Children’s & Adolescent Literature on Refugee Experiences

Displacement Due to Violence and War

**Picturebooks**

Friends like to play war on the playground until a refugee child tells of losing his family in a real war.

A young boy in Syria is forced to stay inside due to the war around him.

True story of a young boy and musician who survives the Khmer Rouge killing fields and work camp.

True story of a boy who lost his leg in a land mine during the Russia/Chechnya war and became a refugee.

A boy separated from his family by the Khmer Rouge tries to survive when forced to work in the fields.

**Chapter Books**

Forced to become a child soldier, a 16-year-old Somali refugee confronts his painful past.

Short stories of children who escaped war and persecution in their countries to seek asylum.

Nonfiction graphic novel on the harsh realities of living in, and trying to escape, a war zone in Syria.

After an attack on his Sudanese village, an orphaned boy struggles to survive and escape the violence.

DeWoskian, Rachel (2019). *Someday We Will Fly*. Viking. YA HF
A Jewish family is separated and flees Poland for Shanghai during WWII as conflict increases in Japanese-occupied China.

Ellis, Deborah (2009). *Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood. NF
Interviews with 20 Iraqi refugee children about how the U.S. War on Terror affected their lives.

A teen is forced to flee to Canada and survive by himself when his father is arrested in Ethiopia.

Tara and her Kurdish family must flee from Iraq into Iran as they face an uncertain future.

In 1931 during the Depression, the U.S. “repatriated” Latinx citizens, sending them back to Mexico. When Estrella organizes a protest, she is dumped over the border and must find her way back to her family.

True story of a boy in a Cambodian labor camp who is forced to kill and survives by playing an instrument.

First-hand accounts of children forced to flee their war-torn homelands as refugees.

Perkins, Mitali (2010). *Bamboo People*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. YA RF
Two Burmese boys on opposite sides of a conflict, one a Karen refugee and the other the son of a doctor, meet in the jungle and must learn to trust each other to survive.
Amira's Sudanese village is attacked, and she flees to a refugee camp, expressing her dreams in drawings.

Nadia flees snipers in Aleppo during the civil war in Syria to meet her father at the Turkish border.

Refugees trying to escape at the end of WWII find themselves aboard a ship in danger of being torpedoed.

A memoir of a Congolese teen who survived a massacre to come to the U.S. as an activist and artist.

Collection of firsthand narratives stories from teens forced to flee from Central America to the U.S.

Deo goes on the run with his brother after his village is attacked in Zimbabwe, trying to get to South Africa.

**Journeys of Hardship, Loss, and Hope**

**Picturebooks**

A girl coming from Greece to the U.S. is separated from her favorite dress, which travels the world.

Kek, a young Sudanese refugee, is haunted by guilt and a sense of dislocation in snowy Minnesota.

Poems of the lives of children fleeing their homes in Central America to seek refuge in the U.S. Poetry

A young girl and her father travel by foot through Mexico toward the border with the U.S.

After his home is destroyed by the war in Bosnia, a boy finds hope in the survival of two goldfish.

A child forced to flee when war destroys her world and family is told there is no room in her new school.

A small sad boy joins a caravan of people to flee war in the Middle East, hoping one day to return.

Anh's story of traveling to Australia as a child with his family as refugees from Vietnam.

Forced to flee a civil war in Nicaragua, Jose and his mother struggle to create a new life in Canada.

A girl and her mother come by boat as asylum seekers from the Middle East to Australia.

War forces a child and his mother to flee a country in Africa, as he clings to his lucky charm, a marble.

A boy tries to squeeze a whale in his suitcase, a symbol of fitting his life in a suitcase before fleeing.

Migrants drown in a boat navigating treacherous seas, an indictment of society's treatment of migrants.

A family of refugees traveling from Iraq to Greece loses their treasured cat in the midst of their journey.

