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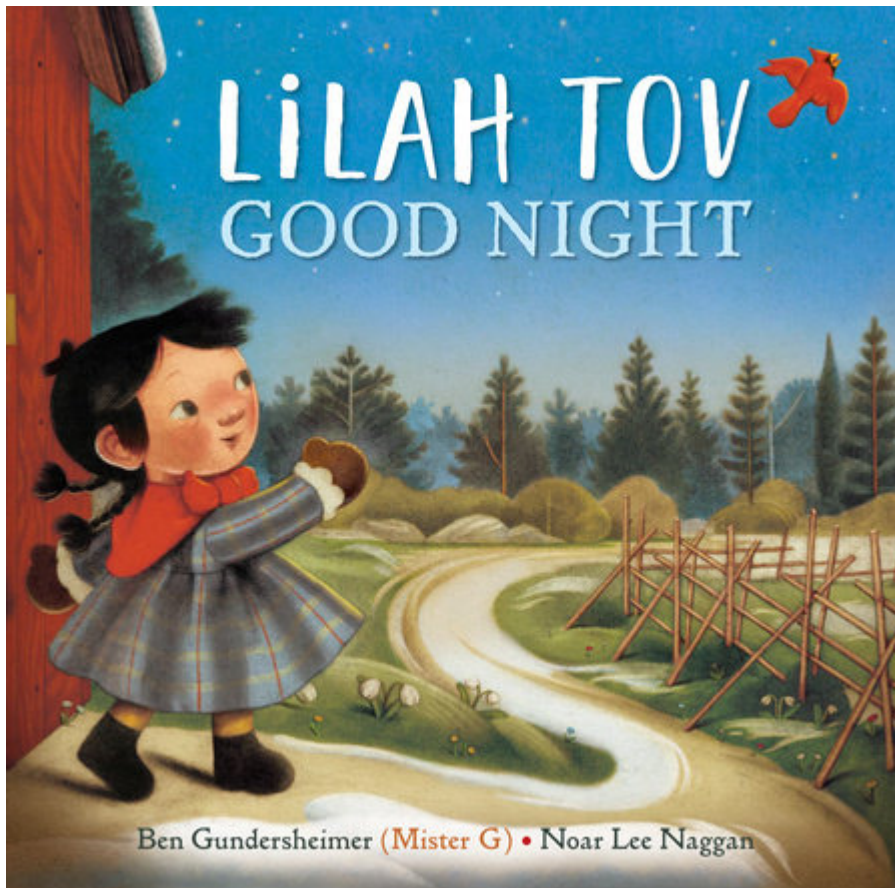
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Books to Help Kids Understand What It's Like to Be a Refugee | Brightly

by Olugbemisola Rhoday-Perkovich : 12-15 minutes : 8/3/2020

We see the news stories about refugees almost every day. We hear the true but almost unimaginable accounts of families forced to flee their homes, their homelands, their entire lives. While we may wish that our children didn't have to know about such trauma, the facts are that it's real and very present — and there are countless children actually living it. Stories can facilitate dialogue and promote healthy communication on this difficult topic, help to foster empathy and understanding, and even inspire young readers to take action to ensure safe and welcoming environments in their own communities. Here are titles that can help.

