

Kristine Wilhelmsen

Representation of Refugees Experiences in Children's Literature and their Value in the EFL Classroom.

Master's thesis in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education
for Years 1–7.

Supervisor: Delilah Bermudez Brataas

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Abstract

Millions of people escape from dangerous situations, serious human rights violations and persecution, indicating the importance of representation of refugee experiences in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom (Amnesty International, 2022). The purpose of this thesis is to analyze children's literature and their representation of the refugee experience. This research project includes a literature review of a selection of children's books on the topic of refugees, portraying authentic refugee experiences with child protagonists. The goal of using these books and exploring this topic is that these books act as a window for students to learn about other people's experiences, and investigating how literature can help develop empathy, understanding and respect (Bishop, 1990).

By applying critical visual methodologies, I analyze the representation of refugees in children's literature and use multimodal analysis to study images, text, and composition through which the story is built. The analysis consists of memoirs covering a visual depiction of refugee experiences, namely *The Best We Could Do* (2017), *The Little Refugee* (2011), *The Boat* (2015), *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020), and *The Paper Boat* (2020), and discover ways in which EFL teachers can best utilize visual mediums to discuss uncomfortable or painful topics. Results show the importance of an inclusive classroom in developing empathy, understanding and respect for others following the guidelines presented in the English subject curriculum and the core curriculum of LK20 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2017). The use of texts depicting someone's reality acts to humanize the situation, helping both children within the refugee community and those outside it with understanding oneself, each other, and highlighting the diversity of which makes up a classroom.

Sammendrag

Millioner av mennesker unnslipper farlige situasjoner, alvorlige brudd på menneskerettighetene og forfølgelse, noe som indikerer viktigheten av å representere flyktningers opplevelser i engelsk som fremmedspråk (EFL)-klasserommet (Amnesty International, 2022). Formålet med denne avhandlingen er å analysere barnelitteratur og dens fremstilling av flyktningers opplevelser. Dette forskningsprosjektet inkluderer en litteraturgjennomgang av et utvalg barnebøker om temaet flyktninger, som skildrer autentiske flyktningers opplevelser med barn som hovedpersoner. Målet med å bruke disse bøkene og utforske dette temaet er at bøkene vil fungere som et vindu for å lære om andre menneskers opplevelser, og undersøke hvordan litteratur kan bidra til å utvikle empati, forståelse og respekt (Bishop, 1990).

Ved å anvende kritiske visuelle metoder analyserer jeg fremstillingen av flyktninger i barnelitteratur og bruker multimodal analyse for å studere bilder, tekst og komposisjon. Analysen består av memoarer som dekker visuelle fremstillinger av flyktningers opplevelser, nemlig "The Best We Could Do" (2017), "The Little Refugee" (2011), "The Boat" (2015), "When Stars Are Scattered" (2020) og "The Paper Boat" (2020), og oppdager måter som EFL-lærere best kan utnytte visuelle medier for å diskutere ubehagelige eller smertefulle temaer. Resultatene viser betydningen av et inkluderende klasserom for å utvikle empati, forståelse og respekt i tråd med retningslinjene som presenteres i læreplanen for engelskfaget og grunnleggende del av LK20 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2017). Bruken av tekster som skildrer noen sin virkelighet bidrar til å menneskeliggjøre situasjonen, og hjelper både barn i flyktningmiljøet og de utenfor det med å forstå seg selv, hverandre og fremheve mangfoldet som utgjør et klasserom.

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1.0 Introduction

In an increasingly diverse and multicultural society, the need for understanding and respect for diversity grows. Millions of adults and children are facing extreme conditions daily resulting in the need to seek refuge: this is reflected in classrooms all over the world, including Norway. A teacher's responsibility has grown to not only include management, developing and teaching valuable lessons, and developing school-home-relationships, but also the need for developing understanding, empathetic, resilient, and respectful citizens of an everchanging society. Utilizing a wide range of literary texts becomes a valuable resource in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. I opt to learn and develop student's resilience, strength, understanding, empathy and respect for themselves and others through literary texts.

After carefully selecting several literary texts, I began analyzing them through a theoretical and contextual framework. The purpose of the analysis was to investigate what topics are present in literature representing refugee experiences, and how different authors and illustrators chose to display these experiences. As a young, new teacher, I want to be the best role model for my students I can be. By following the competence aims and guidelines set by the Ministry of Education and Research, I will help shape curious, attentive, understanding, and inclusive individuals by using authentic texts such as those presented in this thesis. This is my ultimate hope: "if we have the time and resources, we can find that book and help change that child's life, if only for a brief time, and only for a little bit" (Bishop, 1990).