A family escapes from Vietnam on a small boat, intertwined with the journey of an ant colony.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annotation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lofthouse, Liz</td>
<td><em>Ziba Came on a Boat</em></td>
<td>Illus. Robert Ingpen. La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A young girl and her family make a dangerous journey by boat from Iraq to Australia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miller, David</td>
<td><em>Refugees</em></td>
<td>Melbourne, Vic., Australia: Lothian</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>VN</td>
<td>Two ducks have a difficult time finding a new place to live after their swamp is destroyed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milner, Kate</td>
<td><em>My Name is Not Refugee</em></td>
<td>Edinburgh: The Bucket List</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A young boy and his mother must leave town and walk and walk to find a safe place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orbeck-Nilsssen, Constance</td>
<td><em>Why Am I Here?</em></td>
<td>Illus. Akin Duzakin. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A young girl wonders what life would be like if she lived elsewhere or was a refugee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodkey, Geoff</td>
<td><em>We’re Not from Here</em></td>
<td>New York: Crown. Sci Fi</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Sci Fi</td>
<td>A boy and his family migrate to the planet Choom but must change the minds of the inhabitants who no longer welcome the “violent” humans who have already destroyed their own planet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanna, Francesca</td>
<td><em>The Journey</em></td>
<td>London: Flying Eye Books. RF</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A mother and her children journey into the unknown with fear and hope from the Middle East to Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shulevitz, Uri</td>
<td><em>How I Learned Geography</em></td>
<td>New York: Farrar. HF</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>HF</td>
<td>A boy escapes hunger and misery by studying his father’s world map as a Polish refugee during WWII.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skrypuch, Marsha. F. &amp; Ho, Tuan</td>
<td><em>Adrift at Sea: A Vietnamese Boy’s Story of Survival</em></td>
<td>Illus. Brian Deines. Toronto: Annick. NF</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>NF</td>
<td>Tuan and his family survive bullets and a leaking boat in long days at sea, fleeing Vietnam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple, Kate &amp; Jo</td>
<td><em>Room on Our Rock</em></td>
<td>Illus. Terri Baynton. Tulsa, OK: Kane/Miller/EDC</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>There are two ways to read this story, either with seals rejecting or accepting room for others on their rock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonatiuh, Duncan</td>
<td><em>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</em></td>
<td>New York: Abrams. Fantasy</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Pancho Rabbit goes on a dangerous trek in search of his father in El Norte, guided by a coyote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watanabe, Issa</td>
<td><em>Migrants</em></td>
<td>Gecko Press. VN Fantasy</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>A visually powerful narrative in which a group of animals are migrants are forced on a dangerous journey.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wheatley, Nadia</td>
<td><em>Flight</em></td>
<td>Illus. Armin Greder. Victoria, Australia: Windy Hollow. RF</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A family travel at night on a donkey fleeing bombs and violence to the safety of a refugee camp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young, Rebecca</td>
<td><em>Teacup</em></td>
<td>Illus. Matt Ottley. New York: Dial. Parable</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>RF</td>
<td>A boy travels across the sea in a rowboat in search of a new home, with a teacup of dirt from his home.</td>
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Chapter Books

After their home is bombed in Syria, Tareq and his family seek refuge with a militant group and then escape to Greece. Resilience in the face of darkness

A Salvadoran boy and his family join a caravan heading north, includes why they leave and their sadness at having to leave.

Poni must run for her life due to the Sudanese war in a long and dangerous trek to a camp in Kenya.

A boy with a mysterious past flees with a woman across Caucasus and Europe, facing many hardships.

A family from Bangladesh in New York City flee fearing deportation after 9-11 when their visas expire.

Ebo is on a dangerous journey from Ghana across the desert and ocean to find his family and a better life.

A boy makes a treacherous journey from Guatemala when his cousin is murdered by the drug cartel. Sequel: *The Crossroads* (2019). Dealing with life as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S.

A refugee ship from Nazi Germany is given entry to Cuba as a refugee boy befriends a Cuban girl.

Three refugee stories connect across time and place in harrowing journeys occurring in 1930s Germany, 1994 Cuba, and 2015 Syria.

A girl forced to flee with her Hindu family during the 1947 partition of India keeps a diary.

Miguel and his sister leave their Mexican village in a dangerous journey across the desert and border.

A boy must travel on a dangerous trek from Mexico to Los Angeles to reunite with his brother.

A family flees war-torn Syria, enduring refugee camps, ocean crossings, and swindlers to seek safety.

Lee, Julie (2020). *Brother’s Keeper*. Holiday House. HF
Two children flee from North Korea, trying to reach South Korea and safety during the Korean War.

A teen’s dangerous journey from Honduras through Mexico to the U.S. in search of his mother.

In Kosovo, Meli and her family flee the civil war, moving from one refugee camp to another.

Torres Sanchez, Jenny (2020). *We Are Not from Here*. Philomel. YA RF
Three Guatemalan teens run from violence in a desperate journey through Mexico to reach the U.S. border.

Wilkes, Sybella (1994). *One Day We Had to Run! Refugee Children Tell Their Stories in Words and Paintings*. Millbrook Press. NF
Collection of personal stories and paintings by refugee children from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

Orphaned by the Sudanese civil war, a boy leads other “lost” boys on a long walk to Ethiopia and Kenya.