- **Picture Books**



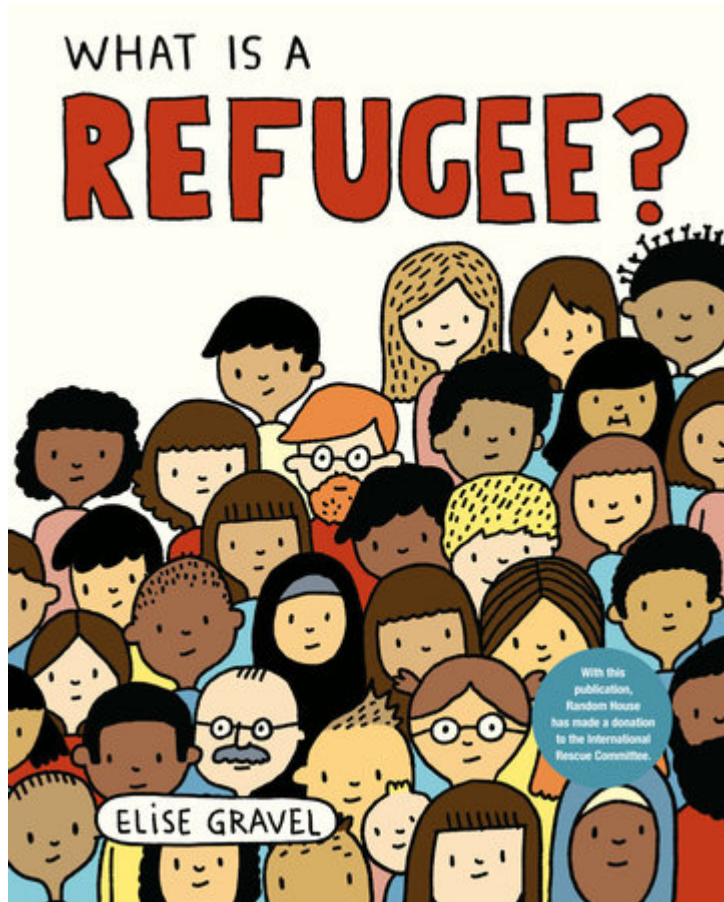
- [Lilah Tov Good Night](#)

by Ben Gundersheimer (Mister G), illustrated by Noar Lee Naggan

Follow along as a young refugee girl on a journey to her new home says *lilah tov* — “good night” in Hebrew — to the natural wonders around her, from the hens in the henhouse to the waves crashing on the beach. A soothing Jewish lullaby presented in picture book format, it's also a great bedtime story for

tiny tots.

(Ages 3 - 5)

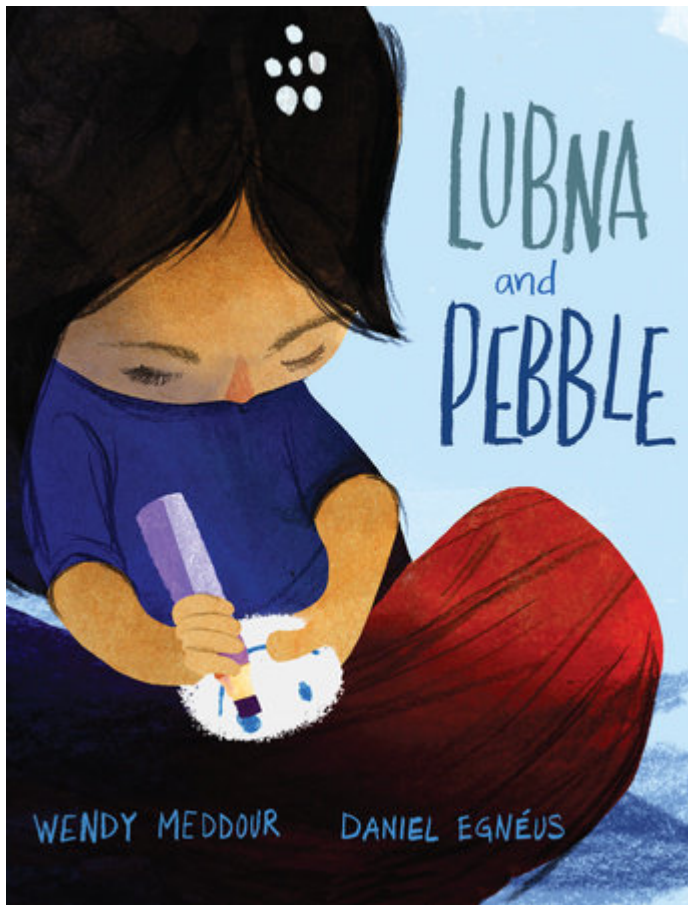


What Is a Refugee?

by Elise Gravel

This illustrated, accessible book introduces young readers to the term “refugee.” This timely picture book answers questions children may have about refugees, including who they are, why they leave their own country, and why they are sometimes not welcome in their new country.

