

Recommended Books on the Global Refugee Crisis



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Below are 10 books written about the refugee and asylum-seeker experience, many 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.

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/

^{vi} www.grovetlantic.com/?title=The+Refugees

^{vii} Publisher's description.

^{viii} www.electricleterature.com/10-books-about-refugees/