The thesis includes a description of the methods applied during analysis and data collection of five picturebooks and graphic novels. In the first section, I describe and introduce the literary works analyzed in this thesis and how I searched for a range of diverse and inclusive texts. I then present valuable historical and theoretical background which shaped my understanding and use of these literary texts. Then, I present differences in the books in terms of artistic choice, and what these choices signify. In section three, I delve into the texts according to themes found in the books, namely modes of transportation, camps, piracy, and mother figures. Here the texts are first analyzed on their own and then compared to representation of the other stories through looking at specific incidents from the books. In the fourth section, I discuss the depictions of the topics in general, comparing the representations with each other, and compared to the theoretical framework. I also make final recommendations for using visual literature in the EFL classroom and their relation to LK20.

2.0 Method

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology, methods, and materials used in the thesis will be presented. This project is a qualitative study and aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What themes are used in children's literature to depict the refugee experience, and how do these representations contribute to encouraging understanding and empathy towards children's literature?; (2) How do images, illustrations and color portray emotion and allow for emotional connection in children's literature?; (3) How can children's literature act as a window into discussing uncomfortable topics on representation?

First, I present theoretical background used to discuss the value of these books in the EFL classroom. Then, I present the selection criteria that helped narrow the search for texts I analyze in the study. Third, contextual information is presented, such as brief history and terminology that may color my interpretation of the literature. Then, I discuss how I collected data using children's literature, and which prerequisites influenced my analysis. When analyzing the literature, I apply critical visual methodologies and multimodal analysis to the images, text, and the composition through which the narrative is built. Lastly, positionality and ethics are an important aspect of any research. In the last section, I present my own background and motivation for conducting this research, and how I can support this ethically.

2.2 Theoretical Background

There are many benefits of bringing literature into the EFL classroom, especially visual literature such as picturebooks and graphic novels. First, they are highly motivational, and they provide opportunities to learn about external situations on history and personal experiences. They also help readers develop literacy and provide appropriate differentiation and scaffolding. Further, they provide opportunities to develop empathy and respect for others different than themselves. Their motivational aspects offer the opportunity to read whole stories regardless of language proficiency (Birketveit, 2021). "Comics, graphic novels, and comic creation websites are engaging literary formats that can help to motivate student' interest in reading and writing", as they provide opportunities for building literacy and offers opportunities for reading and writing coherent texts in the future (Gavigan, 2019). Visual literature "enable competent readers and reluctant readers alike to engage in the reading process and become motivated to read more", making these mediums beneficial to include in the EFL classroom (Rimmereide, 2021, p. 197). The stories in visual literature can be of different lengths and complexity because of their language and visual elements, and ability to support and challenge readers on all levels. Because readers can rely on visual elements and written text to different extents, the reader is effectively supported and guided in the reading process because they can make their own decisions and construct meaning with guidance from both verbal text and visual elements. Every reader can find elements of understanding, making the stories and their medium motivational on their own.

The combination and relationship of verbal and visual elements can provide scaffolding for reluctant readers. While readers of a lower proficiency level can find assistance in the visual elements while focusing on the story, more proficient readers are challenged by reading more intricately and finding hidden elements, motivating the

reader to keep reading. The story is told through various elements: there are verbal narratives describing situations; visual elements depicting surroundings, settings, and providing another aspect of the storytelling; and significance where readers must analyze and understand context and clues by looking at content, style and placement of visual and verbal elements (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Readers are assisted at every step as text and image correlates and supports each other making verbal narrative less challenging. This offers great opportunity for differentiation, as the books provide visual support for those who need it, while challenging those with a higher understanding. "The learners have a choice in their meaning-making; they can rely mostly on the pictures or mostly on verbal text or go back and forth between the two according to where their cognitive strength lies" (Birketveit, 2021, p. 17). Some readers rely on support from visual elements to fully comprehend the story, while others consider the balance of visual and verbal elements. Visual elements can be supported by written text of manageable length, providing the appropriate differentiation and scaffolding according to the reader's needs to allow for further development and learning. More proficient learners are also challenged and supported where it is necessary, as they are challenged to read between the lines and consider placement, content, and style of visual and verbal elements (Rimmereide, 2021).

