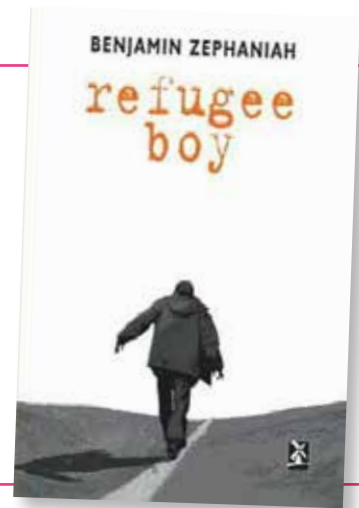


REFUGEE BOY

by Benjamin Zephaniah

Bloomsbury
(Lower secondary)



Alem Kelo's father is from Ethiopia. His mother is from Eritrea. With the countries at war, the family face persecution and violence in each place. So Alem's dad does an astonishing thing. He takes Alem to London to 'celebrate' his 14th birthday and abandons him there to seek asylum while his parents continue to fight for peace at home. This unforgettable story follows Alem's attempts to find his feet in a confusing often hostile country, while in and out of court hearings.

BACKGROUND

In 1961, Eritrea began fighting for independence from Ethiopia and the Ethiopian civil war began in 1974. That conflict ended in 1991 but, although Eritrea was granted independence, the dispute over border placement could not be agreed and relations between the two governments deteriorated. The Eritrean-Ethiopian war began in May 1998 when Eritrea invaded the then Ethiopian territory of Badme, where Alem was born. The war ended in June 2000, by which time tens of thousands of people had been killed and only minor border changes were made.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Was Alem's father right to leave him in London? How do you think he felt doing it? What would you have done in that situation?
- How do you feel when people use language you do not understand?
- What is important to an average 14-year-old in the UK? What is important to Alem? Explain why Alem might feel differently?
- What are the negative and positive experiences Alem has had in England?
- Why is the final chapter written in the first person? What does Alem mean by 'This is not The End'?
- What have you learnt about the treatment of asylum seekers after reading this book?

ROLE PLAY AND WRITING

- How do the media represent asylum seekers in the UK? How would Alem react to the headlines?
- Work in pairs: One should play a refugee, the other a journalist from a popular newspaper. Prepare an interview where the refugee asks the journalist to justify their representation of asylum seekers.
- In chapter 9, Alem receives a letter from his father. Before reading it, write down what you think it might say. Act out how you think Alem will react to the news.
- Write a letter to the government asking that Alem be given asylum in Britain, and explain why.
- Working in groups of four: A refugee, an adjudicator, a defence lawyer and the State. Define your roles and create a scene whereby you must decide whether to grant asylum or not.
- Imagine you have just finished your first day of school. Write a diary entry explaining how you felt.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 1: We are all born free and equal. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated the same way.

Article 6: Everyone has the right to be protected by the law.

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 25: We all have the right to enough food, clothing, housing and health care.

FOLLOW UP WORK

Visit www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/refugees-and-asylum to find the latest Amnesty actions, articles and blogs on the subject.

Research the work done by the Refugee Council and their Children's Section which works directly with separated children. Organise a fundraising event for them. www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/fundraising

FIND OUT MORE

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

With thanks to Fran Collins