

PEOPLE IN EXILE



No one becomes a refugee by choice. Many refugee camp residents used to be farmers or nomadic people and were used to living in their own houses in open spaces. UNHCR

‘Refugees show incredible courage and perseverance in overcoming enormous odds to rebuild their lives. Ensuring that they get the protection they deserve is a noble cause because refugee rights are human rights – and rights that belong to us all.’

António Guterres, UNHCR High Commissioner

CONCENTRATION CAMPS



The Oxford English Dictionary defines concentration camp as: a camp where non-combatants of a district are accommodated, such as those instituted by Lord Kitchener during the South African war of 1899-1902; one for the internment of political prisoners, foreign nationals, etc., especially as organised by the Nazi regime in Germany before and during the war of 1939-45.

The term lost some of its original meaning at the end of WWII when people fully understood what had been happening at Nazi concentration camps, and since then the term usually means: a place where people are imprisoned, forced to work in inhumane conditions with little or no food, and ultimately murdered.



UN DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are inherent to humans, and can neither be given nor taken away – we all have these rights simply because we are human. But human rights are not always respected or recognised.

We Are All Born Free – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures, with forewords by Irish award-winning author John Boyne and David Tennant, and a cover illustration by Peter Sis, was published to mark the sixtieth anniversary year of the Declaration. The thirty articles are illustrated by different artists, from all over the world, and each illustration is a unique and individual interpretation of an article. (See Relevant and Related Books in this pack)

In this book, the illustrations of Articles 14 and 15 might be of special interest to children:

Article 14: *If we are frightened of being badly treated in our own country, we all have the right to run away to another country to be safe.*

Article 15: *We all have the right to belong to a country.*



LIFE IN A REFUGEE CAMP

At the end of 2007 there were 11.4 million refugees and 26 million internally displaced people (IDP) forced to flee their homes by conflict or persecution (UNHCR figures). Afghans (around 3 million) and Iraqis (around 2 million) accounted for nearly half of all refugees under UNHCR's care worldwide in 2007, followed by Colombians (552,000), Sudanese (523,000) and Somalis (457,000).

Some were able to go home. Under voluntary repatriation programmes 731,000 refugees were repatriated in 2007. In addition, an estimated 2.1 million internally displaced people went home that year.

See: www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=12551

The number of people living in a camp depends on the crisis. When the number of refugees is in the hundreds of thousands, aid agencies try to set up several smaller camps rather than one massive camp. Smaller camps are easier to manage when it comes to fire risks, security problems, the spreading of diseases etc. Because of the often crowded and unsanitary conditions, many diseases affect people, eg diarrhoea, cholera, measles, malnutrition, malaria, head lice, TB and tetanus, sometimes causing death.

When they first arrive, refugees are usually registered or given some kind of document that they use to prove they are a resident of a camp and to get food rations. They also usually get a food package and other relief items, such as blankets, clothing and cooking equipment.

Shelters for refugees are usually made of local materials, such as wood, metal sheets, branches and trees and plastic sheeting. When possible, refugees build their own shelters with tools provided by the aid-workers, though sometimes the aid-agencies provide tents. In *Mud City* by Deborah Ellis, the streets and walls of the camp in

Afghanistan are made of mud, and many of the children have spent their whole lives there; but it is well-run and there are huts where women learn to read and do embroidery, though these double as sleeping quarters at night. Shelters usually have stoves for heat and cooking, although sometimes in warm climates cooking facilities are outside. You can read about such cooking facilities in *Mud City*. (See Relevant and Related Books in this pack).

Palestinian refugees have been living in camps in Lebanon and inside Palestine itself for more than fifty years and so often have permanent homes. (See photograph on the cover of this insert of Dheisheh Camp in Bethlehem, which has 11,000 residents in 1km squared.)

