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Overview

Do you want to impact the world view of the young people in your life? Do you want to find some reading material to which your tutee can relate? Consider one of these books.

Explore our list of literature—these books are geared for children and adolescents and are written about the refugee or immigrant experience from many different perspectives and lands. Some tell the story of life in a war zone or conflict, flight from a home country, life in a refugee camp, or adjustment to a new home in a faraway country. Check them out from your local library or buy some as a gift.

*Age appropriateness:* These books were categorized into age groups by the Chicago Public Library and Amazon, mainly according to reading level. Some of the content may contain sensitive material that may be upsetting or scary. Please use your own judgment as to what is appropriate for your child.

*Settings:* The themes that run through these stories often tell truths of the refugee or immigrant experience, no matter which countries they come from. Read a variety.

Recommendations to add to the list? Please send any more book titles that you think would be appropriate to add to this list to volunteer@refugeeone.org.

Sources

Images, synopses, and other book information for this handout were gathered from the Chicago Public Library and Amazon. Books were compiled, in part, thanks to the joint work of Susan Corapi of Trinity International University and Megan McCaffrey of Governor’s State University in their research *Seeing Themselves in a Book: A Collection of Titles to Support Refugee Children* (February 2017) and from the National Network of State Teachers of the Year’s *Social Justice Book List* (August 2017).

About RefugeeOne

Who We Are

As the largest full-service refugee agency in Chicago, RefugeeOne has welcomed more than 17,500 refugees fleeing war, terror, and persecution since 1982. RefugeeOne walks alongside refugees from the moment they land at O’Hare Airport—providing welcome, English classes, furnished homes, job search support, mental health care, after-school programming, and mentors to help refugees integrate into American society. Our ultimate goal is to help refugee families become self-reliant in as few as 6-9 months. What’s remarkable is how quickly they succeed!
Preschool to Second Grade

**Chachaji’s Cup**  
*by Uma Krishnaswami*

Neel loves listening to Chachaji’s stories over hot cups of tea. Chachaji’s tales of great Hindu gods and demons, and his adventures in the Army, leave Neel in awe. But it is the tale of his great-uncle’s teacup that teaches Neel the most, for the cup holds far more than sweet, spicy chai. It holds the story of a family and a country split in two during the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan.

**The Colour of Home**  
*by Mary Hoffman*

Hassan feels out of place in a new cold, grey country. At school, he paints a picture showing his colorful Somalian home, covered with the harsh colors of war from which his family has fled. He tells his teacher about their voyage from Mogadishu to Mombassa, the refugee camp and on to England. But gradually things change. When Hassan’s parents put up his next picture on the wall, Hassan notices the maroon prayer mat, a bright green cushion and his sister Naima’s pink dress - the new colors of home.

**Faraway Home**  
*by Jane Kurtz*

Desta’s grandmother is ill in faraway Ethiopia, and her father must return to his native land to help out. As her father prepares for the trip back, the man’s love and yearning for home is obvious and Desta begins to worry. Where does her father truly belong—in the village of his youth or here in America with her? What was growing up in Ethiopia like? And will her father’s love for his family be enough to bridge these two worlds and bring him back to her?
Gleam and Glow
by Eve Bunting
Eight-year-old Viktor, from Bosnia, watches as his father walks away to join the Liberation Army and knows that soon he, his mother, and younger sister, Marina, will be forced to leave their home too. One man leaves his two golden fish with the family. As they ready themselves to depart, Viktor releases the fish into their pond. After days of walking and weeks of living in a refugee camp, the boy and his family share a glorious reunion and eventually return home.

How Many Days to America? A Thanksgiving Story
by Eve Bunting
After the police come, a family is forced to become refugees and must flee their home on a Caribbean island to embark on a dangerous boat trip to America. There, they have a special reason to celebrate Thanksgiving.

I Hate English!
by Ellen Levine
Mei Mei, a bright young girl, an immigrant from Hong Kong, is having much difficulty adjusting to the new language and culture at school in New York City. When she hears a story in English about traveling by covered wagon, Mei Mei cries. A sensitive teacher takes Mei Mei under her wing, and succeeds in helping Mei Mei understand her fear of losing her identity.

I’m New Here
by Anne Sibley O’Brien
Three students are immigrants from Guatemala, Korea, and Somalia, and they have trouble speaking, writing, and sharing ideas in English in their new American elementary school. Through self-determination and with encouragement from their peers and teachers, the students learn to feel confident and comfortable in their new school without losing a sense of their home, country, language, and identity.
The Journey
*by Francesca Sanna*
This title chronicles the unexpected, grueling migration of a family whose lives are forever changed by war. *From the author:* The Journey is actually a story about many journeys, and it began with the story of two girls I met in a refugee center in Italy. After meeting them I realized that behind their journey lay something very powerful. So I began collecting more stories of migration and interviewing many people from many different countries. A few months later...I knew I wanted to create a book about these true stories. This book is a collage of all those personal stories and the incredible strength of the people within them.