Further, visual mediums provide opportunities to develop literacy through challenging the reader to decode both verbal and visual elements at the same time (Birketveit, 2021). As visual literature allows for differentiation, they meet learners on their level providing guidance towards their next milestone. They challenge readers by building a bridge between what the learners already know and what the story is trying to say, allowing the learners to use and develop their literacy skills visually, verbally, and multimodally (Birketveit, 2021). Reading is a long and complex process, as it challenges with decoding words and sentences which create meaning. Visual literature draws on the same aspects, only throws another element into the mix: visual elements. "Reading texts where the verbal and the visual texts complement each other, such as comics, graphic novels and picturebooks, requires the reader to be involved in the reading process in a different way than reading prose without images" (Rimmereide, 2021, p. 199). Whereas novels rely on thorough descriptions and the use of comprehensible text, visual literature also involves active construction of meaning through visual elements. It is not only about constructing meaning and developing ideas through written text, but also about reading visual elements and finding the meaning they bring to the process of reading. The texts contribute to the development of visual literacy as well as verbal literacy, and together develops the idea of multimodal literacy (Rimmereide, 2021). Visual literature appeals to readers on a new level which enhances learning through textual, visual, aural, and emotional stimuli to communicate a story (Tsene, 2019).

Books can provide opportunities for discussing situations such as history and personal experiences, for example by introducing books presented in this thesis. According to Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella, literature shapes the way we look at the world and can provide opportunities to learn about outside aspects:

Literature does not only represent the world, but also constructs the world; it depicts the world not only as it is, but also as it might be. Literature, as a form of art, can help readers see the world differently or anew and thus help them envision alternatives to current or dominant beliefs and ways of living. (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 37).

Literature can offer important opportunities for discussion of atrocities, war, and crises, but also development in evolution and society. A reader reflects on, and constructs, a world while reading which brings insight into important aspects of society and culture such as race, nation, region, religion, education, age, and history (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). It is not only a construction of a fictional world found in literature, but reading can also alter a reader's perspective and connect them with the real world, as the reader's ideas and beliefs develop. "Children's literature transmits information and values of the culture from which it emerges, and it can influence readers in subtle ways to accept and internalize beliefs, perceptions, and expectations" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 35). A reader learns about aspects of the world and bring these interpretations into their own lives, challenging their outlook on life. Furthermore, reading literature allows readers to learn about their fears and pleasures, resulting in developing an understanding of "what it means to be human and how human beings relate to and treat one another" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 38). Introducing a diverse range of literature to children allows them to understand history and traditions that are important to specific cultural groups that may be present in their classroom and society, while also challenging them to compare them to their own views, experiences, and traditions (Bishop, 1990). Literature is, therefore, an important step in understanding and developing one's own character, while developing relationships, learning about someone else's story and how we affect one another.

According to competence aims and core values of LK20, schools should promote inclusivity and give students the opportunity to "develop her or his identity in an inclusive and diverse environment" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 5). How to reach this goal, however, is not specified, leaving the teacher with endless possibilities. The teacher also has their own strengths and limitations, which color their teaching and choices of material and focus. If a teacher is uncomfortable discussing topics such as refugee experiences, war, and devastation, it is likely that they will avoid the topic or discuss it only briefly. As a result, students may not get the support and environment they need to develop. Figure 1 outlines how teachers should establish a multicultural, diverse, and inclusive environments that students need to develop into self-reflecting, self-aware, respectful, and understanding citizens.