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

20 June every year is World Refugee Day.

- Can you think of ways in which you/your school might mark the day? How do we make our classrooms/school/community welcoming to all newcomers, including refugees, every day?
- Write a list of famous refugees on the whiteboard. Allocate one hour and ask the children, in groups, to research and produce as much information about them as they can. The names of these refugees should be relatively familiar to most children, eg Karl Marx, Jesus Christ, Lenin, the Von Trapp family made famous in *The Sound of Music*, Albert Einstein, Victor Hugo, Rudolf Nureyev, Sigmund Freud, The Dalai Lama, Frédéric Chopin, Sitting Bull, Hugh O'Neill. The teacher should ensure an adequate supply of reference books is available to the children, or that the children can access a reputable website such as:
www.unhcr.org/promref/index.html





TEAM SPIRIT

Visit the UNHCR website www.unhcr.org and read some of the comments by goodwill ambassadors to the UNHCR, like Angelina Jolie: www.unhcr.org/news/joliesudanjournal.pdf.

PERSONAL WRITING AND DIARY-WRITING

About Refugees

Discuss famous diaries that have been written by young people:

The Diary of Anne Frank, by Anne Frank (Puffin Books)
Zlata's Diary (Puffin Books, ISBN 9780140374636), begun by Croatian Zlata Filipovic when she was still in primary school.

For teenage readers:

Thura's Diary, by nineteen-year-old Thura al-Windawi (Puffin Books, ISBN 9780141317694) tells of her life in war-torn Iraq.

Over A Thousand Hills I Walk With You, by Hanna Jansen (Andersen Press, ISBN 9781842706732) is a very powerful and disturbing personal account of how eight-year-old Jeanne survived the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. **(This material is very challenging; teachers should read it before deciding to use it.)**

The teacher might read extracts if suitable.

- The children might be asked to write a diary account of what they imagine they would feel or see as they are fleeing to safety; or to write a journal entry from a position of safety, imagining they're refugees now safe in Ireland, looking back on what they had to endure while fleeing. What do they miss most about their own homeland?
- Having first talked around the class about their feelings, children could be asked to role-play leaving a place they really loved or leaving a dangerous and unsafe place to go and join their family. They might role-play how it felt to be a grandmother or close relative left behind, unable to escape to safety, just as Sadiq's grandmother was left behind because of the Irish government's rules on what constitutes a family.

DISCUSSION

In April 2008, JK Rowling and other children's writers, including Judy Blume and Michael Morpurgo, took a stand and publicly stated their beliefs when they signed an open letter calling for greater protection for children living in wartorn Darfur.

'It is time to change the narrative. The world needs to wake up. For too long it has let these children suffer. Our politicians need to act on Darfur.'

DISCUSSION

What do families bring with them as they flee war or imminent (and/or illegal) arrest or famine?

In *Boy Overboard*, by Morris Gleitzman, we see Dad rolling up prayer mats and Mum taking a picture that Jamal painted in school and a candlestick that's been in the family for 'hundreds of years'.

- Children might suggest five things they would probably have to bring (eg passports or other identification papers, medical information, money or jewellery, the warmest clothes they can find, water) and five that each child might bring as 'luxury' items (favourite toy, small rock or piece of soil or earth, photos of friends).

Some people think that refugees have no money, but most will have some – brought with them when they fled, some sent by relatives abroad. Refugees can sometimes sell goods of their own, such as possessions they no longer need or things they've made – refugees at a camp in Bethlehem sell embroidered goods to people who come to the camp.

- How might a refugee family travel? What dangers might they have to face? Where might they have to sleep and how will they select the safest possible place to sleep? The children in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, and Parvana in *Parvana's Journey*, travel on foot in search of refuge and shelter, while Shauzia in *Mud City* also travels on foot. Jamal and his family travel by boat in *Boy Overboard*. We see on the news that many refugees have been found hiding under false floors in lorries, in dangerous, cramped conditions. (See: Relevant and Related Books in this pack)

PERSONAL WRITING AND DIARY-WRITING

About concentration camps

In *In the Claws of the Eagle*, the final part of his Louise trilogy, written for older readers by Aubrey Flegg (see Relevant and Related Books), a young prisoner of Terezín concentration camp keeps a journal and makes the entries by the beam of the camp searchlight (pp215 –



217). Her entry for 23 September 1943 describes the only performance of the children's opera *Brundibár* during that winter of 1943.