My Name is Yoon
*by Helen Recorvits*
Yoon's name means "shining wisdom," and when she writes it in Korean, it looks happy, like dancing figures. But her father tells her that she must learn to write it in English. In English, all the lines and circles stand alone, just like how Yoon feels in the United States. Yoon isn't sure that she wants to be YOON. At her new school, she tries out different names—maybe CAT or BIRD. Maybe CUPCAKE!

My Name Was Hussein
*by Hristo Kyuchukov*
Young Hussein lives with his Roma family in a small village in Bulgaria. Some call them Gypsies, but they are the Roma people, whose ancestors migrated many years ago from India. Hussein and his family are Muslims. The boy loves to celebrate the religious holidays and also loves his name. Life is good in Hussein's village—until the soldiers come with guns and tanks. Hussein and his family are forced to give up their identities and choose Christian names. This story of racial and religious prejudice is poignant and powerful.
The Name Jar
by Yangsook Choi

Being the new kid in school is hard enough, but what about when nobody can pronounce your name? Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious, wondering if the American kids will like her. Instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week. Her new classmates are fascinated by this no-name girl and decide to help out by filling a glass jar with names for her to pick from. But while Unhei practices being a Suzy, Laura, or Amanda, one of her classmates comes to her neighborhood and discovers her real name and its special meaning.

One Green Apple
by Eve Bunting

Farah feels alone, even when surrounded by her classmates. She listens and nods but doesn’t speak. It’s hard being the new kid in school, especially when you’re from another country and don’t know the language. Then, on a field trip to an apple orchard, Farah discovers there are lots of things that sound the same as they did at home back in the Middle East, from dogs crunching their food to the ripple of friendly laughter. As she helps the class make apple cider, Farah connects with the other students and begins to feel that she belongs.

The Seeds of Friendship
by Michael Foreman

Adam, an immigrant boy in a big city, is lonely until he sees snow for the first time and starts to play with the neighborhood children. When he starts school, he gets some seeds and begins to plant them with help from his new friends. Adam is from a “faraway place,” but he has moved to an apartment in a city. It’s exciting, but lonely; Adam paints his homesickness, hanging pictures of African animals on his wall.
Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey
by Margriet Ruurs

Quiet, intense nostalgia permeates the fictional Rama’s recollection of her family’s life in Syria before war forced them to flee and start over in another country. Written in English and Arabic, the tight blank verse contains just enough detail for readers to imagine Rama’s journey. On every spread, a round pebble hovers over the refugees, providing light, like the moon or sun, as well as hope. A unique offering that will open eyes and soften hearts.

Teacup
by Rebecca Young

A boy must leave his home in a fictional land and find another. He brings with him a teacup full of earth from the place where he grew up, and sets off to sea. Some days, the journey is peaceful, and the skies are cloudless and bright. Some days, storms threaten to overturn his boat. And some days, the smallest amount of hope grows into something glorious. At last, the boy finds land, but it doesn't feel complete . . . until another traveler joins him, bearing the seed to build a new home.

Ziba Came on a Boat
by Liz Lofthouse

Based on real events about a refugee family from Afghanistan, this book is the moving story of a little girl whose family has lost almost everything. This beautiful picture book takes us on her brave journey to make a new life far from home. The author focuses on Ziba’s bravery and her mother’s hope for a better future.
Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan
by Mary Williams

Eight-year-old Garang, orphaned by a civil war in Sudan, finds the inner strength to help lead other boys as they trek hundreds of miles seeking safety in Ethiopia, then Kenya, and finally in the United States. This is their story of resilience. Since 2000 the U.S. has taken in about 3,000 "Lost Boys of Sudan," orphaned by the ethnic and religious wars that have left over two million dead.

Dia’s Story Cloth by Dia Cha
The story cloth made for her by her aunt and uncle chronicles the life of the author and her family in their native Laos and their eventual emigration to the United States. Intricately composed, painstakingly stitched by hand, the “story cloth” of the title was created by the author’s aunt and uncle, Hmong who fled their native Laos for a refugee camp in Thailand.