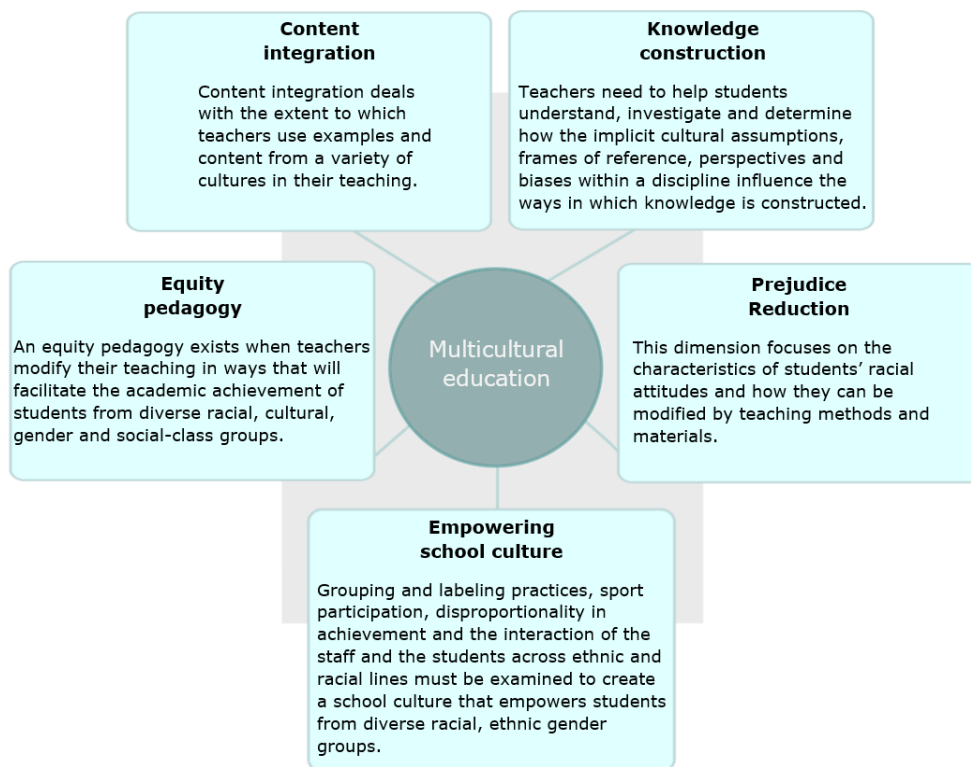


Figure 1 – Multicultural education (Murty, et al., 2021, p. 171).

Every child should not only learn about and develop understanding and respect for others but has also a right to learn about themselves and how to overcome their own struggles (Bishop, 1990). A way to do this is by including a diverse range of literature in the classroom, allowing the learner to delve into a world of fiction and non-fiction that can shape their understanding of others, themselves and the diversity present in the classroom and the world. It is just as important for a learner to encounter other's stories to gain understanding as it is for learners to read about similar stories to their own. Creating inclusive classrooms where difference is advocated for, and learners are given opportunities to discuss and reflect is a complex choice involving knowledge, support, respect, and integration. Figure 1 shows the complexity of the classroom and the choices that impact the development of an inclusive and diverse environment that helps develop identity, empathy, understanding and respect (Murty, et al., 2021).

Further, literature in general and visual mediums, bring opportunities for essential development of character, empathy, and respect towards others with different backgrounds from oneself. In an increasingly diverse classroom, the importance of empathy, acceptance and understanding of other's differences grows and with it a teacher's responsibility to create and develop an inclusive classroom keeping race, language, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in mind (Murty, et al., 2021). By using a wide range of literature with various topics, learners are given the opportunity to discuss difference among themselves. "Rather than analysing or debating an 'issue', the purpose is to understand, respect and empathise with differing perspectives and lives", thus developing empathy, tolerance and respect towards other's story through reading a range of inclusive texts (Murty, et al., 2021, p. 174). Literature can help develop tolerance and respect for differences by allowing the reader to experience encounters with worlds created by one's imagination and worlds reflecting reality. This will not only

help readers develop tolerance, empathy, understanding and respect, but can also work to help with overcoming their own struggles and developing strength and character through seeing someone else go through similar things and learning their struggles and how to overcome them (Murty, et al., 2021). Bishop (1990) explains the importance of reading about the society and culture which shapes the world, taking into consideration literature's limits and opportunities:

It won't take the homeless off our streets; it won't feed the starving of the world; it won't stop people from attacking each other because of racial differences; it won't stamp out the scourge of drugs. It could, however, help us to understand each other better by helping to change our attitudes towards each other. (Bishop, 1990).

This claim is grounded in descriptions of a learners' needs in education, and more specifically, literature. With access to a wide enough range of literature, students gain the opportunity to look at fictional constructions of the world which can reflect their own lives and experiences or those of others. A wide range of literature can build bridges between imagination and reality, allowing students to celebrate and investigate the differences and similarities that make us all human and which make up the world. "Diverse and inclusive texts give teachers and learners a chance to engage with sometimes difficult themes, and to learn about themselves and their own attitudes, perceptions and beliefs, as well as those of others" (Murty, et al., 2021, p. 172). Children need windows that show reality to help them decode and understand the diversity of the world and their connection to people unlike themselves. By allowing children to read stories like and unlike their own, we create classrooms advocating for difference where all is equal and valued where the children are allowed to develop a sense of importance and value (Bishop, 1990).

