

# Refugee

By Alan Gratz

## Before Reading

Preview the book by reading the title, looking at the cover image, and then reading the back-cover copy. While this book is a work of fiction, its topic seems as if it could have been lifted out of the news. Think about what you may have heard or read in the news about people fleeing their homelands to seek refuge in a new country.

## While Reading

As you read, take time to pause and consider these questions:

Compare the events that force each of the main characters to leave their homes. What are the inciting events? What roles do their governments play?

Mahmoud and his family encounter unexpected dangers, challenges, and cruelty on their journey. What are the issues they have to deal with that they didn't anticipate?

Explain how Isabel's views of her father conflict with her grandfather's. How do her grandfather's views make her question whether leaving Cuba is the right thing to do?

Josef turns 13 on the MS *St. Louis*. In what ways is he then forced to "act like a man"? How does he take on an adult role during his family's journey?

Mahmoud has an important realization about the way the world sees refugees. What is the realization, and how does it lead him to take life-changing action?

## After Reading

Part of what makes this book so powerful is the way the three stories are connected. Think about the devices the author uses to link the stories, including but not limited to specific plot points, repeated phrases or words, and story structure. How would you assess the author's purpose in making these connections for the reader?

### Literacy Tip

*Refugee* is a work of historical fiction. In this literary genre, the setting is in the past. The author's descriptions of places, and characters' languages and customs, reflect the time period. While the characters and events in a work of historical fiction are made up, they are often inspired by real people and events.

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### Think About It!

If you dig deep enough into most family histories, you will find examples of someone, sometime, who left home in search of a better life. In some cases, people didn't move very far away. In other cases, people moved halfway around the world. And the reasons they moved vary—from seeking better economic or educational opportunities to escaping oppression and/or persecution.

What's your ancestral heritage? Talk with your relatives about your family history. Keep notes of your conversations, or record them (with permission, of course). Family gatherings—holidays, reunions, graduations, etc.—are a great time to get people talking and sharing stories. If you're feeling inspired, make a family tree (yes, there's an app for that!).