Four Feet, Two Sandals
by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed

Two young Afghani girls living in a refugee camp in Pakistan share a precious pair of sandals brought by relief workers. This poignant story centers on two Afghani girls, each of whom ends up with half of a pair of sandals after the workers bring used clothing to their refugee camp. Lina and Feroza agree to share the shoes, taking turns and sometimes each wearing one.

Going Home, Coming Home
by Truong Tran

A young girl visits her grandmother in Vietnam where her parents were born and learns that she can call two places home. This book tells a contemporary immigrant story, not of child refugees coming to America, but of a child of refugees visiting, for the first time, the country her parents still call home.
Home at Last
*by Susan Middleton Elya*
Ana Patino is adjusting well to her new life in the United States after leaving her home in Latin America, but her mother is having a difficult time because she doesn’t speak English. When Ana’s baby brother falls ill, Mama agrees to take English lessons. As her knowledge of the English language grows, so does her sense of belonging.

Leaving Vietnam: The True Story of Tuan Ngo
*by Sarah Kilborne*
In the middle of the night, Tuan Ngo and his father fled their home in war-torn Vietnam. But slipping away on a tiny boat was only the beginning of this young boy’s journey to freedom. "Leaving Vietnam" is the true story of Tuan’s escape, a first-person tale as a boat boy and refugee.

The Lotus Seed
*by Sherry Garland*
A young Vietnamese girl saves a lotus seed and carries it with her everywhere to remember a brave emperor and the homeland that she has to flee. She keeps a seed from the palace gardens with her through vicissitudes of war, flight, and emigration until one summer a grandson steals it and plants it near the family’s American home. The following spring, a lotus grows from the mud puddle, seeding hope in her heart.

Mali Under the Night Sky: A Lao Story of Home
*by Youme Landowne*
This book tells of a family’s escape from civil war in Laos. The opening images celebrate family roots with pictures of a young girl, Mali, playing in her community, and at home. In abrupt contrast, the images move to scenes of Mali alone on a tense, empty street. War is near, and the family flees at night across a wide river to another country, where they are arrested for not having a home.
Mama’s Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation

by Edwidge Danticat

After Saya’s mother is sent to an immigration detention center, Saya finds comfort in listening to her mother’s warm greeting on their answering machine. To ease the distance between them while she’s in jail, Mama begins sending Saya bedtime stories inspired by Haitian folklore on cassette tape. Moved by her mother’s tales and her father’s attempts to reunite their family, Saya writes a story of her own—one that just might bring her mother home for good.

Mohammed’s Journey: A Refugee Diary

by Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young

Saddam’s soldiers came to Mohammed’s house in Iraq, beat him and his mother, and took his father away. After that night, he and his mom escaped from Iraq by bus, on horseback, in an inflatable raft on a raging river, and finally, by hiding in a truck on a ship.

My Freedom Trip

by Frances Park and Ginger Park

Just prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, young Soo secretly crosses the 38th parallel from North Korea to South Korea, hoping to join her father on the other side. Because it is dangerous for more than one person to cross at a time, her mother waits behind. At every step there is danger, but the child remembers her mother’s words—“Be brave, Soo!”

My Name is Maria Isabel

by Alma Flor Ada

For María Isabel Salazar López, the hardest thing about being the new girl is that the teacher doesn't call her by her real name. "We already have two Marías in this class," says her teacher. "Why don't we call you Mary instead?" But María Isabel has been named for her Papá's mother and for Chabela, her beloved Puerto Rican grandmother. Can she help her teacher see that if she loses her name, she’s lost the most important part of herself?
My Name is Sangoel
by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed

After Sangoel’s father is killed in the Sudanese civil war, his family leaves their refugee camp, flies on a sky boat, and is settled in a city apartment as Sangoel starts school. As a refugee from Sudan to the United States, Sangoel is frustrated that no one can pronounce his name correctly until he finds a clever way to solve the problem.

My Two Blankets
by Irena Kobald

Cartwheel moves to a new country from Sudan with her auntie, and everything is strange: the animals, the plants—even the wind. An old blanket gives Cartwheel comfort when she’s sad and feeling homesick—and a new blanket just might change her world. When she meets a new friend, the relationship helps her take her first steps into a new culture and building a new life there.

Rene Has Two Last Names
by Rene Colato Lainez

Young Rene is from El Salvador and he doesn't understand why his name has to be different in the United States. His new classmates giggle when Rene tells them his name. "That's a long dinosaur name," one says. Rene doesn't want to lose the part of him that comes from his mother's family. When the students are given a project to create a family tree, Rene is determined to explain why he uses both of his last names.

