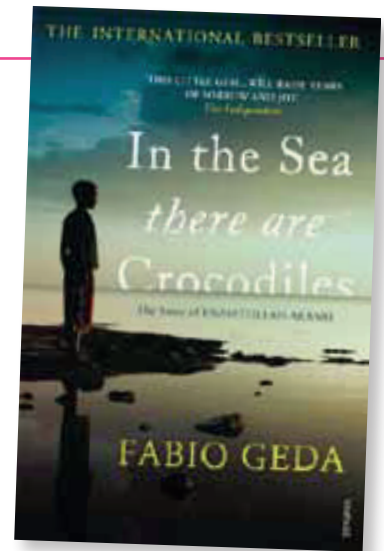


IN THE SEA THERE ARE CROCODILES

by Fabio Geda

Random House
(Lower secondary)



Set in the 1990s, this is the true story of an Afghan boy called Enaiatollah Akbari and his often perilous five-year journey from Afghanistan to Italy, as told to Italian writer Fabio Geda.

Enaiatollah is only 10 years old when his mother, out of love, leaves him in Pakistan to fend for himself – her way of saving him from Taliban rule. His family belongs to the minority Hazara people persecuted by the Taliban. And so begins Enaiatollah's long struggle to find a new home, security and education.

The map in the book shows the route of his journey – through Iran, Turkey and Greece before finding a safe haven in Italy – and the text tells of the setbacks, cruelty and also kindness he encounters. His escape includes hiding in the false bottom of a lorry, dangerous border crossings and encounters with traffickers, and serves as a frank and revealing testament to the experiences of a young asylum seeker today.

BACKGROUND

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996, and imposed very strict rules based on their extreme interpretation of Islam. They also targeted certain ethnic minorities including the Hazara people. This led to many Afghans fleeing the country in search of safety, but often living in desperate conditions, penniless, unable to speak the local language and in search of protection. There are still thousands of children struggling in a similar situation to Enaiatollah. Many leave Afghanistan because it remains dangerous and unsafe, but are discriminated against because of their ethnicity.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the worst dangers Enaiatollah faced on his journey? **Possible answers:** Police – especially in Iran, Traffickers, Ethnic/religious conflict, eg with the Baluchi boys in Quetta and the longbeard who tips his soup away, Weather – in the mountains on the way to Turkey, Being fired on, Hunger and thirst, eg in the lorry in Turkey, The sea – leaving Turkey for Greece
2. What do you think would be the most frightening moment?
3. Enaiatollah says that he's read that *'the decision to emigrate comes from a need to breathe.'* (p.93) What did he mean? How does it apply to all the decisions he made to move on?
4. The book starts with Enaiatollah's mother whispering advice to him as he drifts off to sleep: do not steal, cheat, take drugs or use weapons. Were these good pieces of advice in his situation? Did he live by his mother's commandments? Did Enaiatollah do as she asked? What advice would you give to a child in his position?
5. The book weaves together Enaiatollah's first person narrative with the author's questions and comments. Do you like the way the story was told? Does it make it more or less authentic?
6. Enaiatollah says in the last sentences of the book that he *'realised for the first time that I was [alive] too.'* (p. 211) What does he mean by this?

ROLE PLAY

In groups of four or five, take the parts of the boys who attempt to cross in the dinghy from Turkey to Greece. Try to bring out the different attitudes and feelings they have about what they are about to do.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 3: We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

Article 7: The law is the same for everyone. It must treat us all fairly.

Article 12: Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters, or bother us or our family without good reason.

Article 26: We all have a right to education and to finish primary school which should be free. We should be able to learn a career or make use of all our skills. Our parents have the right to choose how and what we learn. We should learn about the United Nations and about how to get on with other people and to respect their rights.

FIND OUT MORE

Read an interview with Fabio Geda and Enaiatollah Akbari at www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/2082/fabio-geda

Further resources for teaching around human rights can be found at: www.amnesty.org.uk/education