

HIAS Book and Film Club for Adults



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Introduction

This is a guide to starting your own HIAS Book or Film club.

For adults who wish to start a book or film club on their own, HIAS encourages you to use the list of suggestions on the following pages to select a book or film to read or view (your choice!). Next, invite a group of 5-10 friends to join you in reading or watching your selection. Set a date 4-6 weeks out to have a Zoom discussion of your book or film. We invite you to register your book or film club [here](#). Students in grades 2-12 can join the HIAS Student Book Club (see pages 4-6).

Book Suggestions for Adults

Below are 10 books written about the refugee and asylum-seeker experience, some by refugees and asylum seekers themselves. This is by no means an exhaustive list – we encourage you to search Google to find many of the other outstanding and important texts out there.

1. *A Backpack, A Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka* (Lev Golinkin) – In this memoir, the author tells the story of his family’s flight from the Soviet Union. Through the eyes of his young self, author Lev Golinkin paints a heartfelt and compelling picture not only of the life they left behind but of the challenges of everyday life in Indiana for the family of newly arrived refugees.
2. *Exit West* (Mohsin Hamid) – *Exit West* imagines the forces that drive ordinary people from their homes into the uncertain embrace of new lands through the story of two young people, Nadia, and Saeed, who meet in a country teetering on the brink of civil war. The book follows these remarkable characters as they emerge into an alien and uncertain future in the midst of an unforgettable story of love, loyalty, and courage.ⁱ
3. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* (Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil): In 1994, Clemantine Wamariya and her fifteen-year-old sister, Claire, fled the Rwandan massacre and spent the next six years migrating through seven African countries, searching for safety. . . . When Clemantine was twelve, she and her sister were granted refugee status in the United States; there, in Chicago, their lives diverged. Though their bond remained unbreakable, Claire, who had for so long protected and provided for Clemantine, was a single mother struggling to make ends meet, while Clemantine was taken in by a family who raised her as their own. She seemed to live the American dream: attending private school, taking up cheerleading, and, ultimately, graduating from Yale. Yet the years of being treated as less than human, of going hungry and seeing death, could not be erased. . . . In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Clemantine provokes us to look beyond the label of “victim” and recognize the power of the imagination to transcend even the most profound injuries and aftershocks.ⁱⁱ

4. *The House of Spirits* (Isabel Allende): Allende fled to Venezuela in 1973 after the coup that brought down Salvador Allende, the socialist leader and her father's cousin. She moved to California in the late 1980s. Drawing on the circumstances of her own exile, Allende used her debut novel to tell a multigenerational saga that takes place in an unnamed country very much like Chile. We see the destruction of democracy and the rise of a cruel dictator who tries to eliminate all opposition.ⁱⁱⁱ
5. *Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-Torn Syria in a Wheelchair* (Nujeen Mustafa, Christina Lamb) – Prize-winning journalist and the co-author of . . . New York Times bestseller *I Am Malala*, Christina Lamb, now tells the inspiring true story of another remarkable young hero: Nujeen Mustafa, a teenager born with cerebral palsy, whose harrowing journey from war-ravaged Syria to Germany in a wheelchair is a breathtaking tale of fortitude, grit, and hope that lends a face to the greatest humanitarian issue of our time, the Syrian refugee crisis.^{iv}
6. *Refugee* (Alan Gratz): Three different kids. One mission in common: ESCAPE. Josef is a Jewish boy in 1930s Nazi Germany. With the threat of concentration camps looming, he and his family board a ship bound for the other side of the world. Isabel is a Cuban girl in 1994. With riots and unrest plaguing her country, she and her family set out on a raft, hoping to find safety and freedom in America. Mahmoud is a Syrian boy in 2015. With his homeland torn apart by violence and destruction, he and his family begin a long trek toward Europe. All three young people will go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. All will face unimaginable dangers – from drownings to bombings to betrayals. But for each of them, there is always the hope of tomorrow. And although Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud are separated by continents and decades, surprising connections will tie their stories together in the end.^v
7. *The Refugees* (Viet Thanh Nguyen) – In *The Refugees*, Viet Thanh Nguyen gives voice to lives led between two worlds, the adopted homeland and the country of birth. From a young Vietnamese refugee who suffers profound culture shock when he comes to live with two gay men in San Francisco, to a woman whose husband is suffering from dementia and starts to confuse her for a former lover, to a girl living in Ho Chi Minh City whose older half-sister comes back from America having seemingly accomplished everything she never will, the stories are a captivating testament to the dreams and hardships of immigration.^{vi}
8. *They Poured Fire On Us From The Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* (Alphonson Deng, Benson Deng, Benjamin Ajak, and Judy A. Bernstein): As gunshots, flames, and screams engulfed their village, three cousins fled into the cover of the forest. . . . With each footstep they were drawn deeper into the horrific violence of Sudan's civil war: a world of bombed-out villages, mine-sown roads, and relentless desert, a world where starving adults would snatch the grain from a weak child's fingers. . . . Their journey led them first to Ethiopia and then, driven back into Sudan, toward Kenya. They walked nearly one thousand miles, sustained only by the sheer will to live. This book is the three boys' account of that unimaginable journey.^{vii}
9. *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (Dina Nayeri): Dina Nayeri was 9-years-old when her family have to leave Iran because of religious persecution, eventually settling in Oklahoma after a couple of years in Dubai and Rome. In her memoir, Nayeri draws from her childhood and from the accounts of asylum seekers she meets in Greek refugee camps to explore what it means to be a refugee.^{viii}