A Song for Cambodia
by Michelle Lord

When Arn was a young boy in Cambodia, his days were filled with love, laughter, and music. That all changed in 1975 when Arn’s village was invaded by soldiers and his family was torn apart. Arn was taken to a children’s work camp, where he labored long hours in the rice fields. When guards asked for volunteers to play music one day, Arn bravely raised his hand taking a chance that would change the course of his life.
Their Great Gift: Courage, Sacrifice and Hope in a New Land
by John Coy

Simple text and thought-provoking photographs offer an utterly distinctive look at immigration to the United States through the eyes of children from many different backgrounds. Photos of modern-day immigrants appear alongside a spare, poetic text describing their collective experience in a new country. Images of families who came to the United States from many different parts of the world celebrate the diversity of our country and contain a vision of hope for the future.

Where Will I Live?
by Rosemary McCarney

This stunning photo essay takes a look at the thousands of children around the world who have been forced to flee war, terror, hunger and natural disasters—young refugees on the move with very little left except questions. The images here will help unaffected children understand what this must feel like. Children, even with uncertain futures, are resilient and can face uncertainty with optimism.

The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee’s Story
by Pegi Deitz Shea

Mai spends her days at the Widows’ Store, listening to the Hmong women as they stitch and talk. They are making pa’ndau—brightly colored story cloths. Mai wishes she, too, could make one of the beautiful pa’ndau, but what story could she tell? This tale depicts life in a refugee camp in Thailand. Mai lives there with her grandmother, who helps her as she struggles to perfect her stitchery. Only by going back into her own brief and tragic past can she find a story to tell—one of hope and faith in the midst of war and confinement.
Third Grade to Sixth Grade

90 Miles to Havana
by Enrique Flores-Galbis

In 1961, Julian, a young Cuban boy, experiences the violent revolution and watches mobs throw out his family’s furniture and move into their home. For his safety, his parents make the heartbreaking decision to send him and his two brothers away from Cuba to Miami via the Pedro Pan operation, the boys are thrust into a new world where bullies run rampant and it's not always clear how best to protect themselves. He tries to avoid the powerful camp bullies while he waits in anguish for his parents, and in a wrenching parting, his two older brothers are sent away to a harsh orphanage in Denver.

Always With You
by Ruth Vander Zee

After her mother is killed by an explosion that also destroys her Vietnam village, four-year-old Kim is alone and afraid. Eventually, she is rescued by soldiers who bring her to an orphanage. Surrounded by the love of the couple who run the orphanage, the companionship of the children who live there, and her mother's promise, “I will always be with you,” Kim finds the strength and courage to survive.

Hamzat’s Journey: A Refugee Diary
by Anthony Robinson

In 2001, when Chechens were at war with Russia, Hamzat was on his way to school in the capital of Grozny when he stepped on a landmine. His leg had to be amputated, and eventually he and his father went to the U.K. for expert treatment and to be fitted for an artificial leg. As it was unsafe for them to return home, the family sought asylum in the U.K., where the family is learning to adapt to their new life after the horror of living in a war zone.
**Inside Out & Back Again**  
*by Thanhha Lai*

Inspired by the author’s childhood experience as a refugee—fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama—this coming-of-age debut novel in verse has been celebrated for its touching child’s-eye view of family and immigration. Hà has only ever known Saigon: the thrills of its markets, the joy of its traditions, and the warmth of her friends close by. But now the Vietnam War has reached her home. Hà and her family are forced to flee as Saigon falls, and they board a ship headed toward hope—toward America.

**Making It Home: Real Life Stories from Children Forced to Flee**  
*by Beverley Naidoo*

Here, in this remarkable book, real kids from all over the world tell their stories as children forced to flee. They tell how it happened to them, what their life is like now, and what they hope and plan for as they grow up. Beyond the headlines and TV reports, their words and images offer a personal reflection of what every kid needs and should have: family, food, safety, a future, a place to call home.

**Playing War**  
*by Kathy Beckwith*

One summer day Luke and his friends decide to play their favorite game of war, but Sameer, who is new, hesitates to join in. When Sameer tells them the next day that he has been in a real war, they don’t believe him. As he tells what happened to his family in his old home in the Middle East, the others start to see their game in a new light.

**The Red Pencil**  
*by Andrea Davis Pinkney*

Life in Amira’s peaceful Sudanese village is shattered when Janjaweed attackers arrive, unleashing unspeakable horrors. After losing nearly everything, Amira needs to find the strength to make the long journey on foot to safety at a refugee camp. She begins to lose hope, until the gift of a simple red pencil opens her mind -- and all kinds of possibilities.
Refugee

by Alan Gratz

Josef is a Jewish boy living in 1930s Nazi Germany. Isabel is a Cuban girl in 1994. Mahmoud is a Syrian boy in 2015. All three kids go on harrowing journeys in search of refuge. All will face unimaginable dangers, but there is always the hope of tomorrow. And although Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud are separated by continents and decades, shocking connections will tie their stories together in the end.

