

Collecting Children's Refugee Literature: A Bibliography*

by [Elisa Mason](#)

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A wealth of children's books has been written over the years about the refugee experience. Many of these stories successfully convey the universal emotions of fear, grief, and confusion that arise when our worlds are suddenly upended. Others pay homage to the resilience of children when placed in difficult situations over which they have no control. These narratives present ideal teaching opportunities to explore such themes as compassion, empathy, tolerance, justice, conflict resolution, and a respect for human rights. In addition, children's refugee literature can be used to introduce the fundamentals of a wide variety of classroom subjects, such as geography, history, art, social studies, and language/literature.

This bibliography was compiled to support the efforts of primary school teachers in these areas and to suggest relevant titles for incorporating into school library collections. The following criteria were considered for selection purposes:

- titles that are appropriate for an elementary school audience
- books in different formats for different reading levels
- stories that reflect diverse refugee populations
- narratives that highlight different facets of the refugee experience

While a number of book review resources were consulted to identify relevant titles, the resulting collection cannot be deemed comprehensive. In the end, the bibliography includes only English-language books published as of 1990, many of which focus on refugees who ended up in the United States. However, all major geographical regions of origin are represented, and myriad phases of the refugee experience are introduced, for example, flight/arrival, refugee camps/resettlement, confusion/adjustment, and sorrow/coping mechanisms.

The first section organizes titles by format and audience; if available, a link is provided to more information about the book on the publisher's web site. A [complete list](#) of these titles is available through Amazon.com. Section two notes several general resources that teachers can review for ideas on how to discuss the refugee experience in a classroom setting. Also included are specific guides retrieved for individual books listed in the bibliography.

Readers who would like to select a story based on a refugee's region-of-origin can do so using the geographic index in the annex.

1. Children's Literature

Picture Books/Younger Readers

Alfredito Flies Home by Jorge Argueta; illus. by Luis Garay; transl. by Elisa Amado. Toronto: Groundwood Books; Berkeley: House of Anansi Press, 2007.

- After four years in the U.S., Alfredito and his family are returning for a visit to their homeland, El Salvador. This story focuses less on the experience of newly arrived refugees in their host country, and more on the strong ties to and feelings for the home country and family left behind. Includes a Spanish/English glossary.

- [More information](#)

Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan by Mary Williams; illus. by R. Gregory Christie. NY: Lee & Low Books, 2005.

- This book describes the arduous journey undertaken by thousands of Sudanese boys who sought safety in refugee camps, first in Ethiopia, then in Kenya. Includes an afterword on the U.S. resettlement of 3,800 "lost boys" and a map.

- [More information](#)

Chachaji's Cup by Uma Krishnaswami; illus. by Soumya Sitaraman. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2003.

- A grandfather shares magical stories with his grandson, as well as his memories of the partition of India in 1947. A beloved teacup was one of the few items saved. A brief afterword is included.

- [More information](#)

The Color of Home by Mary Hoffman; illus. by Karin Littlewood. NY: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2002.

- This is the story of a young Somali refugee boy and his adjustment to life in the U.S. He finds a way to deal with his sorrowful memories and to express his emotions through painting and color.

- [More information](#)

Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom by Dia Cha; stitched by Chue and Nhia Thao Cha. NY: Lee & Low Books; Denver: Denver Museum of Natural History, 1996.

- This book describes the fighting that disrupted the lives of the Hmong in Laos, the narrator's escape to a refugee camp in Thailand, and her eventual resettlement to the U.S. Unusually, the words are supplemented by pictures from a story cloth, a traditional Hmong art form that depicts events through embroidery. A lengthy afterword provides background about the Hmong, their needlework, and the historical events that brought many of them to the U.S.

- [More information](#)

Four Feet, Two Sandals by Karen Lynn Williams & Khadra Mohammed; illus. by Doug Chayka. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2007.

- Two Afghan girls in a refugee camp in Pakistan take turns wearing a pair of sandals, and learn about cooperation, friendship, and solidarity in the process.

- [More information](#)

Gleam and Glow by Eve Bunting; illus. by Peter Sylvada. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001.

- This story focuses on the separations that families must endure when conflict occurs: separation among family members, separation from home, and separation from the cherished things that refugees cannot carry with them to safety. The afterword notes that the book was inspired by actual events in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

- [More information](#)

How I Learned Geography by Uri Shulevitz. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

- Impoverished and hungry in a host country, a boy is angry when his father brings home a map instead of food one evening. However, he learns to appreciate the map when it becomes a mechanism for his escape from misery. The author's afterword notes that he and his family fled Poland and lived in the Soviet Union, in the part of Central Asia now known as Kazakhstan.

