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The cultural fabric of our global society is constantly changing, becoming richer and more textured as it interweaves the lives of people from all over the world. The stories of newcomers both blend in with and stand apart from the stories of people who have lived in their homelands for generations, reminding us of our common humanity and unique histories.

Many immigrants arrive in the U.S. after fleeing inhumane conditions at home. According to a report from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 10.4 million “refugees of concern” in 2012, and almost half of those who were forced to leave their homes because of war or other peril were children. Adult and child refugees are relocated all over the world, and in the U.S., there are 350 resettlement agencies across the country. Many handbooks and tool kits have been published to help teachers deal with the challenges of teaching refugee children who have lived through trauma and violence and must now adjust to the unyielding demands of finding their place in a new culture. That process of adjustment is, of course, critical to the futures of those children as well as anyone involved in their lives.

Sympathy is a natural and appropriate human response to the suffering these children have endured, but when sympathy becomes pity, the child is reduced to the status of victim without agency. The 1951 Refugee Convention establishing UNHCR spells out that a refugee is someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” By this definition, a refugee is someone who is helpless, dependent, and powerless. But refugee children are much more than the sum of their violent pasts and deserve to be understood as such. Children’s literature that addresses real and fictional refugee experiences can expand readers’ understanding of the people whose lives are uprooted by war. If shared sensitively and thoughtfully in classrooms, such stories can be instructional as well as transformative.

Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has spoken often about “the danger of the single story,” in which the experiences of groups of people tend to be viewed in limited ways. The books for youth recommended below represent a few of the millions of stories of refugee children who have endured and flourished despite tremendous odds. The real and fictional children in these books guide readers’ attention not only to suffering but also to joy in little things—one rubber sandal, a well-loved Barbie doll, cattle sculpted from mud—all of which symbolize bigger things: friendship, loyalty, protection, safety.

The tenth anchor standard for reading in the “English Language Arts” of the Common Core State Standards states a goal: “Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.” This standard, focused on text complexity and type, underscores the importance of literacy development through a variety of sources, both fiction and nonfiction. By its very nature, personal narrative writing includes many of the elements that cross genres: dialogue, description, and biographical information. The fictional and nonfictional experiences of refugee children represented in the books below can be used in classrooms to serve multiple purposes. First, they affirm the lives of children who may themselves be refugees or are the children of refugees and seldom see themselves reflected in literature. Second, they provide readers of all backgrounds an opportunity to learn about lives different from their own and to make connections on a universal, human level. Finally, the books included here were chosen for their literary quality as well as their treatment of the topic of refugee experiences as varied and complex. Several of these books include glossaries, maps, references, and historical synopses, all of which can be used to teach students how information is delivered and can be understood in a variety of modes.

The titles below are grouped in sets of three, by geographical area, so that teachers using them in classrooms can guide students to see points of similarity and difference among stories of children from one region of the world. The sets of books are intended for readers between grades 4 and 7 and range in level of text complexity. Each set includes a picture book, which can be used to introduce the topic of refugee experiences as well as specific themes. Though often intended for younger readers, picture books provide valuable opportunities for older students to engage in repeated readings and close analysis. The other two texts are either longer fiction or personal narratives. This variety of literary forms invites readers to learn about refugee experiences from different perspectives, and the accompanying teaching activities will enable students to demonstrate understanding of the content as well as the forms of text.

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
TRANSPLANTED: STORIES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN
BY AMINA CHAUDHRI

Afghanistan

The theme of friendship, especially in the face of adversity, unites the following three books. The fictional and real children in these stories reach out to others to offer companionship and solace or to share memories of their lost homes and, in doing so, sustain their own optimism. Though they are devastated by the war, they recognize that by looking beyond difference and connecting with people around them, they are doing their part to create peace in a hostile world.

Anchor Text

Four Feet, Two Sandals. By Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed. Illus. by Doug Chayka. 2007. 28p. Eerdmans, \$17 (9780802852960). Gr. 1–3.

Ten year-old Lina lives in a refugee tent camp in Pakistan and has not worn shoes for two years, so when she finds a single sandal left by relief workers, she is overjoyed. Coincidentally, Feroza, another girl at the camp, has the second sandal. The girls agree to share their treasure, taking turns to wear the pair on alternate days. In the process, they forge a close friendship, built on shared stories of lost loved ones, memories of their homes in Afghanistan, and their longing to return. When Lina and her family are granted asylum in America, the girls must part. The sad ending is tempered by promises to “share again” some day.

Companion Titles

Making It Home: Real-Life Stories from Children Forced to Flee. By Beverley Naidoo. 2004. 128p. illus. Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780142404553). 305.23. Gr. 4–6.

Three personal narratives by Afghan refugee children living in Pakistan share one theme: nostalgia for a homeland that is known only through memories and a desire to return in safety one day. Eqleema’s, Mohammed Masoom’s, and Nadia’s lives are marked by the violence they have known and the resilience they have developed in the face of it. Staying healthy; working hard in school; and enjoying math, sewing, cartoons, poetry, and the company of friends provide joy and balance feelings of displacement.

