



# TeachersFirst READING TREKS

## *Refugee*

### Teacher Guide

Access Reading  
Trek Map

### Grade Level & Content Areas

**Ages:** 11–14  
**Grades:** 6–9 (independent)  
**Reading Level:** 6th Grade  
**Lexile Measure:** 800L  
**Guided Reading Level:** Y  
**Developmental Reading  
Assessment (DRA):** 60

**Content Areas:** Language arts,  
English, reading, literature, social  
studies, and history.

## Synopsis of Book

Alan Gratz braids together the stories of three older children and their families as they struggle to escape the only worlds they have ever known and journey to what they hope to be new forever homes. Real, life-threatening dangers pursue each. All are leaving a violent crisis—Josef is a Jewish boy in Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, Isabel is about to become a big sister amidst the riots against Cuba’s Communist regime in 1994, and Mahmoud is just trying to survive and be the best big brother possible with the 2015 Syrian Civil War literally bringing down the walls around him. Joseph and his family travel by ocean liner to Cuba aboard the MS St. Louis, only to be turned away; Isabel, her best friend, and their families travel by a small makeshift boat across the Florida Straits, only to be blown off course by the Gulf Stream all the way to the Bahamas; and Mahmoud and his family travel by car, raft, ferry, train, and foot across the Aegean Sea and Eastern Europe. Each child loses someone dear to them along the way, and yet does not lose hope. Gratz provides an eye-opening look at the struggles of refugees, motivating empathy and change.

## Standards

### Common Core State Standards for K–5

#### Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure

#### Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

# Common Core State Standards for 6–12

## Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure

## Speaking and Listening

- Comprehension and Collaboration

## Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

# National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Theme 1: CULTURE
- Theme 3: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS
- Theme 4: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY
- Theme 6: POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

# National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

- CREATING
- RESPONDING
- CONNECTING

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## Using a TeachersFirst® Reading Trek to Explore This Book

TeachersFirst Reading Treks create a virtual field trip of resources about a piece of literature or a text using the My Maps feature of Google Maps. To motivate and enrich student reading, teachers and students can reference this visual collection of web resources and images as they relate to the contents of a book.

TeachersFirst has done the hard work for you! Use the activities in this teacher guide and the accompanying [Reading Trek map](#) as you and your students explore this book. And, if you feel inspired, you (or your students) can create your own Reading Trek about this or another book!

## Using This Reading Trek in Class

Below is a list of ideas for how to use this Reading Trek in your educational setting.

### Working with the Map:

1. Introduce the book to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard using the Reading Trek map, highlighting its various layers.
2. A refugee is someone who must leave their home for their own safety due to a situation beyond their control, like a weather event or emergency, natural disaster, or violent crisis. The time an individual spends away varies

from a relatively short term to permanent relocation. Have students work independently or in groups to create a slide presentation in comSlider ([TeachersFirst review](#)) that shares potential situations pertinent to their location, how long they would be away, and where they would go.

3. Identify realistic, short-term potential crises that could impact the school's population. Have students work in groups to draft and record public service announcements using Adobe Premier Rush ([TeachersFirst review](#)). These could be translated to support ELL families within the school.
4. For many refugees, coming to the United States is their ultimate goal. Immigration policies and procedures have changed over the years. Discuss what it means to be an American after taking a 31-minute virtual field trip to Ellis Island ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
5. Invite a member of Refugee Council USA to speak to your class. Have students generate a list of questions in advance that can be provided to the speaker using Padlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)). If an in-class speaking opportunity is not feasible, consider using [Microsoft Teams](#) or Zoom ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
6. Listen to “[Home](#)” by Landon. Have students compose a written or artistic response. Artistic responses may be submitted to [Refugees In Towns](#) for the organization's arts festival.
7. Challenge students to write an epilogue for one of the characters from the story.
8. Consider having students use Write the World ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to write a story or recount an incident where they went from feeling “invisible” to “visible.”
9. Use Edpuzzle ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to add questions that prompt student reflection while watching the videos “[Auschwitz Birkenau German Concentration and Extermination Camp](#)” and “[Holocaust Survivors--First Steps in DP Camps and a New Beginning](#).”

### Extension Activities:

1. [World Refugee Day](#) is June 20. Browse the site for ways to participate.
2. Visit [WRAPS](#) to locate resettlement organizations and agency contacts and establish a limited partnership to assist local refugees. A similar resource is the [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) (programs and services are listed by state).
3. Visit [Refugees In Towns](#) to discover conditions for refugees worldwide, the routes they've taken to their hopeful new homes, and after-crisis stories. You'll also find case studies of migration mapping, urban economic impacts, and experiences. Use this information to create a project to support refugees local to the school community.
4. Contact the local soccer center or club. Inquire about hosting or volunteering with a soccer camp for refugee families. Multilingual volunteers are quite helpful. You may also consider inviting an adult education instructor to the event as a resource for parents.
5. Research the needs of local refugee families—school social workers and guidance counselors will be very helpful resources. Host a drive to meet those needs, paying special attention to cultural concerns.
6. Host a Spare Change for Change drive where the donations benefit [UNICEF](#) or [Save the Children](#).

## Helpful Resources

### From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Google My Maps Basics](#)
- [OK2Ask: Engage & Inspire with Reading Treks](#)

### Other Resources:

- [Alan Gratz](#)
- [“Refugee Book Talk” with Author Alan Gratz](#)
- [The Voyage of the \*St. Louis\*](#), from Facing History and Ourselves. Consider why countries, including the United States, refused to accept Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis* who sought escape from Nazi-occupied Europe.
- [U. S. Policy During the Holocaust: The Tragedy of the \*SS St. Louis\*](#)
- [“MS ST LOUIS - Voyage Of The Damned”](#)
- [“MS \*St. Louis\* Holocaust survivor on Canada’s apology”](#) (actual footage of the ship)
- [U.S. Refugee Admissions](#)