- [More information](#)

The Long Road by Luis Garay. Toronto: Tundra Books, 1997.

- After their village in an unspecified Central American country is destroyed, José and his mother must flee. This story describes the long journey they undertake in order to seek safety in a third country.

- [More information](#)

The Lotus Seed by Sherry Garland; illus. by Tatsuro Kiuchi. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1993.

- A story, simply told, of a girl's grandmother and the special significance of the lotus seed she carried with her when she escaped from Vietnam and made her way to a new country.

- [More information](#)

My Freedom Trip: A Child's Escape from North Korea by Frances Park and Ginger Park; illus. by Debra Reid Jenkins. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 1998.

- A young girl narrates the story of her escape from North Korea to South Korea. Traveling alone with a guide, she wonders when she will see her father, who was the first to leave, and when she will be reunited with the mother she left behind.

- [More information](#)

Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story by Ken Mochizuki; illus. by Dom Lee. NY: Lee & Low Books, 1997.

- This story recounts the steps taken by the Japanese consul in Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara, to save the lives of thousands of Jewish refugees from Poland during the Second World War. Includes an afterword by Mr. Sugihara's son.

- [More information](#)

The Silence in the Mountains by Liz Rosenberg; illus. by Chris K. Soentpiet. NY: Orchard Books, 1999.

- A poignant story of a boy who has fled his beloved homeland to find safety elsewhere, but who never feels quite at home until his grandfather helps him understand what he is missing. No country of origin is specified; however, the author includes a dedication to the "people of Lebanon."

- [More information](#)

Sitti's Secrets by Naomi Shihab Nye; illus. by Nancy Carpenter. NY: Four Winds Press, 1994.

- A young girl visits her Palestinian grandmother who "lives on the other side of the earth." Despite the lack of a common language, she experiences the joy of family and cultural traditions that unite people across time and distance.

- [More information](#)

Fiction/Older Readers

The Arrival by Shaun Tan. NY: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007.

- This graphic novel depicts the story of a man who leaves his country, which is overshadowed by some nameless menace. The surrealistic pictures and the unfamiliar alphabet help the reader feel the protagonist's confusion as he attempts to make sense of his new home.

- [More information](#)

Drita, My Homegirl by Jenny Lombard. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2006.

- Alternating chapters tell the stories of Drita, a refugee girl from Kosovo who has difficulties adjusting to her new environment, and Maxie, an African-American girl with a sad secret of her own, and how the two formed an unlikely friendship.

- [More information](#)

Give Me Shelter: Stories about Children Who Seek Asylum ed. by Tony Bradman. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2007.

- A collection of 11 short stories by people who were asylum-seekers themselves or who worked with asylum-seekers. The protagonists' countries of origin include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.
- [More information](#)

Home of the Brave by Katherine Applegate. NY: Feiwel and Friends, 2007.

- A beautiful story told in free verse from the perspective of a young Sudanese refugee boy, newly arrived in Minnesota. He is safe, but lonely, bewildered by the new culture confronting him, and wracked with guilt that he survived when so many others did not.
- [More information](#)

Mud City by Deborah Ellis. Toronto: Groundwood Books; Berkeley: House of Anansi Press, 2003.

- Shauzia is a tough, capable, headstrong Afghan girl living in a refugee camp in Pakistan. Sick of the conditions in the camp, she disguises herself as a boy and tries her luck on the streets of Peshawar. A testament to the resourcefulness of kids in the face of adversity.
- [More information](#)

The Other Side of Truth by Beverley Naidoo. NY: HarperTrophy, 2003.

- Two children are smuggled out of Nigeria after their family becomes a target of political violence. Once in London, their troubles continue when they are abandoned. This story captures the fear and confusion experienced by unaccompanied minors when they are thrust into the asylum process, and the tension and alienation they feel when trying to adapt to a new, often unwelcoming culture.
- [More information](#)

Non-fiction/Older Readers

Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees comp. by Deborah Ellis. Toronto: Groundwood Books; Berkeley: House of Anansi Press, 2009.

- A stark account of the impact of war on refugee children. The author interviewed Iraqi kids living in Jordan, and presents their heartbreaking stories in a straightforward way. While the children are diverse in terms of age, where they lived in Iraq, their religious affiliations, and family connections, they are similar in that their lives have all been indelibly marked by violence and tragedy.
- [More information](#)

The Journey That Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey by Louise Borden; illus. by Allan Drummond. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

- Presented as a scrapbook, with photos, reproductions of original documents, and original drawings, this book tells the stories of H.A. and Margret Rey, and chronicles their escape from Paris when the Germans invaded in 1940.
- [More information](#)

Making It Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee comp. by Beverley Naidoo. NY: Dial Books, 2004.

