



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

WELCOMING AND ORIENTING NEWCOMER STUDENTS TO U.S. SCHOOLS

HIGHLIGHTED RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

- 1. Behind the Mountain.** Danticat, Edwidge. 166 pages. New York: Scholastic Inc. 2002.
Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.scholastic.com
Narrates the personal and political events that force a young Haitian girl and her family to immigrate to New York City and describes the adjustment process to a new culture. Using a diary narrative format beginning in October 2000, the protagonist, a middle-school girl, named Celiane, describes the ordinary events of life with her mother, older brother, and friends in rural Haiti. Celaine's father left for New York City five years earlier and works to raise money and make the political connections to bring his family back together. Celaine and her family go to visit her father's sister, Tante Rose, in Port-au-Prince where she works as a nurse. While visiting, Celaine and her mother are caught in a bus bombing that occurs to protest the upcoming election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. They are trapped in the city while the violence continues and they resolve to immigrate by Christmas. Once reunited, the family struggles with such issues as making cultural connections in the community through church and radio stations, developing new friends in school, learning a new language, dealing with family tension, and coping with cold weather. Woven into the story is Haitian history, Christmas traditions, folk stories, and the oppressive practice of subjecting young girls to indentured service. The author writes the story based on her own migration from Haiti to America in the 1970s.
- 2. Carly.** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 7 min. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1999.
Availability: This video is available from UNHCR. Web site: www.unhcr.ch
"Carly is an educational tool aimed at children of between 5 and 8 years old... The story is about a little girl who is forced to flee her home. She experiences insecurity and rejection before finding warmth, protection and affection in a new home." - Publisher's description
- 3. Coming to America: A Muslim Family's Story.** Wolf, Bernard. 48 pages. New York: Lee & Low Books Inc. 2003.
Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.leeandlow.com
Uses easy-to-read text and vivid photos to describe the daily activities of an actual Muslim family working hard to establish their new life in America after immigrating from Egypt. The Mahmoud family, earning only \$60 a month in Egypt, won a lottery for a "green card" which allows legal immigration to the United States. Hassan, the father, works as a night clerk in a 24-hour grocery store in New York City and the stress of this job is taxing. Soad, the mother, stays at home to care for the family but spends weekends learning English. Amr, graduates from eighth grade and achieves excellent academic honors which pleases his parents. Sisters Dina and Rown also work hard in school and learn about American customs such as Father's Day and fashion trends. The family struggles to buy food and pay rent while maintaining the Egyptian custom of expansive dinners

consisting of soups, several entrees, and desserts. They stay true to their Muslim faith through observing the rituals of several daily prayer breaks and make a special visit to a great mosque in Manhattan. An afterword explains the significance of the Qur'an as a guide for daily conduct and the five basic pillars of the Muslim faith. (IP)

4. **Dawn and Dusk: A Kurdish Family Torn by War.** Mead, Alice. 151 pages. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR) 2007.

Availability: This resource can be ordered from the publisher at: <http://www.fsgkidsbooks.com/>. It may also be available from other book vendors or your local library.

Depicts the personal and political crises facing a fictional Kurdish family living in western Iran during the early 1980s. The intended audience of middle-school students learns about Kurdish customs as well as how society changes when Ayatollah Khomeini reintroduced strict Muslim laws in 1979. The protagonist, 13-year-old Azad, lives a typical life by attending school, playing with friends, and caring for his pet parrot. He tries to hide the pain caused by his parents' divorce due to his father's life as an informant for the ultra-conservative SAVAMA secret police and his mother's loyalty to human rights. The Iran-Iraq war falls on the doorsteps of this small border town, called Sardasht, when Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader, orders chemical weapons to be unleashed. This event widens the family rift further as Azad chooses to leave his father and accompany his mother to her tribal home in the mountains. Azad's uncle, Mohammad, joins the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), to press for equal rights and the creation of a separate state of Kurdistan. He is caught, and the family is forced to seek asylum in Turkey and finally to relocate to the United States. (IP)

5. **Documentary Project for Refugee Youth.** Global Action Project. New York: Global Action Project, *Availability:* This site is available on the Web at: <http://www.global-action.org/refugee/about.html>.

The Flash site is available at: <http://www.thedocumentaryproject.org/>. Offers the results of collaboration among refugee high school students, artists, the Global Action Project, the International Rescue Committee, and other organizations in New York City. The Documentary Project for Refugee Youth consisted of a core group of a dozen 14- to 17-year-old refugees primarily from Western African (Burundi and Sierra Leone) and the Balkans (Bosnia and Serbia) who attended a weekly multimedia workshop. By learning the techniques of documentary making, such as interviews, photography, journalism, and video, the youth engaged in creating artistic products to educate the general public about the refugee condition. Among the project's goals were to involve these youth in a dynamic activity at a critical point in their resettlement, foster both self-reliance and mutual cooperation, provide creative avenues of self-expression and of validation of personal experiences, and produce work that will become part of the canon of social-issue documentaries. The project's Web site features a collective scrapbook, photo essays, interviews and a curriculum available for free download. The youth made three documentaries: "Moving On", "One Family", and "Picture a Story".

6. **Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America.** Dumas, Firoozeh. 208 pages. New York: Random House, 2006.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.randomhouse.com

Relates the story of Firoozeh Dumas from the time she came to Southern California as an Iranian girl of seven years old through her college years and marriage to a Frenchman. Each member of her family has particular issues with the cultural change of immigration: her engineer father who lost his first job in the U.S. after the hostages were taken at the Tehran embassy; her mother who never masters English sufficiently to speak so Americans can understand her; and her uncle who grows fat on fast food and seeks out various diet remedies to lose weight. Firoozeh has to endure the taunts of other children while trying to fit into her new culture. Her father takes trips back to Iran where his pension that is meager by American standards allows him to act as a wealthy man and stay in hotels, handing out large tips. When Firoozeh decides to marry her husband, François, she has to deal with the cultural dictates of both her and his families as well as the religious issues. At the end of the book

several special features have been added: an afterword tells about the reception of the book by the reading public as well as the author's family; the author is interviewed by Khaled Hosseini, the author of *The Kite Runner*; and a reader's guide providing discussion questions.

7. **God Grew Tired of Us.** National Geographic Films. 90 minutes. Washington, DC: National Geographic Films, 2006.

Availability: This DVD can be purchased from the National Geographic Store at <http://shop.nationalgeographic.com/>

Documents the experiences and emotions of three young men from the group known as the "Lost Boys" who were granted asylum in America after walking barefoot over the sub-Saharan desert to escape the Sudanese civil war and subsequently living in a Kenyan refugee camp for ten years. John Bul Dau, Daniel Abol Pach, and Panther Blor were separated from their families and joined over 20,000 boys who formed extremely close family groups to care for each other as they faced famine, disease, wild animals, and attacks from the rebel soldiers. The documentary reveals the pain of separation as the three young men prepare to leave their surrogate families bound for a new life in America. Initially, they are bewildered and overwhelmed by the cultural differences as they enter modern American life where refugee placement agents must show them how to use electricity, cooking appliances, indoor plumbing, transportation routes, and supermarkets. After the first year, government financial support is no longer available, and these three men are working two or three jobs while trying to complete their education. They speak poignantly about their loneliness and they wish for the companionship of the large group back in Africa and desperately seek family members. After three years, they are active, college-educated, polished members of American society who are proud of their Dinka culture, advocate tirelessly for development in the Sudan, and seek assistance for other refugees. John shares an emotional reunion with his mother and siblings. (IP)

8. **Kids Like Me: Voices of the Immigrant Experience.** Lapinsky, Terri, and Blohm, Judith M. 266 pages. Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006.

Availability: Availability: May be ordered directly from Intercultural Press at: <http://www.interculturalpress.com/store/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=0&idproduct=56>

Kids Like Me includes the personal narratives of 26 young immigrants as they adapt to life in a new and sometimes strange country and culture. Kids Like Me also includes discussion questions, self-directed activities and research ideas for teachers and families that can be used in classrooms, clubs and community settings. (KHH)

9. **Little Cricket.** Brown, Jackie. 224 pages. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2004.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at <http://www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com>

Tells the story of Kia Vang, a twelve-year-old Hmong girl from Laos, whose nickname is "Little Cricket," and her family's flight through Thailand to the United States. In the 1970s during the Vietnam War, North Vietnamese soldiers came into Laos, and the village in the mountains where Kia lived was destroyed. Her father had been killed like the other men from the village who had tried to escape. With her older brother, mother, and grandparents, they make the dangerous trek to Thailand where they are placed in a refugee camp. After three years a Catholic church in Minnesota offers passage to three of the family, and Kia leaves with her grandfather and brother to begin a new life in the St. Paul area where other Hmong refugees have settled. While she stays close to home and befriends a recluse boy and his monkey who live in the apartment building, her brother Xigi rejects Hmong culture and gets into trouble because of gambling debts. The three family members come together and face the reality of their new lives. When Xigi says that he has taken a job to become a butcher, his grandfather who previously had opposed any such work except their own raising and selling of vegetables agrees to help Xigi achieve his goal. Kia and her grandfather save the money from their vegetable stand in the hope of bringing over the rest of the family from the refugee camp; when they take the money to the church, they learn that the church already has raised the funds and soon

mother and grandmother, who have been studying English while waiting, will join them. Inspired by hearing this news, grandfather who has been withdrawn announces he will start to learn English and shows an interest in meeting his neighbors. (IP)

10. **My Name Is Bilal.** Mobin-Uddin, Asma, and Kiwak, Barbara (illustrator) 30 pages. Homestead, PA: Boyds Mills Press, INC. 2005.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.boydsmillspress.com

My Name is Bilal by Asma Mobin-Uddin is about a Muslim boy named Bilal. He and his sister, Ayesha, encounter teasing at their new school, mostly because Ayesha covers her hair. The bullies taunt them by telling them to “go back to your own country” and by tugging on Ayesha’s headscarf. Bilal starts off school by announcing his name is “Bill” in order keep his Muslim identity a secret, but after he stands up to the bullying, he comfortably shares his real name. This is a great book for refugee or immigrant students who are struggling with their identity as Muslims.

11. **One Day We Had to Run! Refugee Children Tell Their Stories in Words and Paintings, Revised edition.** Wilkes, Sybella. 64 pages. London: Evans Brothers Ltd. in association with UNHCR (UK) and Save the Children, 2000.

Availability: This publication is available for purchase from online out-of-print booksellers. This resource may also be acquired through a library on interlibrary loan.

Records the experiences of a group of young refugees in Kenya, including the tragedies they witnessed, the dramas they survived, and the future they envision. Their stories, in words and images, speak for the 22 million refugees worldwide, many of whom are vulnerable children who have suffered horrific events. In addition to the children's vivid stories and paintings, the book provides information about the countries from which the children fled - Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda - all enduring civil war, chronic political instability, and unreliable weather conditions leading to drought, famine, and disease. A postscript describes the continuing chaos in Sierra Leone. Prepared in association with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children, this book can be used by teachers to help students explore concepts such as migration, justice, human rights, safety, environmental protection, economic development, poverty and wealth, and the experience of being a newcomer. The stories and images contained in the book could be presented in school assemblies, to foster greater awareness of the refugee situation; and incorporated in the curriculum, to support lessons in geography, history, humanities and social studies, language, and citizenship.

12. **A Piece of Home.** Levitin, Sonia

Wijngaard, Juan. 32 pages. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1996.

Availability: This book is out-of-print. I may be available on interlibrary loan from your local library.

Describes the excitement and fear experienced by Gregor, a young Russian boy, as he immigrates to America. Written for primary school students, the story recounts Gregor’s curiosity about his extended family already settled in America and the pain of leaving his native land. Each family member brings one item to remember Russia; his father brings his “garmoshka,” an accordion, his mother, a Russian tea samovar, and Gregor chooses his treasured and tattered baby blanket. Gregor’s anxiety increases as he picks at his airplane food and worries that his cousin, Elie, will call him a baby since he treasures his blanket. The initial reunion is awkward yet the blanket breaks the tension when Elie realizes that he has the same blanket. It was part of a larger quilt that was hand-made by their great-grandmother and cut into two pieces so that each family would have a piece of home. (IP)

13. **Red Midnight.** Mikaelson, Ben. 224 pages. New York: Harper Trophy, 2007.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at <http://www.harperchildrens.com>

Recounts the fictional story of a young Guatemalan boy, Santiago, as he escapes from murderous government soldiers and sails to freedom in America in a small sailboat. As the night sky over his

burning village glows red, Santiago saves his four-year-old sister, Angelina, and at the encouragement of his wounded Uncle Ramos, he travels to the farm where his uncle taught him to sail a small boat called a "cayuco." The journey vividly captures the fear and determination that characterize actual refugee stories. Santiago is a descendant of indigenous Guatemalans, known as the "first people," who live in rural farming communities trapped between the communist rebels and oppressive government soldiers armed by the United States in the 1980s. When the first people were tricked into signing away their property to the government, the guerrillas began to recruit in the villages causing tense relationships with neighbors spying on neighbors and ultimately, the destruction of countless villages and mass murders. Santiago and Angelina face starvation, dehydration, pirates, sharks, and violent weather to sail from Guatemala to Florida. (IP)

14. Refugee Teenagers: Escape and Protection from Persecution and War. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 23. Washington, DC: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) July 1999.

Availability: This is available online at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/protect/openssl.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=4534f1e713>

"Each day, somewhere on this planet, teenagers become refugees. These are young people who have fled their home countries to escape persecution or war. Refugee teenagers often face mistreatment during flight, and further dangers await them upon arrival in their country of asylum. Because they are not yet grown up, refugee teenagers are among the most vulnerable groups of any refugee population. This brochure recounts the stories of several refugee teenagers and discusses some of the issues surrounding the protection of refugee adolescents, namely, the dilemmas of unaccompanied minors and the military recruitment of child soldiers." - Publisher's description

15. Remix: Conversations with Immigrant Teenagers. Budhos, Marina. 145 pages. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

Availability: This book can be acquired through a library on interlibrary loan. It can also be purchased through major online book resellers.

"Presents profiles of fourteen teenagers from countries around the world, revealing their struggles to fit into American society and their personal triumphs." - Publisher's description

16. The Story of My Life: An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky. Ahmedi, Farah, and Ansary, Tamim. 256 pages. New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2005.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at <http://www.simonsays.com>

Recounts the life of an Afghan girl, Farah Ahmedi, who is crippled by a landmine when walking to school in Kabul and who comes with her mother to Chicago to attend high school. Due to the severity of her injuries, she is chosen to be taken to Germany for life-saving medical treatment. There the doctors amputate one leg and fuse the other leg so it is no longer able to bend. She spends two years in Germany during which time she learns how to walk with a prosthesis; however, she is unable to return to her home due to the war there. By the time she rejoins her family, rockets and warfare have become daily events in Afghanistan, and the schools are closed for "rocket days." When she and her mother return from a trip to the market, they find their home destroyed, her father and sisters dead. Eventually her mother sends Farah's two brothers off to Pakistan so that they can escape from the terror of the Taliban. Later Farah and her mother make the dangerous crossing into Pakistan, and from there they are rescued by World Relief and taken to America. While Farah adapts quickly to her new country doing such typical teenage activities as learning how to drive, her mother falls into a despondent state and requires psychiatric help. Farah looks forward to going to college and someday revisiting her native country. (IP)

17. Swimming to America. Mead, Alice. 160 pages. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Explores how a youngster from Albania who is living in the New York City area illegally views her life and future prospects. Linda Berati cannot find out from her parents about her background and grows alienated from them; as an eighth-grader she finds school boring and bonds with another foreign-born student, Ramón, who is Cuban. Together they build a hideout from which they can see the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Ramón's brother, Miguel, is involved in drug selling. When Linda is working with Ramón's family at a movie theater, other drug dealers come looking for Miguel and shoot him. Linda runs home to call the police even though she is sure that this action will place her and Ramón's families both at risk for deportation. When her parents find out about the danger Linda encountered, they tell her the truth that they are all illegal but nevertheless decide they will not live in fear. Likewise Ramón's family sends Miguel who was only grazed by the bullet to live with other relatives and quit the job at the theater; they say that over and over they make new beginnings and they will do that again. Meanwhile Linda's parents will have Linda change to a more challenging school and agree that no matter where they end up, she must get the best education possible. (IP)

18. **To Be a Refugee.** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 15 min. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Availability:* *This video is available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR at <http://www.unhcr.ch>* Children's video. To be used at schools and in general with young audiences. A teaching guide for the video is available upon request.