2.3 Selection Criteria

There are many children's books regarding the topic of refugees, and there are multiple ways of accessing this information. One can look at libraries and their inventory: the Seattle Public Library, for instance, has 55 books on the topics of immigration and refugee experience in children's books. In addition, one can search for topics on sites such as GoodReads, where there are registered over 1000 books on the topic of refugees. Further, there are teaching resources such as BookTrust and ReadBrightly, where literature suited for education is collected into lists classified by genre and topic. I narrowed my search for what types of books to analyze and decided on literature depicting the journey from one country to another: seeking refuge and refugee experiences. I selected children's books where the main character is forced to move from their home country to a distant country, and where the journey is depicted using a combination of words and illustrations. By narrowing my search, it became easier to find literature suited for my project and allowed me to look more closely at the specific books to compare topics and themes. The books offer opportunities for discussing and investigating the representation of uncomfortable topics through engaging and comprehensible texts for students on all proficiency levels. I used criteria such as authentic storytelling and children as narrators to narrow my search and to analyze their potential more thoroughly.

I chose books published between 2010 and 2023, as they are still relevant, and it was important that the book is contemporary in language and form. It was also

important that the books were suitable for younger EFL learners, which requires that the language and vocabulary are of a level appropriate for children I may encounter in an EFL classroom. Further, it was important that the stories focus on refugee experiences depicting war and seeking refuge, and that they are written by authors within the refugee-community to provide authentic experiences.

In summary, my criteria for choosing books were: (1) published between 2010 and 2023; (2) language and story suitable for young English learners in school; (3) story focuses on refugee experiences; (4) the authors are from the refugee-community; (5) the main character is a child; and (6) the book includes illustrations depicting war and the refugee journey.

Based on these criteria, I have chosen two picture books, and three graphic novels: *The Paper Boat* by Thao Lam (2020); *The Little Refugee* by Anh Do and Suzanne Do (2011); *The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui (2017); *When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (2020); and *The Boat* by Matt Huynh and Nam Le (2015).

2.4 Introductions

The stories chosen are all graphic memoirs in the form of picturebooks and graphic novels. They are visual representations of a segment of a person's life, indicating the reality of the experiences through connecting the stories to real life based on historical background and their depictions of real-life situations.

The Paper Boat and *The Little Refugee* are picturebooks of varying difficulty: the first is completely wordless whereas the latter offers simple language suitable for the youngest readers. *The Paper Boat*, by Thao Lam (2020), illustrates a family's escape from Vietnam by following an ant colony's journey on a paper boat in treacherous weather. The story is simple yet complex as it creatively connects the ants to the humans by portraying the war and the refugees' journey. *The Little Refugee*, by Anh Do and Suzanne Do (2011), portrays a family escaping from war in Vietnam on an overcrowded boat. The story progresses as the family experience robberies and rescue on treacherous weather, and through the hardships that lead to success in business and education in Australia. It depicts the life of a family escaping from war and the dangers they endured on their journey while also depicting how the family succeed in a new land. There are similar depictions of treacherous weather and devastation in *The Boat*, which is an interactive graphic novel by Matt Huynh in collaboration with SBS based on the story of Nam Le (2015). The book includes audio, movement and illustrations combined with clickable objects and panels containing stories and pictures from real life. Going back and forth in time, the story progresses through treacherous weather, and conditions such as sickness and overcrowding that depict the experience on the boat.

Like *The Boat*, *When Stars Are Scattered* tells a story of children who are separated from their parents. *When Stars Are Scattered* is an illustrated memoir by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed and illustrated by Iman Geddy (2020), which follows the main characters Omar and Hassan over the course of several years inside a Kenyan refugee camp after having fled the war in Somalia. The young boys are orphans, and as Omar is older, he is left to take care of himself and his brother with help from their primary caregiver Fatuma. *When Stars Are Scattered* describes conditions in refugee camps and dangerous journeys like those briefly mentioned in *The Best We*

Could Do by Thi Bui (2017). This is an illustrated memoir that depicts a family's journey from one place to another and how the family succeeded in this new country. The story is told through the perspective of multiple generations in conversation with the main character Thi and shows the difficulties relating to displacement seen from a child's perspective.

Through the use of imagery and symbolism, varying difficulty of phrases and illustrations, and authentic graphic storytelling of uncomfortable topics, I would recommend the following for children in between 1st and 10th grade: *The Paper Boat* and *The Little Refugee* for children 5 years old and up; *When Stars Are Scattered* for 8 and up; and *The Best We Could Do* and *The Boat* for children 13 and up. To get the maximum potential of these books, it is recommended to discuss themes and language while reading to ensure a reader's progress and development of literacy skills, empathy, respect and understanding.