The Roses in My Carpets

by Rukhsana Khan

Living in an Afghanistan refugee camp, a young boy refuses to let his imagination be stifled. He weaves beautiful carpets as he deals with memories of tragic events that made him lose his father and flee his home. In a recurring nightmare, the boy flees with his mother and younger sister, Maha, from the planes that killed his father, then awakes to find himself in a safe but impoverished camp.

The Unforgotten Coat

by Frank Cottrell Boyce

When Chingis, the older of two Mongolian brothers who have arrived in Julie's sixth-grade class, proclaims her as their "Good Guide" – a nomadic tradition of welcoming strangers to a new land – Julie must navigate them through soccer, school uniforms, and British slang.

The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain

by Peter Sis

When cracks begins to appear in the Iron Curtain, and news from the West slowly filtered into the country, a young child in Soviet Czechoslovakia learns about beat poetry, rock 'n' roll, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola. Then comes the Prague Spring of 1968, and for a teenager who wants to see the world and meet the Beatles, this is a magical time. But this brief flowering provides a glimpse of new possibilities—creativity can be discouraged but not easily killed.
The Arrival
by Shaun Tan
Tan captures the displacement and awe with which immigrants respond to their new surroundings in this wordless graphic novel. It depicts the journey of one man, threatened by dark shapes that cast shadows on his family’s life, to a new country. The only writing is in an invented alphabet, which creates the sensation immigrants must feel when they encounter a strange new language and way of life.

Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees
by Deborah Ellis
This book is a collection of heartrending entries based on interviews with displaced kids from Iraq. Though young in years, the individuals in this book have suffered through more death, destruction, and violence than most people endure in a lifetime. The stories in this book are frank, harrowing and show surprising resilience.

Esperanza Rising
by Pam Muñoz Ryan
Esperanza thought she’d always live comfortably with her family on their ranch in Mexico. But a sudden tragedy forces Esperanza and Mama to flee to California during the Great Depression, and to settle in a camp for Mexican farm workers. Esperanza isn’t ready for the hard labor, financial struggles, or lack of acceptance she now faces. Esperanza must find a way to rise above her difficult circumstances --Mama’s life, and her own, depend on it.

Home of the Brave
by Katherine Applegate
Kek, a Sudanese refugee, is confronted by many strange things at the Minneapolis home of his aunt and cousin, as well as in his fifth grade classroom, and longs for his missing mother, but finds comfort in the company of a cow and her owner. American culture, the Minnesota climate, and personal identity are examined in this moving first-person novel written in free verse.
**I Lived on Butterfly Hill**  
*by Marjorie Agosin*

When her beloved country, Chile, is taken over by a militaristic, sadistic government, Celeste is sent to America for her safety and her parents must go into hiding before they "disappear." Agosin's rich, expansive novel, based on true events in Chile during the 1970s, covers three turbulent years in Celeste Marconi's life.

**A Long Walk to Water**  
*by Linda Sue Park*

This is a story about two eleven-year-olds in Sudan, a girl in 2008 and a boy in 1985. The girl, Nya, fetches water twice a day from a pond that is two hours’ walk from her home. The boy, Salva, is one of the "lost boys" of Sudan, refugees who cover the African continent on foot as they search for their families and for a safe place to stay. Enduring every hardship, Salva is a survivor, and his story goes on to intersect with Nya’s.

**Refugees**  
*by Catherine Stine*

Sixteen-year-old Dawn runs away from her foster home. Johar, an Afghan teenager, sees his world crumble before him. He flees his village and the Taliban, and makes a dangerous trek to a refugee camp in Pakistan. Thanks to his English skills, Johar finds a job at the camp assisting Louise, the Red Cross doctor—and Dawn’s foster mother. In e-mails and phone calls, Dawn and Johar begin to share and protect each other and a remarkable bond forms.

**Refugees! A Family’s Search for Freedom and a Church That Helped Them Find It**  
*by Jeanne Jacoby Smith*

This story recounts the story of a family who escaped their home during a war. Afloat for many days, they were rescued by the United Nations. Their new life began when a church in Ohio opened its doors to resettle them. From setting up a household, to teaching the refugees English, finding them a job, and acclimating them to their new life in America, the author walks sponsors through the process of resettling refugees.