

DISCUSSION GUIDE

AGES
9-12
GRADES
4-7

“Some novels are engaging and some novels are important. *Refugee* is both.”

—Ruta Sepetys, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Salt to the Sea*

“An incredibly important, heartrending, edge-of-the-seat read.”

—Pam Muñoz Ryan, author of the Newbery Honor Book *Echo*

“Full of struggle, heroism, and non-stop adventure...terrific.”

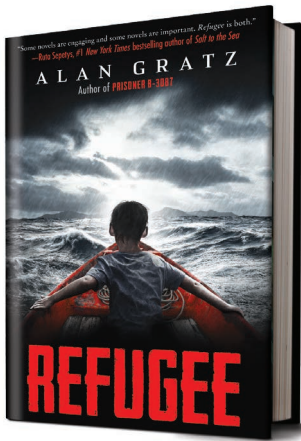
—Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, author of the Newbery Honor Book *The War That Saved My Life*



REFUGEE

by ALAN GRATZ

About *Refugee*



Hardcover:
978-0-545-88083-1 • \$16.99
Also available in ebook and audio formats.

Three young people are looking for refuge, a place for themselves and their families to live in peace. Separated by decades in time and by oceans in geography, their stories share similar emotional traumas and desperate situations. . . . and, at the end, connect in astounding ways. Josef in 1930s Nazi Germany, Isabel in 1990s Cuba, and Mahmoud in present-day Syria—all three hang on to their hope for a new tomorrow in the face of harrowing dangers.

★ “Nothing short of brilliant.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Gratz skillfully intertwines the stories of three protagonists . . . filled with both tragic loss and ample evidence of resilience, these memorable and tightly plotted stories contextualize and give voice to the current refugee crisis.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



About the Author

Alan Gratz is the acclaimed author of several books for young readers, including *Prisoner B-3087*, which was named to YALSA's Best Fiction for Young Adults list; *Code of Honor*, a YALSA Quick Pick; and *Projekt 1065*; a *Kirkus* Best Book of the Year. Alan lives in North Carolina with his wife and daughter. Look for him online at alangratz.com.

Pre-reading Activity

In this book, you will encounter cultures that may or may not be familiar to you. Research and become familiar with these terms before you read:

For Josef's story: Adolf Hitler, *Kristallnacht*, Dachau, bar mitzvah, *minyán*, *yarmulke*, *tallisim*, *Führer*

For Isabel's story: Batista, Fidel Castro, *el norte*, *clave*, *mañana*

For Mahmoud's story: Bashar al-Assad, Aleppo, Daesh, Mecca, hijab, EU (European Union)

CCSS.RL.4-7.4

Discussion Questions

Key Ideas and Details

1. Discuss the reasons that Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud's families leave their homes. What are the situations in each of their lives that force them to flee? How are their situations similar and how are they different? **CCSS.RL.4-7.1**
2. What is the theme of this book as expressed through the central characters? What do you feel is the most important idea in each of these stories? Provide examples in the plot of each story to support your ideas. **CCSS.RL.4-7.2,3**
3. Discuss the personalities of each of these young people: Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud. In what ways do each of them have to take charge of their families' plights at different points in their story? Describe the points at which each young person has to act as an adult. **CCSS.RL.4-7.3**
4. How do the parents in each of these families change in the course of their journeys? Compare the fathers and mothers of Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud, and discuss the ways that events in each story shape their responses to their situation. **CCSS.RL.4-7.1, 3**
5. Compare the method of travel for each of these refugee families. How does Josef's sea voyage compare to those of Isabel and Mahmoud? What is the most threatening part of each of these voyages and how do those threats create obstacles for the families as they travel? **CCSS.RL.4-7.3**

Craft and Structure

6. Josef says, "It was like they were invisible . . . people chose not to see them." (p. 18) How does this simple statement reflect his experience

on the train in Nazi Germany? Why do the people ignore them? Compare his experience to Mahmoud's when he says, "They only see us when we do something they don't want us to do." (p. 214) **CCSS.RL.4-7.4**

- Why do you think the author chose to tell these three stories in alternating chapters? What is the effect on the reader of moving back and forth between the stories from different periods of history? **CCSS.RL.4-7.5**
- Who are the helpful people in each of these three journeys? Why do others treat the refugees with meanness and disrespect? How do these experiences affect each of the families and lead to the survival of certain family members? **CCSS.RL.4-7.6**
- How does the author develop the point of view of each of the characters? What is the impact of seeing how many days each character has been away from home at the start of each section? How do the stories of these three children intersect in the end, even though they are separated by many years? **CCSS.RL.4-7.6**

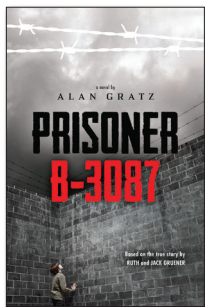
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Listen to the audiobook of *Refugee*. What is the experience of hearing the main characters speak rather than reading their words on the page? How does your perception of these stories change when you hear them narrated in a recording? **CCSS.RI.4-7.7**
- Compare the stories of Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud to others you have read about refugee children. There are many stories of Holocaust victims like Josef and his family, but fewer that recount events that are more recent, such as the war in Syria. Compare the experience of Mahmoud's family to one described in a *Time* Magazine article: <http://time.com/a-syrian-refugee-story/> **CCSS.RI.4-7.**
- Research the history of the three dictators in these stories—Adolf Hitler, Fidel Castro, and Bashir al-Assad. Discuss how the policies and beliefs of these leaders have affected the lives of the characters in each story. Are the lives of the people in each of these places still the same today or have their lives improved? **CCSS.RL.4-7.9**

Post-reading Activity

Can you find places in your community that are helping refugees to settle into a new life? Discuss ways that you could help children that have been affected by a refugee experience become acclimated to a different country with different customs. **CCSS.RL.4-7.9**

Other Books by Alan Gratz



PRISONER B-3087

Scholastic Press
March 2013

Hardcover:
978-0-545-45901-3
\$16.99

Also available in ebook
and audio formats.

