

Refugee Reading Guide
South Texas ISD Preparatory Academy
Summer, 2021

"They only see us when we do something they don't want us to do..."

I Introduction and Pre-Reading

Welcome to your summer reading of Alan Gratz's gripping novel, *Refugee!*

Before we begin, it is important to understand the difference between a refugee and an immigrant. Using a dictionary, look up the two terms and write the definitions in the box.

A refugee is

An immigrant is

In this book, you will be spellbound by the stories of three **refugees** that are similar in age to yourself. In order to fully prepare yourself to understand and know their stories, research and become familiar with these terms **BEFORE** you read:

For Josef's story: Adolf Hitler, Kristallnacht, Dachau, M.S. St. Louis, bar mitzvah, *minyach*, *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)

Now, let's get to know author Alan Gratz better through watching this video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkT6kxPD-I>

Based on what you just watched, write down three things you learned about him/his writing of this book that you believe will be important to reading and understanding it better:

1.

2.

3.

The Novel

Refugee by Alan Gratz is a historical novel that braids the stories of three young refugees in three different time periods and settings: 1938 Berlin, 1994 Cuba, and 2015 Syria. The circumstances of all the kids and families are dire, and their journeys are fraught with imminent danger. Although the three main characters are fictional, their stories represent a composite of real events that occurred to real people during each of the three time periods in the novel.

The characters in *Refugee*

Josef Landau

a 12-year-old German Jew in the 1930s, who tries to escape Germany to Cuba

Isabel Fernandez

a 12-year-old Cuban girl in 1994, who tries to escape Cuba's hunger crisis following the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the US

Mahmoud Bishara

a 12-year-old Syrian youth in 2015 whose house gets destroyed by a missile and whose family decides to flee to Germany

II Thematic Topic: Celebrations

Alan Gratz wrote about celebrations in this novel –

- Josef- bar mitzvah
- Isabel- singing with family
- Mahmoud- seeing the wedding procession

Celebrations are integral to the life of families and communities. Think about a special celebration (not a birthday) you and your family participated in during the past year.

What did you celebrate?

Your response:

How did you celebrate it?

Your response:

What made it special?

Your response:

What does the celebration reveal about what you value?

Your response:

Why is it important to celebrate even during hardships (think COVID)?

Your response:

III Reflection Questions

Choose TWO of the three questions below and answer in complete sentences.

1. In your opinion, what was the toughest choice or bravest act a character in *Refugee* had to make? Explain your answer using evidence from the novel.

Answer:

2. What are some similarities (courage, responsibilities, sacrifices, etc.) shared by Mahmoud, Josef and Isabel that allow them to persevere throughout their arduous journey? Explain your answer using evidence from the novel.

Answer:

3. Select one character from the novel and using specific detail, explain how that character has changed since the beginning of his or her journey.

Answer: