

# Yom Ha'Shoah Program Ideas from HIAS



Welcome the stranger.  
Protect the refugee.

## Introduction

Not even a week after we conclude our Passover celebrations, we will find ourselves observing Yom Ha'Shoah. Against the backdrop of Passover's imperative to free ourselves and others from narrow places, we will remember the 6 million Jews and millions of LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses and others who perished in the Holocaust. Sadly, today, so many around the world continue to be persecuted for who they are. The Jewish people knows well the peril of denying these people refuge. This year, in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in recorded history, we can deepen our Yom Ha'Shoah observances by weaving into our programming the experiences of today's refugees who are fleeing violence and persecution.

## Program Recommendations

In addition to any service you may be planning, here are programmatic ideas to incorporate today's refugee crisis into your Yom Ha'Shoah programming:

- Invite a Holocaust survivor and a contemporary refugee to speak about their experiences with time for Q&A.
- Show a film about today's global refugee crisis (suggestions below). Consider also hosting a moderated post-film panel with a Holocaust survivor, a contemporary refugee and/or professionals from your local refugee resettlement agency discussing some of the themes of the film and the speakers' experiences.
- In this month prior to Yom Ha'Shoah, invite your community to read a book (suggestions below) about today's global refugee crisis. On Yom Ha'Shoah, host a community-wide book discussion with guiding questions for participants to discuss.

## Films

- *The Resettled*<sup>i</sup> (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.

- *The White Helmets*<sup>ii</sup> (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.
- *After Spring*<sup>iii</sup> (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.
- *Refugee Kids*<sup>iv</sup> (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.
- *Which Way Home*<sup>v</sup> – *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.

## Books

- *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.<sup>vi</sup>
- *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.”<sup>vii</sup>
- *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.

- *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."<sup>viii</sup>
- *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (Judith Kerr) – This is a great middle-school level book if you would like to engage a community of all ages in a book club style event. 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.

### Additional Resources

As you plan your Yom Ha'Shoah programming, please feel free to reach out for consultation to HIAS director of education Rabbi Rachel Grant Meyer at [rachel.grant.meyer@hias.org](mailto:rachel.grant.meyer@hias.org) or (212) 613-1363.

For additional Jewish resources on the global refugee crisis like FAQs, fact sheets, text studies, and other holiday materials, visit HIAS' Resource page at [www.hias.org/resources](http://www.hias.org/resources).

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### References

<sup>i</sup> [www.tzuchi.us/video/videos/the-resettled-short-film](http://www.tzuchi.us/video/videos/the-resettled-short-film)

<sup>ii</sup> [www.netflix.com/title/80101827](http://www.netflix.com/title/80101827)

<sup>iii</sup> [www.afterspringfilm.com](http://www.afterspringfilm.com)

<sup>iv</sup> [refugeekidsfilm.com](http://refugeekidsfilm.com)

<sup>v</sup> [www.whichwayhome.net](http://www.whichwayhome.net)

<sup>vi</sup> [www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/549017/exit-west-by-mohsin-hamid/9780735212176/](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/549017/exit-west-by-mohsin-hamid/9780735212176/)

<sup>vii</sup> [www.groveatlantic.com/?title=The+Refugees](http://www.groveatlantic.com/?title=The+Refugees)

<sup>viii</sup> [www.harpercollins.com/9780062567734/nujeen](http://www.harpercollins.com/9780062567734/nujeen)