10. *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (Judith Kerr) – In 1933, a young Jewish girl is forced to flee to Switzerland with her family as Hitler is elected to office. The story tells of their struggle to adapt to a new life as a refugee family.

Film Suggestions for Adults

Below are 5 films about the refugee and asylum-seeker experience. Like the book suggestions above, this is by no means an exhaustive list – we encourage you to search Google to explore the incredible films being made every day about the refugee and asylum crisis.

1. *The Resettled*^{ix} (31 minutes) – This short film takes viewers to Detroit, San Francisco, Boise, Twin Falls, and New York, and introduces refugees from Iraq, Burma, Vietnam, Congo, and Liberia, who share their dramatic stories of survival and the elusive search for the American dream. *The Resettled* reveals the challenges of the refugee experience and the consequences of resettling in a foreign land and inspires viewers to offer newcomers support.
2. *The White Helmets*^x (40 minutes) – Winner of the 2017 Oscar for Best Documentary Short, *The White Helmets* is a short film that follows three rescue workers with the White Helmets – also known as the Syrian Civil Defense – who train in Turkey to provide emergency medical assistance to civilians in Syria’s civil war.
3. *After Spring*^{xi} (1 hour, 41 minutes) – Produced by Jon Stewart, *After Spring* is a feature documentary that focuses on the Syrian refugee crisis. The film follows two refugee families in transition and helps viewers understand what it is like to live in Zaatari, the largest camp for Syrian refugees, where residents decide if they can rebuild their lives in a place that was never meant to be permanent.
4. *Refugee Kids*^{xii} (39 minutes) – *Refugee Kids* is a short documentary that follows students at a New York City summer program for children seeking asylum from the world’s most volatile conflicts. The film presents an intimate, emotionally gripping account of the students’ stories of escaping war and conflict and resettling in America, chronicling their triumphs and setbacks as their lives unfold over the course of one formative summer.
5. *Which Way Home*^{xiii} – *Which Way Home* follows several unaccompanied child migrants as they journey through Mexico en route to the U.S. on a freight train they call "The Beast." The film tracks the stories of children like Olga and Freddy, nine-year-old Hondurans who are desperately trying to reach their families in Minnesota, and Jose, a ten-year-old El Salvadoran who has been abandoned by smugglers and ends up alone in a Mexican detention center. These are stories of hope and courage, disappointment and sorrow.

HIAS Student Book Club



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

What Is the HIAS Student Book Club?

Refugees around the world need YOU! Refugees are people who have had to leave their home and seek a safe haven because their home countries are not safe places to be. Jewish tradition teaches us that we have a special responsibility to welcome, love, and protect refugees. HIAS – a Jewish organization that helps refugees and asylum seekers around the world – invites you to pick a book written by or about refugees and start a book club online.