“Heartbreaking, gripping, raw, and emotional . . . storytelling at its finest.”

—VOYA Magazine

“A powerful story, well told.”

—School Library Journal

“An extraordinary, memorable, and hopeful saga told in unflinching prose.”

—Kirkus Reviews



PROJEKT 1065: A NOVEL OF WORLD WAR II

Scholastic Press
October 2016

Hardcover:
978-0-545-88016-9
\$16.99

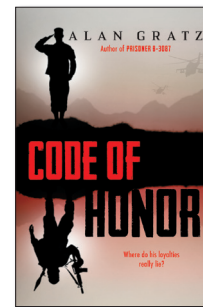
Also available in ebook
and audio formats.

★ “A winning combination of action, suspense and historical setting.”

—School Library Journal,
starred review

★ “A rare insider's glimpse into the Hitler Youth: animated, well-researched, and thought-provoking.”

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review



CODE OF HONOR

Scholastic Press
September 2015

Hardcover:
978-0-545-69519-0
\$17.99

Also available in ebook
and audio formats.

“Readers will be swept up by both the intrigue and the rapid pacing . . . in this action-packed thriller.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Exciting, at times ripped from the headlines, and scary . . . A winner for independent reading and deeper discussion.”

—School Library Journal

Recommended Further Reading After Finishing *Refugee*

90 Miles to Havana by Enrique Flores-Galbis.
Roaring Brook. 2010

Based on the author's experiences when he was sent away from Cuba during Operation Pedro Pan in 1961, this is a heart-wrenching account of families torn apart and the terror of a boy alone in a refugee camp.

Darkness Over Denmark: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews by Ellen Levine.
Holiday House. 2000

These factual stories chronicle the remarkable efforts by the Danish people to help the Jewish population escape from the Nazi regime in 1943, based on interviews with survivors.

Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank.
Bantam reissue edition. 1993

When Anne's Amsterdam family goes into hiding from the Nazis in 1940, she records her most private feelings to her diary, a factual record of the difficulties of living life in hiding for over two years.

Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan.
Scholastic. 2000

Forced to flee their privileged life in Mexico in the 1930s, Esperanza's family lands in a migrant workers' camp in California.

Inside Out & Back Again by Thanhha Lai.
HarperCollins. 2011

In this story based on the author's own experience as a refugee from Vietnam, a young girl eventually finds a new home in Alabama, but also the cruelty of classmates who make fun of her.

A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story
by Linda Sue Park. Clarion. 2010

Salva, one of Sudan's "lost boys," spends years in a refugee camp before finding a new home in America. He later returns to Sudan where his story intersects with Nya's, whose life revolves around carrying water for her family.

Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes.
Crown. 2017

A refugee family that has fled the city of Mosul, in Iraq, is miraculously reunited with their beloved pet after he is lost on their boat to Greece.

Now Is the Time for Running by Michael Williams.
Little, Brown. 2013

Deo and his brother Innocent flee the dusty soccer field in their village in Zimbabwe when the soldiers arrive. Hoping for a safe haven in South Africa, they face the prejudice that many refugees suffer.

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry. HMH Books for Young Readers. 2014 (25th anniversary edition)

Annemarie's family joins the successful effort to help the Jewish population of Denmark to escape the country after the Nazi invasion. Based on a true story.

Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town by Warren St. John.
Delacorte. 2012

Determined to help a diverse group of refugee children, a female soccer coach establishes a team called the Fugees in the Georgia town that is their new home.

Prisoner B-3087

Based on the true story by Alan Gratz with Ruth and Jack Gruener. Scholastic. 2013

As a boy of ten when the Nazis invade Poland, Yanek loses all he holds dear. During the course of World War II, he survives ten different concentration camps in a remarkable true story of survival.

The Red Pencil by Andrea Davis Pinkney.
Little, Brown. 2014

Life in Amira's peaceful Sudanese village is destroyed by war, sending her on an arduous journey to a refugee camp where the simple gift of a red pencil opens new possibilities in her world.

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey
(Arabic and English edition) by Margriet Ruurs.
Orca. 2016

Illustrated with stone images by a Syrian artist, this is one family's story of fleeing their war-torn country for refuge in Europe.

Websites for Further Research After Finishing *Refugee*

The story of the MS *St. Louis* and Captain Gustav Schroeder:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005267>

US immigration policies during World War II:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094>

Images of people leaving Cuba in 1994:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/11/20-years-after-the-1994-cuban-raft-exodus/100852/>

Life in a refugee camp today:

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/crisis-syria/life-zaatari-refugee-camp-jordans-fourth-biggest-city>

Discussion guide written by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature consultant and editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th Books of Junior Authors and Illustrators.

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