(Ages 3 - 7)



[Lubna and Pebble](#)

by Wendy Meddour, illustrated by Daniel Egnéus

Upon arriving at a refugee camp with her father, young Lubna picks up a pebble on the beach. Shiny and smooth with a drawn-on smiley face, Pebble quickly becomes a great source of comfort for her. When little Amir arrives at the camp alone and scared, she must decide if she can part with Pebble to help him. With stunningly imaginative illustrations and poignant text, *Lubna and Pebble* is a beautiful story about friendship, solace, and resilience.

(Ages 4 - 8)

[Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey](#)

by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes, illustrated by Sue Cornelison

Lost and Found Cat follows an Iraqi family's escape from Mosul — by car, by foot, and by boat — all with their beloved pet, Kunkush, in tow ... until Kunkush escapes his carrier. The family is heartbroken, but Kunkush fortunately ends up in the hands of Amy, a woman volunteering with refugees in Greece, who grows determined to reunite the cat with his original family. This moving true story will inspire discussions with young readers about what it means to be a refugee, the unexpected consequences of being

displaced, and the importance of kindness.

(Ages 4 - 8)

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Teacup

by Rebecca Young, illustrated by Matt Ottley

Readers of all ages will find much to connect with in this simple and lovely tale of a boy who must leave his home and find another. He sets off alone in a rowboat, with only a book, a blanket, and some earth from his homeland in a teacup. Young's story doesn't shy away from the loneliness and uncertainty the boy experiences, but the story ends on a hopeful note when he finds land and a much-needed friend.

(Ages 4 - 8)

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Dreamers

by Yuyi Morales

Author-illustrator Yuyi Morales left almost everything behind when she traveled to the United States with her infant son in 1994. This beautifully-illustrated picture book is her memoir, and reminds readers that migrants always carry things with them — including their resilience, dreams, hope, and history. The lyrical text is also available in [Spanish](#).

(Ages 4 - 8)

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Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation

by Edwidge Danticat, illustrated by Leslie Staub

Danticat's celebration of storytelling and the bond between mother and child is an empowering one. Saya, whose mother is being detained, writes a story inspired by her mother's experience. When her father sends Saya's story to a newspaper, she learns firsthand that one voice, one story, can make a difference.

(Ages 5 - 8)

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The Treasure Box

by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Freya Blackwood

This moving picture book centers on Peter who, along with his father, flees his home as war rages around them. On their journey, Peter carries a treasure box — but what's inside is far more valuable than gold or

riches. More than just a story of their journey, this book is about the power of stories and human resilience.

(Ages 5 - 8)

- **Middle Grade**

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Kiki and Jacques

by Susan Ross

Things could be going better for both Kiki and Jacques. Twelve-year-old Jacques just lost his mother and the rest of his family is in a bad place financially. Kiki on the other hand is a Somalian refugee who is trying to acclimate to a new school in Maine. Her presence, and that of another refugee's soccer skills, throws a wrench in Jacques's plan to be the captain of the soccer team and plenty of other things. But despite their differences, can they learn to be friends?

(Ages 8 - 12)

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One Good Thing About America

by Ruth Freeman

In Africa, Anaïs was one of the best students in her English class. But in America, her new home, she doesn't seem to know anything about English. Here with her Mama and little brother Jean-Claude, Anaïs worries about her Papa, big brother, and grandmother back in Africa... and the fighting that forced them to flee. This middle grade novel explores what it's like to be a refugee in America, and reminds us that America — at its core — is a nation of immigrants.

(Ages 8 - 12)

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Saving Hanno

by Miriam Halahmy

Set during the onset of World War II, this novel centers around nine-year-old Rudi and his dachshund Hanno. When fleeing Nazi Germany for London, Rudi's family manages to smuggle the dog in — but Hanno faces a new threat there. Fearing animals are a drain on resources, pets are being euthanized in London. Luckily, as Rudi and the rest of London's children are about to be evacuated to the countryside, he finds a place Hanno will be safe.

(Ages 8 - 12)

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[When Stars Are Scattered](#)

by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed, illustrated by Victoria Jamieson and Iman Geddy

Omar and his younger brother Hassan have lived in a Kenyan refugee camp for almost all their lives. Life is hard, especially for nonverbal Hassan, who can't get the medical treatment he needs. And when Omar has an opportunity to go off to school, he has to weigh the risks of leaving Hassan alone all day with possibly changing their future for the better. This eye-opening graphic novel told by a Somali refugee is an intimate look at the daily life of a refugee.