- Testimonies of refugee kids from Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, the DRC, Liberia, Sudan and Burundi. Each chapter begins with an overview of the conflicts in each country that led to the children's flight.
- [More information](#)

Why are People Refugees? by Cath Senker. Chicago: Raintree, 2005.

- This information book begins with definitions of refugees, internally displaced persons and economic migrants. Subsequent chapters review the history of refugees, discuss some of the reasons why refugees are forced to flee, and talk about the importance of home. One of the consultants to the author is an editor of the periodical, [Forced Migration Review](#).

- [More information](#)

2. Teaching Tools

Studies

Hope, Julia. 2008. "'[One Day We Had to Run](#)': The Development of the Refugee Identity in Children's Literature and its Function in Education," *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 39, no. 4 (December): 295-304.

Hope, Julia. 2007. "[Flightlines](#): exploring early readers for children about the refugee experience," *FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education*, vol. 49, no. 3: 289-98.

Teaching Guides (not available online)

Note: Unlike the children's titles listed above, I have not examined these teaching guides personally. Many of them are now out-of-print; if they are no longer available via the publisher, check [Worldcat.org](#), your local public library's inter-library loan system, or used bookstores for copies.

[Encouraging Refugee Awareness in the Classroom](#): A Guide for Teachers (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1995)

[I Am Here](#): A Citizenship Resource Pack for 11-14 year-olds to Teach about Refugees, Inclusion and Identity (Save the Children UK, 2004)

[Refugees: A Resource Book for Primary Schools](#) (Refugee Council, 1998)

Refugees: We Left Because We Had To (Refugee Council, 2004)

- Note: An [earlier edition](#) is available online in FMO's digital library.

Teaching about Immigrants and Refugees (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1996)

[The Uprooted](#): Refugees and the United States - A Multidisciplinary Teaching Guide (Amnesty International, 1995)

Curricula/Educational Resources (online)

[Classroom Resources](#) (Refugee Council)

- Annotated list of resources prepared for Refugee Week UK.

[Educational Resources for Teachers](#) (UNHCR)

- Provides access to educational materials and lesson modules for art, civic education, geography, human rights, history, and language & literature.

Global Communities: Learning about Refugee Issues (Refugee Week UK)

- Also prepared as a Refugee Week education project; this resource pack aims to "develop better understanding of global migration and refugee issues amongst young people and to support teachers in tackling these issues in their classes." There is a [primary school version](#)

and a [secondary school version](#).

[Refugees](#): a resource book for 8-13 year olds (British Refugee Council, 1992)

- Includes activities relating to leaving home, journeying to safety, living in a new country, and returning home.

[Teacher Resources](#) (Refugee Week Australia)

- Ideas for introducing refugee issues in the classroom.

Teaching Guides for Titles in This Bibliography

The Arrival - [Booktalk](#)

Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan - [Classroom Guide](#)

Chachaji's Cup - [Teacher's Guide](#)

Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom - [Classroom Guide](#)

Drita, My Homegirl - [Curriculum Guide](#)

Four Feet, Two Sandals - [Teacher's Guide](#)

Home of the Brave - [Teacher's Guide](#)

The Journey That Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey
- [Lesson Plans](#)

The Long Road - [Teacher's Guide](#)

The Lotus Seed - [Teacher's Guide](#)

The Other Side of Truth - [Teacher's Notes](#)

Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story - [Classroom Guide](#)

Annex: Geographic Index

This index organizes titles according to the home region of the refugee narrators/protagonists.

General

- *The Arrival*
- *Why are People Refugees?*

Africa

- *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*
- *The Color of Home*
- *Give Me Shelter: Stories about Children Who Seek Asylum*
- *Home of the Brave*

- *Making It Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee*
- *The Other Side of Truth*

Americas

- *Alfredito Flies Home*
- *The Long Road*

Asia

- *Chachaji's Cup*
- *Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom*
- *Four Feet, Two Sandals*
- *Give Me Shelter: Stories about Children Who Seek Asylum*
- *The Lotus Seed*
- *Making It Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee*
- *Mud City*
- *My Freedom Trip: A Child's Escape from North Korea*

Europe

- *Drita, My Homegirl*
- *Give Me Shelter: Stories about Children Who Seek Asylum*
- *Gleam and Glow*
- *How I Learned Geography*
- *The Journey That Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H.A. Rey*
- *Making It Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee*
- *Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story*

Middle East

- *Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees*
- *Making It Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee*
- *The Silence in the Mountains*
- *Sitti's Secrets*

For an online version of this bibliography, please visit
<http://forcedmigrationguide.pbworks.com/Collecting-Children%27s-Refugee-Literature>.

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**For another, more current, list of children's books that focus on refugees, please check out this [blog post](#) on Playing by the Book.