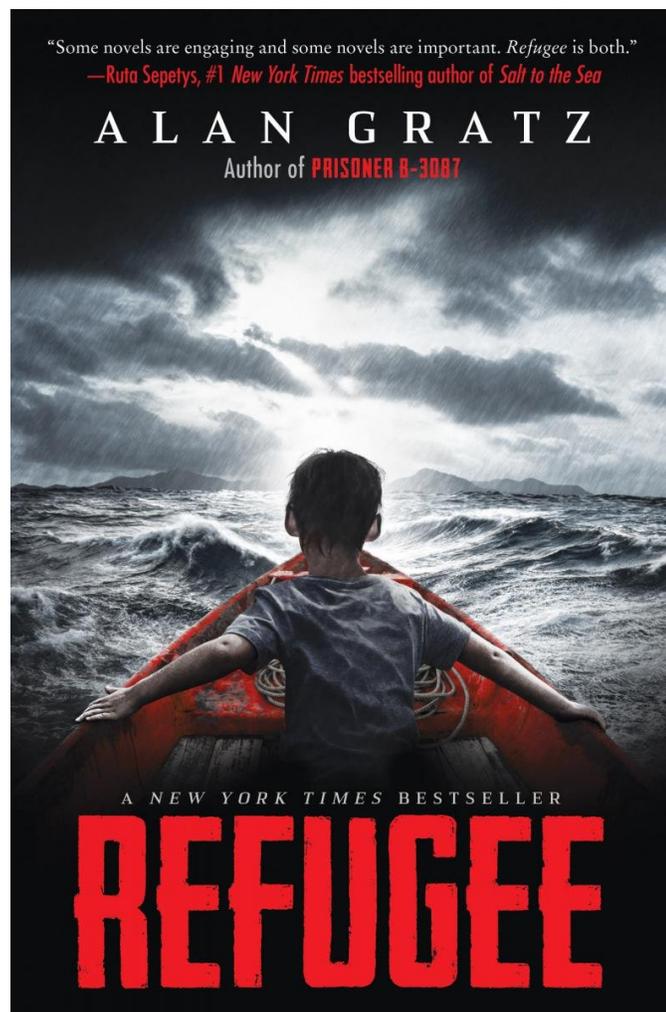


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review
Refugee by Alan Gratz

by Soraya Hajizadeh-Leiber



REFUGEE BY ALAN GRATZ (2017)

"Some novels are engaging and some novels are important. *Refugee* is both." That is what the author Ruta Sepetys said about the bestseller *Refugee*, which was published in 2017. I agree. *Refugee* is about important issues like war, being forced to leave your country and home, and what it's like to be in danger through no fault of your own. I discovered this book more than a year ago and I couldn't put it down because it's not predictable and there are many cliffhangers. I even got yelled at for reading it instead of going to sleep.

Throughout the book, which moves along very quickly, the reader learns about three kids and their families from different places who become refugees. Josef is a Jewish 12-year-old boy who is living in 1930s Nazi Germany. Isabel is an 11-year-old girl who is leaving Cuba in 1994 during the dictatorship because her father was going to be put in prison for speaking about his opinions. And Mahmoud is a 13-year-old boy who is escaping the war in Syria, his home. The reader learns about the long difficult journeys that they're forced to take with their families in order to survive.

Like many other books by author Alan Gratz, *Refugee* is historical fiction. But this one is my favorite. I enjoy the suspense and learning about what it's like for the characters to be refugees. The characters themselves are also likable and relatable. They have to face death and experience losing loved ones. I really liked this book because it did not treat me like a kid; it told the truth without making it seem happier or easier. It made me feel sad sometimes.

In other words, this book is not for everyone because some parts are about awful things. *Refugee* talks a lot about real problems that happened and are still happening today. Mahmoud's story, for example, is still happening now to people in Syria and other countries. Millions are being forced to flee their homes because of war and other problems. I also learned what it was like to be a Jewish kid in Nazi Germany. And I learned that in Cuba people were being put in jail for disagreeing with the government and expressing their opinions. Even though these stories are about different families living in different times, Alan Gratz does a really good job connecting them.

I would recommend *Refugee* to students who are interested in what's happening around the world—in terms of both history and current events. I would teach it to fifth graders and up. As students read the book, I would also give them nonfiction articles about the dictatorship in Cuba, the war in Syria, and Nazi control in Germany. I would ask them to develop their own questions. Their assignment could be to answer them in short responses using the book, articles, and their own research.

I hope you and your students enjoy this book as much as I do!



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