2.5 Historical Background

It is important to define terminology and context because it ensures clarity and prevents miscommunication of what to expect going forward. This historical background allows me to fully comprehend the stories and their impact in relation to reality. It also allows me to analyze and interpret images, text and their complexity as the stories form our interpretation of history and the refugee experience. It is therefore advantageous to investigate the stories' backgrounds and history as they present war and its repercussions.

Firstly, terminology. An immigrant is a person coming to, and living in, a different country than they are born in, "people staying outside their country of origin [...] to work, study or join family" (Amnesty International, 2022). There are further classifications as well, such as second-generation immigrants, however, these persons are born in the country in which they currently reside but are still within the immigrant-community. In contrast, a refugee is someone who has forcibly left from their home country, "a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there" (Amnesty International, 2022). In this case there is an external source of motivation, such as war, death and related atrocities making their home country no longer a safe place to live. Refugees are therefore forced to move from their home country to live in a new country in which they can survive and live. Their children are second-generation refugees.

Push factors are what pushes one away from their home, which when combined with pull factors which are something appealing about a new place, influence the want and need to migrate or escape from one place to another (O'Reilly, 2022). In instances with refugees, push factors may be war, and lack of safety or basic necessities, and pull factors may be safety, ability to work, access to food, or the hope of a successful future.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is a global organization created to ensure the protection of rights and the well-being of refugees and offer protection, shelter, health, and education to people of need. "Refugees account for about 7 per cent (16.7 million) of the global migrant population (232 million) and the overwhelming majority (87 per cent) of them will find refuge in developing countries" (Schuster, 2022, p. 298). There are millions of migrants registered, and large numbers not registered, within the UNHCR, many of which classify as refugees and may require

assistance. The UNHCR will, in some instances of emergency, provide clean water, food, and sanitation, and may also set up camps in instances where this is necessary (UNCHR, 2023a). These facilities are nicely acknowledged in the book by Jamieson and Mohamed (2020), and briefly in Bui (2017). In a refugee camp, it is not unusual for refugees to experience “overcrowded conditions, sanitary facilities, inadequate health care, and lack of food, compounded by lack of safety and security from physical, emotional, and mental abuse” (Ross-Sheriff, 2013). This further explains the importance of exploring refugee experiences, as they highlight a lack of resources such as space, health care, and food, but also violations and abuse.

2.5.1 Context

The number of refugees increases daily, as wars, demonstrations, and other conflicts begin and continue with no indication of when they will stop, leaving people forced to decide whether to leave their home or to hope for the violations to cease. Millions of people, millions of children, are forced to leave their homes because their country or area is no longer safe.

[...] in addition to those children killed in conflicts, six million more children have disabled or seriously injured in wars over the last decade [...]. Almost twenty-five million more children have been driven from their homes by conflict, roughly 50 percent of the current total number in the world. Another ten million children have been psychologically traumatized by war. (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 60).

Today there are refugees in every part of the world, either seeking refuge, waiting to be processed, in hiding, or situated in a new, foreign place. No cause is worse than the other, and the cause for displacement is not particularly important: the importance is to shed light on situations people experience daily, regardless of age, location, and place in time. The stories from Vietnam and Somalia tell stories of the hardships a refugee may encounter.

Considering the atrocities that went on in Vietnam, for instance: citizens endured violence, massacres, bombings, and invasions for over three decades and were at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution. In total, more than 12 million Vietnamese people became refugees after the atrocities that went on in Vietnam between the 50s and 80s. The stories of Bui (2017), Do and Do (2011), Huynh and Le (2015), and Lam (2020) each paint a vivid picture of Vietnam during war and portrays aspects of the serious violations ongoing in Vietnam during and after this time. The story by Jamieson and Mohamed (2020) on the other hand, paints a picture of an ongoing civil war and conflict in Somalia. More than half a million of Somalis have endured slaughter, abuse, and imprisonment, causing citizens to face displacement with hope of returning to Somalia after the settlement of the war or in hope of arriving somewhere safe. These stories indicate the importance of discussing war, seeking refuge, and health violations in the EFL classroom: they are not singular, they are not the only ones, and millions of children experience similar atrocities. Today there are refugees all over the world escaping from violations and danger, such as from conflicts in Ukraine, Somalia, and Sudan, which indicates the relevance of discussing refugee experiences.