How Does The HIAS Student Book Club Work?

Step 1

Choose your book. Take a look at the book list on the next page to find a suggestion or Google “refugee books for kids/teens” – there are LOTS of great suggestions!

Step 2

Send an email or text message to 3-4 friends or family members inviting them to join you in reading the book you selected. Consider inviting camp friends, cousins, aunts/uncles, or grandparents who live across the country to join you!

Step 3

Give everyone 2-3 weeks to finish the book, depending on the length of the book you chose. Schedule a video meet-up on that date to help hold yourselves accountable. Create a shared GoogleDoc where everyone can jot down notes about things new things they learned in the book or questions they have about the book that they would like to discuss with friends.

Step 4

On the date you chose in step 3, come together on your chosen video platform (e.g., Zoom, Skype, FaceTime) and talk about what you read. For younger readers, make sure you pick a time when your parents or an older sibling are available, so they can help you focus your discussion. You can use the questions and observations from your GoogleDoc to spark the conversation. Consider using some of your time to write a letter or make a phone call to your Member of Congress asking them to support refugees and asylum seekers using [HIAS' advocacy talking points](#).

Step 5 (Optional)

Send an email to HIAS' Rabbi-in-Residence, [Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer](#), with a screenshot from your video meet-up (also optional) and a few sentences about what you read and what you learned and discussed with friends. HIAS might feature your book club (with your permission!) on the HIAS blog! You can also register your book club [here](#).

HIAS Student Book Club Book Suggestions

The grade levels are approximate suggestions. Some readers may want to choose a book from younger or older grades – whatever you choose is great! Once you have chosen your book, you might want to search the internet to see if you can find discussion guides for your selection to help guide your conversation.

Grades 2-3

- [Rosie and Warda and the Big Tent](#) (Nechama Liss-Levinson)
- [Four Feet, Two Sandals](#) (Karen Lynn Williams, Khadra Mohammed)
- [The Journey](#) (Francesca Sanna)
- [Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey](#) (Doug Kuntz, Amy Shrodes)
- [Mama's Nightingale](#) (Edwidge Danticat)

Grades 4-5

- [Dia's Story Cloth: The Hmong People's Journey of Freedom](#) (Dia Cha)
- [Drita, My Homegirl](#) (Jenny Lombard)
- [Refugee](#) (Alan Gratz)
- [A Song for Cambodia](#) (Michelle Lord)
- [When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit](#) (Judith Kerr)

Grades 6-8

- [Cry of the Giraffe](#) (Judie Oron)
- [Inside Out & Back Again](#) (Thanhha Lai)
- [A Long Walk to Water](#) (Linda Sue Park, Ginger Knowlton)
- [The Only Road](#) (Alexandra Diaz)
- [The Red Pencil](#) (Andrea Davis Pinkney)

Grades 9-12

- [The Arrival](#) (Shaun Tan; wordless graphic novel)
- [Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees](#) (Deborah Ellis)
- [Escape from Aleppo](#) (N.H. Senzai)
- [The Good Braider](#) (Terry Farish; [discussion guide](#))
- [Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-Torn Syria in a Wheelchair](#) (Nujeen Mustafa, Christina Lamb)
- [Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town](#) (Warren St. John)
- [Over Under Sideways Down](#) (Red Cross UK; graphic novel that contains difficult imagery)

ⁱ www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/549017/exit-west-by-mohsin-hamid/9780735212176/

ⁱⁱ www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/539103/the-girl-who-smiled-beads-by-clemantine-wamariya-and-elizabeth-weil/

ⁱⁱⁱ www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/books/review/25-great-books-by-refugees-in-america.html

^{iv} www.harpercollins.com/9780062567734/nujeen

^v www.alangratz.com/writing/refugee/

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- vi www.groveatlantic.com/?title=The+Refugees
- vii Publisher's description.
- viii www.electricleadership.com/10-books-about-refugees/
- ix www.tzuchi.us/video/videos/the-resettled-short-film
- x www.netflix.com/title/80101827
- xi www.afterspringfilm.com
- xii refugeekidsfilm.com
- xiii www.whichwayhome.net