



# TeachersFirst READING TREKS

## *Refugee*

### Teacher Guide

Access Reading  
Trek Map

### Grade Level & Content Areas

**Ages:** 11–14

**Grades:** 5–9

**Reading Level:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade

**Lexile Measure:** 800L

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

## Synopsis of Book

Alan Gratz braids together the stories of three thirteen-year-old children and their families as they struggle to escape the only worlds they have ever known and journey to what they hope will be their new forever homes. 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 as the 2015 Syrian Civil War brings 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 take a small makeshift boat across the Florida Straits; 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, yet they do not lose hope. Gratz provides an eye-opening look at the struggles of refugees, encouraging both 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 by displaying the [Reading Trek map](#) on an interactive whiteboard and highlighting its various layers.
2. Students can plot major historical events from each period (1930s Nazi Germany, 1990s Cuba, 2010s Syria) on a world map, connecting global events to the characters' experiences and migration routes. Use the map template on Padlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
3. Have students identify and research all international borders the characters cross, examining current versus historical border policies and geographical challenges at each crossing point. Cooperative learning groups

can share their findings using Adobe Podcast ([TeachersFirst review](#)).

4. Ask students to research and map current refugee camps, resettlement locations, and organizations that support refugees and compare modern refugee experiences to those in the novel.
5. Using Google My Maps ([TeachersFirst review](#)), students can plan alternative escape routes for

each family, researching historical context to determine if these routes would have been viable during each time period.

6. Using the information in each map layer, create overlapping timelines. Use Canva ([TeachersFirst review](#)) or try sentence strips for a low-tech option.

## Extension Activities:

1. [World Refugee Day](#) is June 20. Browse the site for ways to participate.
2. Visit the [Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) website to find programs and services in your state. Locate nearby resettlement organizations and agency contacts and establish a limited partnership to assist local refugees.
3. Visit the [Refugees in Towns](#) project website to discover the conditions refugees face worldwide, their routes to their hopeful new homes, and after-crisis stories. You'll also find case studies that map migration, urban economic impacts, and refugee experiences. Use this information to create a project to support refugees near your school community. Find digital tool options at Adobe Express for Education ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
4. Contact the local soccer center or club. Inquire about hosting or volunteering for a soccer camp for refugee families. Multilingual volunteers are particularly helpful. 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 beneficial resources!) Host a drive to meet those needs, paying special attention to cultural concerns.
6. Host a Spare Change for Change drive that benefits [UNICEF](#) or [Save the Children](#).
7. Review the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). Consider fundamental human rights and identify the ways each character had their rights violated, citing evidence from the text.
8. Share [The Voyage of the St. Louis](#), from Facing History and Ourselves. Ask students to consider why countries, including the United States, refused to accept Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis* who sought escape from Nazi-occupied Europe. Share replies on a collaborative bulletin board such as Padlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)).

## Helpful Resources

### From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Building Background Knowledge with Reading Treks](#)

- [OK2Ask: No Passport Required: Cross-Curricular Learning Journeys with Google My Maps](#)

### Other Resources:

- [Alan Gratz](#)
- [“Refugee Book Talk” with Author Alan Gratz](#)
- [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”](#) (includes actual photos of the ship)