(Ages 8 - 12)

- **Young Adult**

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[Enrique's Journey \(The Young Adult Adaptation\)](#)

by Sonia Nazario

This YA adaptation of the true story of the same name follows Enrique — a young boy who sets off from Honduras to find his mother in the United States. His perilous journey sheds lights on what it's like for migrants — from the legalities of immigration to simply trying to survive and provide for their families.

(Young Adult)

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[We Are All That's Left](#)

by Carrie Arcos

Zara desperately wants to connect with her mother, Nadja, and learn more about their Bosnian heritage, but Nadja is unable to talk about the horrors she experienced as a young refugee of the Bosnian War. When their family experiences a terrorist attack in present-day America, Zara is wounded and left struggling with PTSD while Nadja falls into a coma. Feeling even more cut off from her family's history, Zara sets out to uncover Nadja's long-buried story of survival. Deeply moving, challenging, and hopeful, *We Are All That's Left* is a powerful story of faith, family, and healing that should be read by all.

(Young Adult)

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[Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town](#)

by Warren St. John

When boys from different countries — including Congo, Burundi, Sudan, Liberia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq — are brought to a small Atlanta town by the UNHCR for resettlement, they have three months

of official support before they are left to fend for themselves in a struggling and suspicious community. They bond through a shared love of football (soccer), and the efforts of their Jordanian-born coach, Luma Mufleh (an exile herself of sorts), and overcome the trauma and pain of the past and present. They compete successfully against better-funded, well-established teams, and, in the process, learn and teach lessons about community, resilience, and what it means to be a winner.

(Young Adult)

- [*Bamboo People*](#)

by Mitali Perkins

Tu Reh, a Karenni boy, has witnessed the destruction of his family's home and bamboo fields by Burmese soldiers. Chiko is a Burmese boy who loves books and has no interest in combat. The boys' lives intersect when Chiko, forced to become a soldier, is injured and Tu Reh discovers him. Perkins's delicately told story of the enduring power of compassion is thoughtful and satisfying. A helpful [Discussion and Activity Guide](#) and [Book Club Guide](#) are available from the publisher.

(Young Adult)

- [*Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina*](#)

by Michaela DePrince and Elaine DePrince

Teens may have seen Michaela DePrince in Beyoncé's "Lemonade," and young dance fans might know her as the youngest principal dancer ever to be a member of the Dance Theatre of Harlem. *Taking Flight* takes readers from her birth in conflict-ridden Sierra Leone, to her life with vitiligo at an orphanage and refugee camp, then to her being adopted by an American family and fulfilling her long-held dreams of being a ballerina. DePrince's story of overcoming challenges throughout her life, from war and displacement to discrimination in the dance world, is sure to inspire.

(Young Adult)

- [*A Time of Miracles*](#)

by Anne-Laure Bondoux, translated by Y. Maudet

In what [Kirkus called](#) "a beautifully cadenced tribute to maternal love and the power of stories amid contemporary political chaos," Bondoux tells Blaise Fortune's story of survival and his five-year journey escaping the civil unrest in the Republic of Georgia and traveling through numerous refugee camps to France with Gloria, who has cared for Blaise since he was a baby. A mystery surrounding Blaise's identity provides additional tension in this story of sacrifice and hope.

(Young Adult)

As the refugee situations worldwide grow increasingly urgent and complex, be proactive about engaging your children in conversations about what it means to be a refugee, and how citizens of all ages can work to make newcomers feel welcome and safe. Remember that children respond to trauma and challenges in different ways, and there is no “typical” refugee or “single story” that represents the myriad experiences children have in these situations.

For additional suggestions, check out the Teaching Tolerance’s [“Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff.”](#) The British Red Cross also has a helpful fact sheet on the refugee crisis around the world, with definitions, that can be found [here](#). And Amnesty International provides links to a number of resources for children of all ages, including an online educational game called Against All Odds, which you can find [here](#).

Editor’s Note: This article was originally published in 2017 and updated in 2020.