Life in Refugee Camps and Detention Centers
Picturebooks
Saya takes action for her mother who is in a US detention center as an undocumented Haitian immigrant.
A family faces many challenges when a father is taken to a detention center to face deportation to Mexico.
In a refugee camp, Sami worries about the safety of the pet pigeons he left behind in Syria.
A stranger washed ashore on a remote island is put in a pen, rejected as different by the inhabitants.
An Afghan boy struggles with life in a refugee camp, finding comfort from bombs in weaving carpets.
A young girl misunderstands the word alien on her Latinx mother’s immigration card.
Sent to a labor camp during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a girl risks everything to play the piano.
An imagined devastating scenario in which a middle-class Australian family must flee to a refugee camp.
Lubna’s best friend in a refugee camp is a pebble who brings her comfort, but someone else needs it.
When gangs become a problem in a refugee camp in Tanzania, a coach organizes soccer games.
A Hmong girl in a Thai refugee camp finds the story within herself to create her own pa’ndau story cloth. HF
Two Afghan girls in a refugee camp in Pakistan share a precious pair of sandals brought by relief workers.

Chapter Books
A dystopia in which Muslim Americans are forced into internment camps and organize against silence.
A mother and child forced to flee El Salvador are separated at the U.S. border and imprisoned.
Subhi, a Rohingya refugee from Myanmar, has spent his entire life in a refugee camp in Australia. His contained world expands when a girl arrives on the other side of the fence.
Omar, a Somali refugee, who has spent most of his life in a refugee camp in Kenya, gets an opportunity for an education, but that would mean a separation from his nonverbal brother.
Two teens are paired as pen pals, one in a Sudanese refugee camp and the other in Richmond, Virginia.

A Sense of Belonging through Relationships and Language

Picturebooks
During a storm, the animals turn away two strangers, who later come to the rescue for the fox family.

Ana helps her mother adjust to their move from Mexico to the U.S. and helps her learn English.

A refugee from Kenya in Canada is determined to ride a bicycle, leading to an unexpected friendship.

Azzi leaves her country due to war and must learn a new language and start a new school in the UK.

A Syrian refugee, still feeling trauma from the war, visits a park near his new home, finding a new friend.

An orphan reluctantly leaves China on a sea voyage to undergo an examination at Angel Island.

An Arabic quilt connects Kanzi to her old home in Cairo and to acceptance of her language in school.

Pictures tell the story of new immigrants to the U.S. who struggle with the challenges of starting a new life.

Biography of a Chinese immigrant whose love of art led him to become an animator for Disney.

An Arabic quilt connects Kanzi to her old home in Cairo and to acceptance of her language in school.

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Three children from Somalia, Guatemala, and Korea struggle to adjust to their new home and school.

Companion book from the perspective of the classmates learning to connect with the newcomers in school.

When a young girl moves countries and starts at a new school, her Fear tells her to be alone and afraid.

Chapter Books

Julie helps two Mongolian brothers trying to survive in their new UK context as they hide from authorities.

Sami must recover a treasured Afghan instrument stolen from his grandfather but has no money and so begins trading to get it back – a tale about living with fear, being a friend, and finding a new home.

A Syrian refugee boy and an American boy have their lives intertwine in Belgium when terrorist attacks lead to suspicions of Muslims and refugees.

Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their life of wealth in Mexico to become migrant workers.

Escaping from Afghanistan, Fadi’s family heads to the U.S., accidentally leaving his little sister in a camp.

Home as Two Places in the Heart

Picturebooks

An immigrant boy brings the green warmth of Africa into his new cold urban world in the UK.

A Sudanese girl clings to an old blanket when she is sad, but a friendship helps her create a new blanket.

A memoir on the power of story and the gifts that migrants bring with them when they leave their homes.
When a refugee boy is homesick for the sounds of Lebanon, his grandfather helps him hear the silence.
A grandson connects with his grandfather’s feelings of being torn by a love for two countries.
A young girl visits her grandmother in Vietnam, learning she can call two places home. English/Vietnamese

Chapter Books
Pinochet’s takeover of Chile sends an unwilling Celeste to the U.S. and her parents into hiding.
The story of a Vietnamese girl and her family who are settled as refugees in Alabama in 1975.
Two stories in alternating sections connecting a “lost boy” of the Sudan in 1985 with a girl in the Sudan in 2008 who must walk long distances for water.
A Somalian teen’s life in London is turned upside down when her father returns from Mogadishu after 12 years, expecting the family to live by his rules.
Two Jewish sisters leave Austria during WWII and find refuge in Sweden with new families.

The Power of Story

Picturebooks
A story cloth chronicles the journey of a Hmong family from Laos to a refugee camp to the US.
A lotus seed holds the memory and the story of a Vietnamese refugee family’s homeland.
A struggling refugee boy shares his story through drawing a picture of his old home in Somalia.
Desta’s father needs to return to his Ethiopian homeland and shares his memories with his daughter.
Children traveling with a group of refugees use their imaginations and story to create hope.
Zoe draws a map of good memories of the city she needs to flee with her family during a war.
A Hmong girl in a Thai refugee camp finds the story within herself to create her own pa’ndau story cloth. RF
An artist carries her memories within her as she escapes the war in Laos and starts a new life.