19. **Transitions: Stories of Our Journeys.** Houminer, Talia, ed. Georgia Mutual Assistance Association Consortium (GMAAC) 108 pages. 1st Books Library, 2002. *Availability:* *This book can be ordered from the 1st Books Library at www.1stbooks.com Phone: 1-800.839-8640 or from GMAAC, Resources for Refugee and Immigrant YOUTH, 901 Rowland St., Clarkston, GA 30021. Phone: 404-299-6646; Fax: 404-299-6894* Transitions: Stories of Our Journeys is a collection of stories written by refugee youth from around the world compiled by the Georgia Mutual Assistance Association Consortium (GMAAC). These first person accounts offer a unique perspective of the refugee experience. (KHH)

20. **The Trouble Begins.** Himelblau, Linda. 200 pages. New York: Delacorte Press, 2005. *Availability:* *This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.randomhouse.com* Portrays the difficulty experienced by a young Vietnamese boy, Du Nguryen, when he comes to the U.S. to rejoin the family that left him behind when he was a baby. He has been living in a Philippine refugee camp with his grandmother who accompanies him to America. He has trouble fitting in with the kids at school since his English is poor and he does not know classroom routines and American culture. At first his family thinks he only causes problems as they hear one complaint after another about him from other parents, from the school, and from even the police. His own siblings who have been in America much longer regard him at first as dumb and crazy. He cannot make friends and his classmates make fun of his name and treat him as if he is stupid. His grandmother knows that he is a brave, smart boy, but it takes a while for the others to see that. Once another boy invites him to play soccer, he shows how fast he can run and is invited to join the school team. When he delivers newspapers to save his father's paper route, helps save cats from a fire, and wins a math prize at school, his true colors appear and he gains friends as well as the love and support of his family. (IP)

21. **Unity.** Phillips Community Television. 15 minutes. Minneapolis, MN: Phillips Community Television, 2003. *Availability:* *Contact Phillips Community Television for availability: <http://www.youthmedia.tv/>* Explores an amazing transformation in a Minnesota high school where African American students and Somali refugee students turned from resentments to conflict resolution using a combined group called Unity. This 15-minute video chronicles the problems at Roosevelt High School in St. Paul as the influx of Somali refugee students clashed with the African American students. Power struggles and

misunderstandings caused daily fights and escalating violence. Counselors sought to resolve the situation by bringing the Black American student group into conversation with the Somali student group. These meetings enlightened the Americans to the plight and pain of the refugees, and both groups realized that they shared a history of breaking the shackles of oppression. Social interaction increased and they decided to begin a new group named, Unity. After September 11, 2001, Unity organized the student body to form a Wall of Peace around the school to honor the lives lost, to promote peace, and to seek common understanding. As the group evolved, they focused on improving self-confidence and offered leadership roles for all members as they organized information sessions and poster-making activities to constantly remind the school members to seek peaceful resolution to problems. (IP)

22. **Xochitl and the Flowers; Xochitl, la Nina de las Flores.** Argueta, Jorge, and Angel, Carl (illustrator) 32 pages. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2005.

Availability: This book can be purchased from the publisher at www.childrensbookpress.org

In this story based on real events, Xochitl Flores and her family move from El Salvador to Los Angeles. Life is very different in the United States, and Xochitl begins to adjust and settle into her new routine while still missing her home in El Salvador. When a local neighbor makes it difficult for her family to sell flowers like they did before moving to the United States, it is the community that rallies around the Flores family and helps them maintain the life they love so much. This book is written in both English and Spanish, with illustrations by Carl Angel.