



Ten of the Best Books about Refugees

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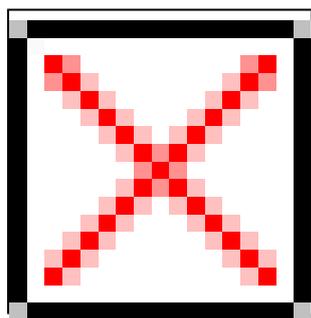
Ten of the Best

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Books about refugees chosen by Fen Coles of **Letterbox Library**

With the media coverage as ubiquitous as it is, it would be hard for any child to escape some awareness of the refugee crisis. Having books to interpret the often misleading and dehumanizing media narrative seems essential to answer questions, foster compassion and combat prejudicial attitudes. Here are **Fen Coles** of Letterbox Library recommendations of the best ten books about refugees, listed in ascending reader age order.

[Ice in the Jungle](#) [3]



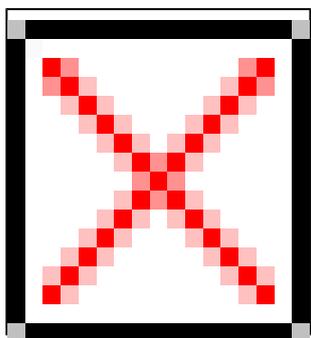
Ariane Hofmann-Maniyar, Child's Play Books, 32pp, 978-1-8464-3730-4, £5.99 pbk

Ice and his mum need to move countries for mum's new job. In their new home, Ice is unnerved by the sizzling climate, the funny language, the strange-looking people and their weird foods, especially those funny bananas! While not explicitly about refugees, this book deals very simply and directly with some of the feelings associated with migration and does so in a deceptively simple way. Perfectly pitched for very young children.

My Friend Jamal

Anna McQuinn and Ben Fray, Alanna Books, £11.99 O/P

Jamal and Joseph were born in the same UK hospital and they are inseparable. It is only when you reach the middle of

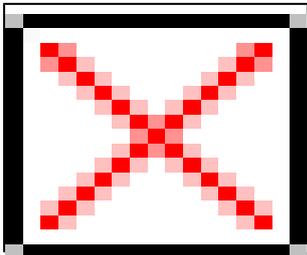


this book that you discover Jamal's parents are refugees from the civil war in Somalia. Either

side of this we witness a delightful celebration of friendship. The narrative carries a simple message about commonality across difference but does so with a charming authenticity and originality. The contemporary, brightly-hued, multi-media collages work brilliantly to conjure up a recognisable landscape of multicultural Britain.

The Silence Seeker

Ben Morley, illus Carl Pearce, Tamarind Books, 32pp, £7.99 O/P

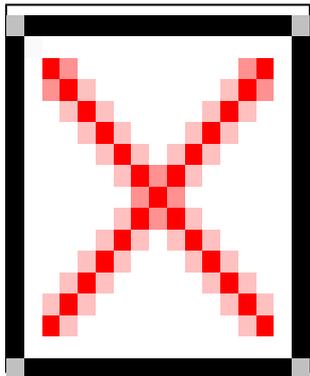


Mum explains to Joe that the new family next door are asylum seekers. 'A Silence Seeker!' says Joe. And so begins the story of an endearing child who sets out to find silence for his new friend. This understated book uses accessible text and stark, manga-style artwork to communicate complex ideas. Morley, a former teacher, said he wrote it to give children in his class, many of whom had first-hand experience of immigration and asylum, something they could relate to. Refreshing for having the 'indigenous' character as Black and the new arrival as White.

[Here I Am](#) [4]

Patti Kim; ill. Sonia Sánchez, Curious Fox, 40pp, 978-1-7820-2226-8, £6.99 pbk

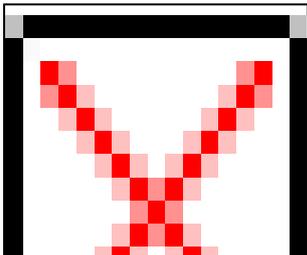
A wordless picture book shows a child and his family moving to an unspecified country, for reasons we never learn, and



captures some of the real challenges faced by people settling in a new country. A messy subway map over-lays other pictures, suggesting the difficulties of navigating a strange city. Unbearably loud and unfamiliar sounds are evoked as images zoom in on beeping car horns and people's gaping mouths. Baffling language is highlighted through nonsensical lettering and reversed wordings on signage. The protagonist's ultimate triumph over all this chaos and uncertainty is captured in the final statement which is both an acquiring of language and a new identity: 'Here I Am'. Perfect visual literacy for a broad range of readers.

[Azzi in Between](#) [5]

Sarah Garland, Frances Lincoln, 40pp, 978-1-8478-0651-2, £7.99 pbk



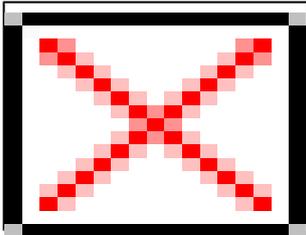
A picture book for 'older' readers (7+), detailing a family's escape from a country at war and

their adjustment to life in a new country (which might easily be the UK), it's based on the author's experiences among refugee families and endorsed by **Amnesty**. Here, text and images work in perfect synchronicity; shades of grey sketch out moments of despair and hardship during the family's perilous flight; a bright, multi-coloured palette takes over as asylum becomes imaginable. The graphic format lend this story a freshness and immediacy perfect for prompting empathy and which will attract a wide range of reading ages. Winner of the inaugural **Little Rebels Award for Radical Children's Fiction** 2013.