- A class discussion could follow on the triumph of the human spirit over adversity – see Maria's comment: 'To us it was a victory over tyranny. ... We will defeat them in the end ... surely we will.'

In *The Cinnamon Tree*, Aubrey Flegg writes about Yola, a thirteen-year-old girl who is horrifically injured when a landmine explodes but who is determined to overcome her injuries and to continue to live life to the full.

The O'Brien Press ISBN 978-0-86278-657-1

In *In the Claws of the Eagle* (see above), Flegg celebrates the achievements of the starving, exhausted, dirty and flea-bitten inmates of the camp of Terezín. Again and again throughout the book, humans suffering unbelievably are lifted out of themselves and out of their misery by beautiful music or painting or other works of art. These works of art allow wretched people to leave their sufferings behind, if only for an hour or two, while they live in imaginations which have been liberated by beauty. Greta Hofmeister, Aninka from the opera *Brundibár*, who survived the Holocaust, said afterwards: 'Music! Music was life!' At the time, of course, the performers had no idea that the people they were performing for were on their way to the gas chambers. The opera *Brundibár* was actually written before the war, and had only one performance outside of Terezín. However, by that time, Krása, the composer, had already been sent to Terezín. In the camp, he had only a piano score, and adapted it from memory to the instruments he had available, and we see the efforts of the prisoners to procure instruments (see Chapter 23, 'Brundibár'). There followed an amazing fifty-five performances of the opera. On one occasion in 1944, it was even performed, at the behest of the Nazis, for the Red Cross. A Red Cross report of how good conditions in the camp were was the result of Nazi deception and mitigated by their ignorance

of the fact that many camp inmates had been deported to Auschwitz to reduce crowding and that the Jewish prisoners had themselves helped the Germans to deceive the inspectors about conditions, hoping and believing that other camps would benefit from their deception (*In the Claws of the Eagle*, pp225 – 231). Krása himself was murdered in Auschwitz, as were most of the children who performed in the opera. The opera was turned into an award-winning picture book in 2004, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak, and, remarkably, the book was then turned back/reinterpreted into an opera in 2005, and now both can be purchased together.

ROLE-PLAY/DRAMA

The children might read Chapter 23 (especially pp210, 211) of *In the Claws of the Eagle*, or do some research about the opera and might then act out the story of Aninka and Pepicek and the villainous organ-grinder, Brundibár, having discussed beforehand that the tyrant wouldn't have been defeated if the three hundred children (and the dog and the cat and the sparrow) hadn't joined forces to work together.

- On a lighter note, children could read p184 where the young boy, Pafko, tells how he walks about the camp holding a bucket, sometimes with a brick in it, in order to make the Germans think he is busy on an errand or following orders. The children might think about what they might have done in Pafko's situation – would they have been as resourceful if imprisoned in a concentration camp? The class might be asked to think of other ruses Pafko might have used and to dramatise these in a series of freeze-frames.
- Children might also study the words attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller about the necessity to stand up for what is right and the importance of looking after one another (See Teaching Guide, last page, *Faraway Home*, O'Brien Press website). Perhaps the senior children could give a talk at assembly, maybe on International Human Rights Day, 10 December, about what happens when people choose to ignore injustice and evil.

THE HUMAN SPIRIT

While we often associate the lives of refugees with their suffering and with the hardships they endure, there are also stories of achievement. Some refugees have been awarded university degrees and have become successful lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, poets, and even politicians. David Vincent, a former Sudanese refugee, is now a member of the UNHCR Speakers' Bureau in Australia and is quoted on their website explaining what 'protection' means to him. Palestinian poet, author and politician Mahmoud Darwish was once a refugee: when he was six, Israeli armed forces assaulted the village and Mahmoud fled with his family to Lebanon. When, the following year, the family returned to their occupied homeland, two settlements had been erected on the land, and they had to move to Galilee. He died recently, in Texas.