Not only do these stories portray powerful refugee experiences and offer the possibility of learning and discussing what other people may have gone through, they also include important historical context. Utilizing a range of diverse and inclusive texts will allow children to understand history, and simultaneously develop empathy, respect,

and character based on how their own views and experiences contrast with the stories (Bishop, 1990). Although it is not necessary that the reader understand the full history, it offers an opportunity to learn about and discuss historical implications. The readers are not only learning about real experiences and learning empathy for other people but are also gaining historical insight from the time the story takes place.

Is it necessary for readers to know these are authentic stories? If the hope is to teach empathy, or to discuss the historical implications, then the answer might be yes. Enlightening the reader on the authenticity of the stories allows for further depth, as it can give the reader a different understanding of the stories and be open for discussion and celebration of them. Although, this brings with it expectations of what they might make the reader feel and think.

How can you best discuss these topics if readers are not aware of their authenticity? They might see these stories as fiction and may not entirely be able to connect it to real life. Allowing children to know every side of the stories can allow them to connect to the experiences in a different way and children with similar experiences can relate to these stories. Can they relate to them in the same way if they do not know that these stories are real? Maybe reading them as “fictional” stories gives them comfort in knowing that they are not real and the belief that nobody has gone through such atrocities. But then: when will they understand others’ circumstances if they are not taught about the hard reality by delving into the stories aware of their connection to reality? Readers who share experiences with the characters in these books may find the stories therapeutic and comforting, allowing the reader to be seen and heard without having to be in the spotlight, and listening to questions or concerns from their classmates. Children connect to the stories regardless of whether they know they are true. Perhaps they might connect to them differently not knowing the depth these stories possess?

Children relate to and engage with stories they read and hear, but unless stated, kids may interpret these stories as just that – fictional. Bringing these kinds of stories into the EFL classroom also brings opportunities to learn about not only experiences of fictional characters but also finding solace and comfort in reading about experiences some may have been through. By humanizing the situation, children may relate to the stories and compare them to their own lives and their own experiences regardless of being aware that the stories are depictions of real experiences.

2.6 Data Collection

There is an old saying which suggests that a picture is worth more than a thousand words, meaning that an image can convey multiple meanings and ideas. Therefore, I have chosen to look at visual narratives and how they convey meaning through illustrations and the use of, or the lack of, written text. My analysis is based on Visual Methodologies, as outlined by Gillian Rose, theoretical work on representation in children’s literature, more commonly known as *Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors* by Rudine S. Bishop, and terminology established by Scott McCloud. These theories and methodologies allow me to analyze literary texts to see the importance of representation in children’s literature and how they visualize and narrate their stories using written and visual elements (Rose, 2001; Bishop, 1990; McCloud, 1994).

It is important to consider visual aspects when reading images. It is not only about what we see, but also what choices are made in terms of what we are allowed to see. Our upbringing, family, friends, values, and the culture that surrounds us influences how we see things. All these aspects shape how we see things, what reactions we have, and our values decide what we are allowed, or not allowed to, see, what we pay attention to and what we find valuable. No person will see it in the same exact way, and therefore the author makes choices to ensure that the reader will see the image in the way that is intended (Rose, 2001).

Considering this, it is valuable to look at Rose’s visual methodologies to analyze composition, visual effects, and interpretation of visual meaning (Rose, 2001). It is interesting to analyze how the image is composed and what it is trying to convey, as these topics can be distant to children of this age-group. What choices has the author and/or illustrator made in terms of visual methods, and within that, sites, and modalities? The images sites are here referred to as where and who made the image, who the intended audience is, and the image itself. Modalities, then, refers to technological, compositional, and social aspects of the image, such as how the image is made, the composition of color, lines, themes and figures, and how we socially view the image based on context and personal interpretation (Rose, 2001). Then, what significance has composition, effects, and visual patterns within the image (see figure 2)?