Shooting Kabul. By N. H. Senzai. 2010. 272p. Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman, \$16.99 (9781442401945); paper, \$6.99 (9781442401952); e-book, \$6.99 (9781442401969). Gr. 4–7.

Fadi thinks he is to blame for the accident that resulted in his six-year-old sister being left behind in Kabul while the rest of the family escaped to safety in Pakistan and then San Francisco. The family’s emotional agony is palpable. At school, Fadi is bullied by racists but befriended by a fellow photographer, Ahn, whose Vietnamese parents also fled their home during the war. Fadi’s transition to his new life is deeply

influenced by vivid memories of the war, his lost sister, and a caring community of fellow Afghanis and other immigrants as well as hateful xenophobia triggered by 9/11.

In the Classroom

Students can create double-entry journals in which they copy meaningful quotes from each text, reflect on their reasons for choosing them, and write about what the words might mean to the characters as well as to themselves. After a discussion about significant themes in the personal narratives in *Making It Home*, students can write found poems in which they use words from a selection of text and rearrange and edit them in poetic form, capturing the essence of the narrator’s experience. Finally, each of these stories touches on the universal theme of the importance of friendship, especially in a time of need. Students can create a graphic web that lists the qualities of a good friend as described in the stories, add traits that they feel are important in their own lives, and write their own personal narrative about a real or imagined experience. Alternatively, webs can be created in the presentation platform Prezi, which allows users to embed graphics, sound, and animation.

Common Core Connections

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.5. Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
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BY AMINA CHAUDHRI

Iraq

The books below will introduce readers to different ways in which lives were impacted by persecution and violence before, during, and after the twenty-first-century U.S. and European military involvement in Iraq. The narratives in all three books share a longing for home and a place to belong. Through these firsthand translated accounts and interviews, readers will empathize with the individuals' nightmares, loss of family members, and the complexity of adjusting to a new life in a place where your presence is not always welcome.

Anchor Text

Mohammed's Journey: A Refugee Diary. By Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young. Illus. by June Allen. 2009. 32p. Frances Lincoln, paper, \$8.95 (9781847802095). 956. Gr. 4–6.

The first-person narrative, poignant watercolor illustrations, and photographs of real people and places lend this story a sense of immediacy. Mohammed and his mother are Iraqi Kurds who barely escaped Saddam Hussein's army with their lives. After a dangerous and terrifying journey, Mohammed and his mother are relocated safely in England. Although he is safe, Mohammed cannot forget the horrors he has witnessed: "The past is still in front of my eyes." The stark reality of the long-lasting consequences of war coexists with an optimistic future in this moving title.

Companion Titles

Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees. By Deborah Ellis. 2009. 128p. illus. Groundwood, \$15.95 (9780888999078); paper, \$9.95 (9780888999085); e-book, \$9.95 (9781554980086). 305.23086. Gr. 7–12.

The children in these accounts were not spared the horrors of war: they have witnessed death and torture; live today with nightmares and depression; and, in many cases, harbor a profound sense of injustice. Each narrative serves as an excellent starting point for discussion.

Out of Iraq: Refugees' Stories in Words, Painting, and Music. By Sybella Wilkes. 2010. 70p. illus. IPG/Evans, \$17.99 (9780237539306). 305.90691409567. Gr. 5–8.

As the title indicates, this volume explores the power of art to express the impact of war and displacement on Iraqi children and families. Some of the refugees featured in this book were artists before the war; some became artists as a result of it. Their work serves as a way to convey difficult feelings, describe experiences, and release inner turmoil. Original paintings and photographs of the storytellers will offer readers further connections to the stories.

In the Classroom

Using the glossaries at the end of each book about Iraq, teachers and students can create a "Word Wall" of vocabulary drawn from the personal narratives about refugee experiences. Students can select words from the books' glossaries as well as the interior texts. To deepen word knowledge and comprehension, students can create "Word Maps" for a selection of words to demonstrate their understanding of literal and figurative meanings of words, etymology, use, derivatives, parts of speech, and so forth. Many computer programs lend themselves well to creating Word Maps, which can then be presented or shared in groups. In addition, students can analyze the art and photographs in *Out of Iraq* and *Mohammed's Journey*, and integrate information from these sources to demonstrate understanding of a topic or theme and share it using PowerPoint, Prezi, Glogster, or another presentation platform.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7.** Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:
TRANSPLANTED: STORIES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN
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Kosovo

This trio of books sheds light on the lives of children affected by the Serbian war against ethnic Albanians and Bosnians in the late 1980s and '90s. Together, these stories allow readers to appreciate the range of factors involved in the characters' experiences as refugees: one does not leave his home country, another begins a new life in New York, and others are relocated to England. All of them know about fear, violence, and the physical and emotional toll exacted by war and displacement. Still, they maintain an optimism that is rooted in friendship, hope, and a gratitude for life itself. In addition to the content, these narratives can be used for their literary content and examined to learn more about the craft of writing, including point of view and descriptive language to convey real or fictional events.

Anchor Text

One Boy from Kosovo. By Trish Marx. Illus. by Cindy Karp. 2000. 32p. Harper Collins, o.p. 305.9. Gr. 4–7.