The Journey

Francesca Sanna, Flying Eye Books, 48pp, 978-1-9092-6399-4, £12.99 hbk

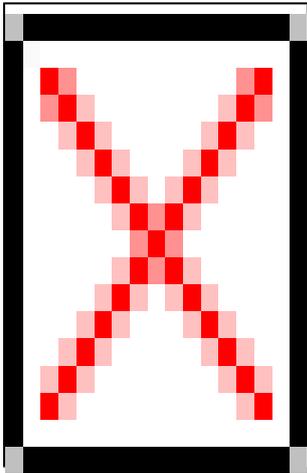
A nameless country, ravaged by a war which stretches like a grasping hand across the land; an escape threatened by



borders and seas and menacing guards; a never ending journey which exists beyond the books' pages. The author interviewed migrants and refugees from many different countries and then layered these narratives up into one single quest for freedom and peace. A picture book for older readers (7+) where the images on their own tell a powerful story with a strength of emotion which challenges the anonymizing and distorting language so often used by the media when representing refugees.

After Tomorrow [6]

Gillian Cross, OUP, 304pp, 978-0-1927-5626-8, £6.99 pbk

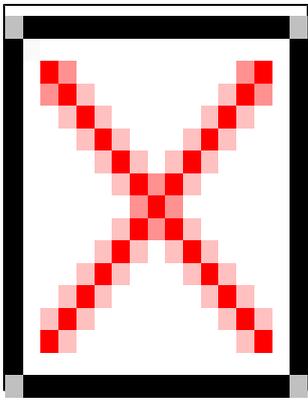


'The first raid happened on an ordinary, boring evening' The opening line in a thrilling slice of dystopia which imagines a Britain, just a short time in the future, where the banks have crashed, money is worthless, food is hard to come by and public disorder has set in. For Matt and his family, their best option is to flee and find safety in a refugee camp in France. A well-executed, frighteningly believable story which very cleverly gets young readers to imagine what it might be like to be refugee themselves. Winner of the **Little Rebels Award for Radical Children's Fiction** 2014.

The Unforgotten Coat [7]

Frank Cottrell Boyce, Walker Books, 112pp, 978-1-4063-4154-6, £7.99 pbk

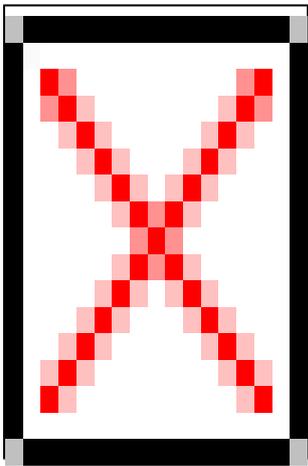
The genesis of this book, explained in the Afterword, is as moving as the narrative itself. The novel tells the story of two refugees, brothers



from Mongolia, making new lives in a school in Liverpool. The subject matter is weighty but the lively voice of Julie, the dialogue-rich text, the lined-exercise-book layout of the pages and the evocative Polaroid camera prints scattered throughout lend this book an engaging informality, clarity and energy. Sparkles with comedy one moment, drills spikes into your heart the next?Winner of the **Guardian Children's Fiction Prize** 2012.

The Day My Father Became a Bush

Joke van Leeuwen, trans. Bill Nagelkerke, Gecko Press, 104pp, 978-1-8775-7916-5, £6.99 pbk

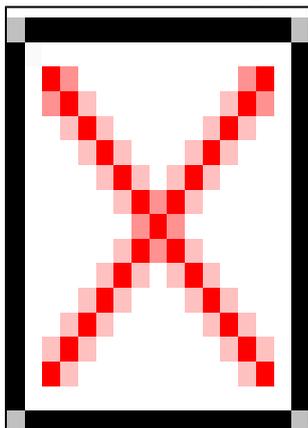


From the title right through until the end statement "I'll stay here until my father no longer needs to be a bush"- this narrative is a perfect example of how humour can be used in the most searing and devastating of ways. When civil war breaks out in her (unnamed) country, Toda has to flee to safety. Her flight is told through her sharp wit and an almost brutal clear-sightedness which, in turn, exposes the adult world of borders, checks and bureaucrats as arbitrary, sometimes cruel, often ridiculous, always baffling. A precise and thoughtful narrative, wrapped up in a philosophy which inspects our humanity with great scrutiny and makes a nonsense of our world.

[Alpha](#) [8]

Bessora and Barroux, trans. Sarah Ardizzone, Barrington Stoke, 216pp, 978-1-9113-7001-7, £12.99 pbk

Launching the exciting new **Bucket List** from publisher **Barrington Stoke**, this graphic novel details one man's



desperate journey from the Ivory Coast to France. A dense and detailed story for older readers (14+) which travels between countries and refugee camps, with seemingly impossible barriers to leap and people poised to exploit the vulnerable at every turn. And yet, at its core, there is an almost painful solidarity as people who have

nothing left try to support each other and give each other glimpses of sanctuary.

Fen Coles is Co-Director of [Letterbox Library](#) [9]. Before joining in 2015, she worked in the charity sector, predominately in the field of LGBT and women's rights. **Letterbox Library** is a 33-year old not-for-profit children's bookseller specialising in equality, diversity and inclusion. You can order these books from the website which has a [Refugees and Migration](#) [10] theme section. **Letterbox Library** also provide **Refugee Bookpacks** for Key Stages 1 and 2. **Letterbox Library** runs the [Little Rebels Award for Radical Children's Fiction](#) [11].

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[9] <http://www.letterboxlibrary.com/>

[10] http://www.letterboxlibrary.com/acatalog/Refugee___Migration_Pack.html

[11] <http://www.letterboxlibrary.com/acatalog/Little-Rebels.html>