensively

Is the resource easy to use?

Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?

Extensively

Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?

Extensively

The font and leading make this book accessible to a range of upper elementary students. Maps of each character's journey help to set context. The novel itself is 317 pages. It is highly recommended that students read the 13 page author's note which provides historical information and suggestions for further support of refugees.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

Extensively

PLOT DESCRIPTION:

Refugee is a gripping novel which follows the alternating stories of three characters as they flee from their homes: Josef, a Jewish boy, escaping Nazi Germany in 1938, Isabel a Cuban girl in 1994, and Mahmoud, a Syrian boy, in 2015. After his father's release from Dachau, Joseph and his family board a ship to Cuba. Isabel and her family leave Cuba after her

father is identified in a demonstration against Castro. According to "wet foot/dry foot" policy, they must navigate their homemade boat to Florida and land ashore. Mahmoud's family are contemporary figures. Having survived a missile attack, they travel overland and through dangerous waters seeking refuge in Germany.

RELATED COMMENTS:

Each sub-story of Refugee is well developed and readers can understand the desperation of the main characters as they seek safety for themselves and their families. While each part is from a distinctly different time, Gratz masterfully, and surprisingly, weaves all three together at the end. Much discussion will ensue from the plight of these characters and themes of oppression, hope, rejection, survival, responsibility, and sacrifice. This crossover book, while fictional, includes historically accurate information. As well, it adds a human face to the current crisis facing many Syrians. As author Ruta Sepetys comments, "Some novels are engaging. Others are important. Refugee is both."

GENRE:

- Contemporary
- Historical

LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Complex conflict
- Rich Characterization
- Well-developed themes
- Point of view

TYPE:

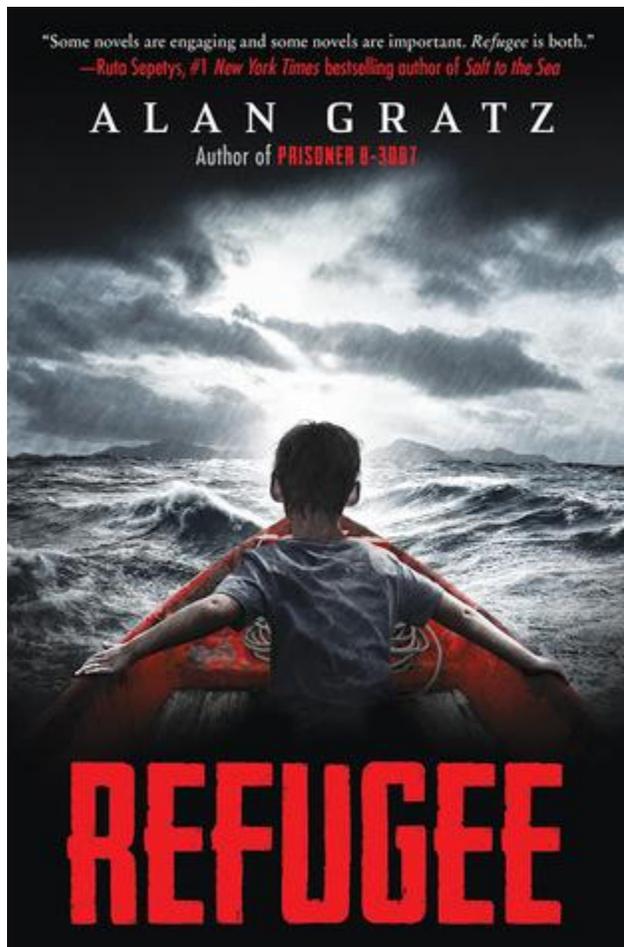
Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

READABILITY:

- At intended grade level(s)

Refugee is the 2018 Winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award and the 2018 Winner of the Jewish Book Council Award: Young Adult Literature. Refugee is also a notable book on lists compiled by: -Young Adult Library Services Association 2018 Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers Selection -Young Adult Library Services Association 2018 Best Fiction for Young Adults -Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2017, Middle Grade -Publishers Weekly's; Best Books of 2017, Middle Grade -The New York Times Notable Children's Books of 2017, Middle Grade -Centre for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Multicultural Children's Books of 2017 -Notable Books for a Global Society 20



Author/Publisher/Website

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2017

Primary Identifier

9780545880831

Recommended Grades & Subjects/Courses

5-7

Evaluation/Record Entry Date

May/2018

Subject

Applied Design, Skills & Technology

ID

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