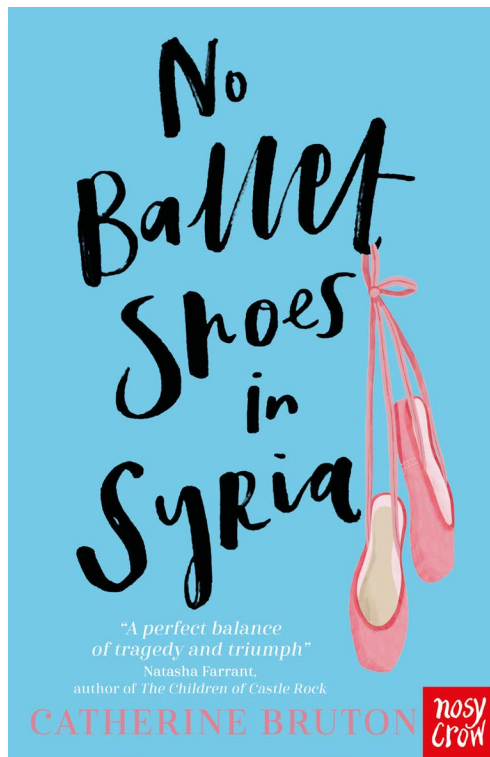


*“A perfect balance of tragedy and triumph”*

Natasha Farrant,  
author of  
*The Children of Castle Rock*



*“When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit for a new generation and never more timely.”*

Hilary McKay,  
author of  
*The Skylarks' War*

**A captivating story, filled with warmth and heart, with wonderfully authentic ballet detail and an important message championing the rights of refugees.**

Aya is eleven years old and has just arrived in Britain with her mum and baby brother, seeking asylum from war in Syria.

When Aya stumbles across a local ballet class, the formidable dance teacher spots her exceptional talent and believes that Aya has the potential to earn a prestigious ballet scholarship.

But at the same time, Aya and her family must fight to be allowed to remain in the country, to make a home for themselves and to find Aya's father – separated from the rest of the family during the journey from Syria.

#### **About the Author:**

Catherine Bruton studied English at Oxford University and has been juggling life as a teacher, children's author and mum for the past fifteen years.

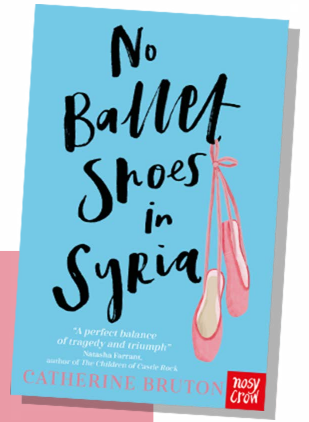
As an English teacher she sees first hand the impact stories can have on young readers – opening their eyes, expanding their horizons, making them ask questions and see the world differently.

Her books tackle some of the big issues faced by young people today – terrorism, immigration, the cult of celebrity, the refugee crisis – in ways that are heart-breaking, often hilarious, but invariably hopeful.



# No Ballet Shoes in Syria

## Discussion Questions



Once you have read the book, ask everyone to discuss their initial responses to the story. Make sure they know what is happening in Syria, and they understand that there are many children like Aya across the UK and Europe.

- We first meet Aya and her family when they have arrived in England. Can you imagine going to a different country where no one can speak your language? How would that make you feel?
- At the beginning, Aya's Mum is very quiet and she hasn't been eating. How do you think this makes Aya feel?
- Why do you think Ciara appears to dislike Aya?
- Aya and Dotty become good friends despite how different their lives appear to be. Discuss the ways they are similar, why do you think they become so close?
- How does this friendship help Aya?
- Miss Helena tells Aya that she '*relied a great deal on the kindness of strangers*' (p. 46). Discuss the different ways Aya and her family are shown kindness.
- We read about Aya's journey through flashbacks. How would you have felt throughout this journey? (e.g. on the boat, or shut in the container?)
- Think about what home means to you. Aya and her family have to flee their home to stay safe. What are the things that remind Aya of home? How different or similar are these to the things that remind you of your home?
- Discuss the word 'refugee'. What did you think this meant before reading *No Ballet Shoes in Syria*? Has reading this changed your view? How does this word make Aya feel?
- How does dance help Aya confront her past? Why do you think that it is only through her dance that she is able to allow her memories in?
- Aya is helped by people in the community. In what ways does she become a part of this community? What impact does she have on those that she meets?
- How did you feel about the ending to the story? Aya never finds her Dad, how is she able to cope with this?