Chapter Books
A short, illustrated book in the form of a letter from father to son on the eve of a dangerous sea crossing.
A boy learns about his family history and the Partition of India from his great uncle through stories told over a beloved old teacup.
Refugees huddle in a rubber dinghy as one uses his violin to weave their stories together to give hope.
In a fictional Latin American country, Max realizes that the stories his grandfather tells him about a
gatekeeper who guides travelers on a journey into tomorrow are related to his mother’s disappearance.

**Immigration and Refugees Across Time and Place in Nonfiction**

**Picturebooks**
Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda. NF
Photos explore the experiences of immigrants, celebrating the diversity and hope they bring to the U.S.
A simple and graphic introduction to the term refugee for young children.
Photos of refugee children from around the world forced to flee due to war, hunger, and natural disasters.
Explores the history of refugees around the world and the effects of never-ending war and conflict.
Discusses what it means to be a refugee and why would people leave their homes.

**Chapter Books**
Discusses cases from across the history of immigration of denying or deporting immigrants in the U.S.
Makes a case for unrestricted immigration in a fact-filled graphic nonfiction.
Fifty artists from around the world created postcard images of birds along with messages of hope.
Five true stories about young people across history who lived through harrowing boat journeys as refugees.
Essays by prominent refugee writers from around the world to explore and illuminate their experiences.
Explores government policy and popular responses to immigrant groups between 1800-1965 in the U.S.
Traces the lives of 22 immigrant teens in Denver as they adapt to American culture and a new language.
Collection of poems by poets from around the world on the many issues facing teen refugees.
Celebrate the genius, diversity, and grit of immigrants and refugees to the U.S.
Survival stories of female refugees from around the world, including her own story.

**RELATED TEXT SETS**

**Significance of Names**

Unhei debates whether to change her name to an American one when she moves from Korea.

When an army invades his village in Bulgaria, a Muslim boy and his family must take Christian names.

A boy from El Salvador helps his classmates understand a Latinx cultural tradition with names.

When Alma complains about her long name, her father tells the story of her names and Peruvian heritage.

Yoon dislikes how her name is written in English, compared to the beauty of her name in Korean.

Thompkins-Bigelow, Jamilah. (2020). *Your Name is a Song.* Illus. Louisa Uribe. Innovation Press. RF
A young girl does not want to return to school because no one can pronounce her name.

Sangoel is proud of his Sudanese name but no one in his school in the U.S. can correctly pronounce it.

Shares terms of endearments parents use to express love to children in fourteen different languages.

**Walls and Borders**

A foolish knight is certain that his side of the wall is the safe side; wall is in the gutter of the book.

Arturo’s family is separated by a line, so he dreams of flying through the open sky, free of barriers.

A boy and his family try to reunite with his father caught on the other side of the Berlin Wall.

The chickens build a huge wall to keep out the “prickly invaders,” actually a friendly hedgehog.

A war-ravaged country is separated by a wire fence from the streams and hills of peace and privilege.

A South Asian child finds a way to take down the wall the keeps the sun from reaching her village.

Giuliano, Ferri (2016). *Brick by Brick.* Hong Kong: Miniedition. Fantasy
Animals take down the wall that divides them to construct a bridge that joins their islands.

Two lonely creatures live in lands of either darkness or light until one day they meet at the border.

Pig builds a wall to keep Tortoise from bothering him, but traps himself inside, keeping out the sun.

A description of walls around the world, from the Great Wall of China to the Berlin Wall.

Lionni, Leo (2014). *Tillie and the Wall*. Dragonfly Books. Fable
Tillie is curious about the wall that has always been in their world and what lies on the other side.

A king banishes anyone who differs from him and builds a wall to keep them out. Cutouts create a wall.

A guard follows orders without question, not allowing anyone to cross the line, then a ball bounces across.

Maria and her family search for a way to send their gifts across the border wall to their Abuela in Mexico.

Siers, Sophie (2019). *Dear Mr. President*. Illus. Anne Villeneuve. Toronto: Owlkids. RF
Sam decides to build a wall in his bedroom to keep out his brother after hearing about the border wall.

Sis describes life in Czechoslovakia under Soviet rule, the loss of freedom, and his escape to the West.

Children on a playground build walls that exclude and walls that invite others into play.

A fence divides two neighborhoods based on race, during the time of segregation in the U.S.

Grandfather yearly visits the demilitarized zone, a barrier separating families in North and South Korea.

Bio = Biography
GN = Graphic Novel
HF = Historical Fiction
NF = Nonfiction
NV = Novel in Verse
RF = Realistic Fiction
FN = Fantasy
VN = Visual Narrative (wordless book)
YA = Young Adult