This slim photo-essay documents the true story of 12-year-old Edi and his family, who were forced to leave their home in Gnjilane, Kosovo, and live for two months in a refugee camp. The straightforward, unembellished third-person narration describes Edi's life as it was before the war, when he lived in Serbia under strict ethnic segregation laws that denied Kosovars many basic civil rights, such as education and fair pay. In the camp, Edi learns to sleep in a cramped tent; to use shared outdoor bathroom facilities; and, in perhaps the hardest adjustment of all, to wait—for food, water, and news of missing family members. Candid photographs capture the refugees' exhaustion and the sprawling vastness of the tent city. Edi's own voice, in the form of an e-mail to the author and photographer, is a moving end to this poignant story.

Companion Titles

Drita, My Homegirl. By Jenny Lombard. 2006. 144p. Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (9780142409053). Gr. 3–5.

In this novel, disparate worlds collide when unexpected friendship forms between Drita, an Albanian Muslim newly arrived in the U.S. from Kosovo and Maxie, an African American from Brooklyn. Each girl's story is told in the first person, offering readers a narrative that is rich in linguistic nuance and cultural perspective. Drita and Maxie have to shed their assumptions about each other, and with the gentle nudging of a few adults and a lot of serendipity, both come to realize that they have more in common than their immensely different lives would have them believe.

Making It Home: Real-Life Stories from Children Forced to Flee. By Beverley Naidoo. 2004. 128p. illus. Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (9780142404553). 305.23. Gr. 4–6.

Two stories of children affected by the Serbian persecution of Albanian Kosovars and Bosnians begin with succinct introductions that offer historical background. Doruntino is an Albanian Kosovar whose family relocated as refugees to England when she was four years old. Victoria Amina is Bosnian and was born in England 10 days after her family arrived as refugees. Both girls' short, personal narratives reflect on the deeply complicated experience of maintaining a proud ethnic heritage and adjusting to a new environment that is at once inviting and resistant toward newcomers.

In the Classroom

Engage students in a discussion about the first-person point of view as it differs in the fictional novel *Drita, My Homegirl* and the two personal narratives in *Making It Home*. Compare the use of language in these stories with the third-person narrative in *One Boy from Kosovo*. Ask students to write an account of an experience in their own lives, either in the first or third person, using descriptive language to evoke tone and feeling.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.6.** Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Book Links

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Sudan

The “Lost Boys” and “Lost Girls,” the children displaced by the Sudanese civil war, are now adults. The three books listed below provide the perspective of these survivors, now grown, looking back from a temporal and physical distance on the lives they once had and the ways in which the war changed them. This distance provides an analytical perspective that comes through in the vivid descriptions, nuanced responses to situations, and compelling story lines.

Anchor Text

Brothers in Hope: *The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*. By Mary Williams. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. 2005. 40p. Lee & Low, \$17.95 (9781584302322). Gr. 3–5.

This fictionalized story of a young boy’s survival of the Sudanese civil war does not cover his eventual relocation to a Western country as a refugee. Instead, he remains at the camp in Kakuma, Kenya, where he works to help rehabilitate other displaced children. In addition to perseverance, strength, and a good deal of luck, Galang’s survival is rooted in his love for his young friend, Chuti.

Companion Titles

Lost Boy, Lost Girl: *Escaping Civil War in Sudan*. By John Bul Dau and Martha Arual Akech. 2010. 128p. illus. National Geographic, \$15.95 (9781426307089); lib. ed., \$27.95 (9781426307096). 962.404. Gr. 7–12.

In this detailed and gripping memoir, Dau and Akech recount the agony of being separated from their family members, witnessing innocent people slaughtered, surviving journeys through harsh environments, and living many years in refugee camps before being relocated to the U.S. Their narratives span two decades, and readers will come away with a deep appreciation for the authors’ experiences.

A Long Walk to Water. By Linda Sue Park. 2010. 128p. Clarion, \$16 (9780547251271); paper, \$5.99 (9780547577319); e-book, \$5.99 (9780547532844). Gr. 6–9.

Park’s novel re-creates the true story of Salva Dut’s miraculous survival of the Sudanese civil war and years in refugee camps before being adopted by a family in New York. Intertwined is the parallel, contemporary story of Nya, a young girl in Southern Sudan, who has to walk for several hours each day to fetch water for her family. Nya’s and Salva’s stories give new meaning to the cliché “Never give up.”

In the Classroom

Engage students in conversation about key themes as they are presented in each of the books about Sudan above and use a chart to show connections among the thematic

elements in the texts. Next, have students watch the 2003 documentary film *The Lost Boys of Sudan*, and then compare and contrast their understanding of the content as it is delivered through the film and through the books. In addition, discuss how the illustrations in *Brothers in Hope* contribute meaning to the text and how they differ from the imagery in the film. *A Long Walk to Water* and *Lost Boy, Lost Girl* make use of alternating narratives for pairs of perspectives. After a discussion about each complete story through the separate narratives, engage students in a role-playing activity in which they assume the persona of a particular character and respond to classmates’ questions.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.5.** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.7.** Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium’s portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

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