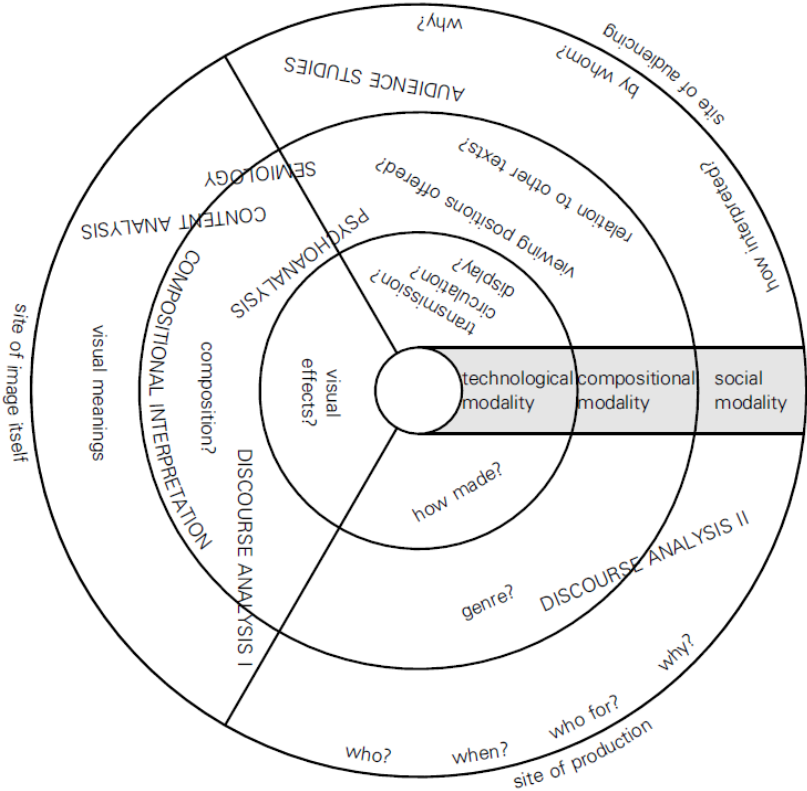


Figure 2 – Sites, modalities and methods for interpreting visual materials (Rose, 2001, p. 30).

Furthermore, authentic storytellers, in this case authors from the refugee community, make “[...] the characters believable and identifies them as members of a particular social group” (Bishop, 1990). This will function as a window to the refugee

experience by looking at experiences and history that are important to that cultural group. Therefore, to research what makes the story reliable and authentic compared to the historical background is important to answer how the books portray the story and how authentic it feels as a reader. The books can then be compared with each other by looking at specific themes found in the books.

This can create distance between the books and reality, as they are physically distant in time and area. Children can, however, relate to any part of the story – not only specifics. There are always going to be aspects a reader empathizes with and relates to. Refugees and non-refugees can here relate to, or at the very least, imagine the general struggles that are depicted, such as dangerous conditions, lack of food and water, being separated from one or multiple parents, and feeling lost and alone. If one cannot connect to the story personally, images, audio, and color becomes important to connect emotionally to the story. Apart from books such as *The Boat* (Huynh & Le, 2015) that utilizes audio and motion, books must rely on images, color, and the use of written text. The composition of the image, such as color, lines, text, and background, can communicate to the reader how the characters are feeling in that moment, and in that way create an emotional connection between the reader and the character (McCloud, 1994).

Considering that I will look at books containing images, written text, and audio, it is appropriate to have a multimodal approach. A multimodal text is one that creates meaning through combining different modes, such as visual image, written text, spoken language, audio, and visual patterns (Løvland, 2010). I look closely at images, how they are composed and how they can be interpreted. It is also, however, important to look at the use of text, and the relationship between verbal and visual elements: do image and text tell the same story, do they support each other, or are they contrasting? With this in mind, I will be looking at a combination of quotes and images from the selected books.

2.7 Positionality and Ethics

As a female born and raised in Norway, a country I still reside in, I will never be able to empathize entirely and thoroughly with people of different cultures and backgrounds. I am privileged in ways immigrants and refugees may never experience, which is why I find these topics important to research. As a teacher, I have the opportunity to learn about and teach aspects outside my territory and ensure that my students are empathetic towards others and understand their own and other's privileges and limitations.

I have little memory of discussing topics such as culture, religion and background growing up. However, I have a responsibility to teach understanding and resilience, and with this I choose to educate myself and others on topics that may be distant and painful. As I cannot provide personal information and experiences surrounding these topics, I find it important to use authentic sources to learn and gain insight. It is important that I find ways make students feel included and seen. My goal is to become the best possible teacher I can for students: how can I best present and discuss uncomfortable or painful topics to help the students evolve and become comfortable with who they are?

As I am not a part of the specific communities of refugees and immigrants, I cannot draw conclusions on what is said or how it is portrayed because I have little

personal knowledge on the topics. The only relationship with these kinds of experiences I have, is what I have learned through working with children telling their stories. This could cause me to make conclusions in different ways than insiders would: I could find issues that are not really issues or overlook things that should not have been overlooked. It was important to choose books that portray authentic stories told by authors within these communities. As it is difficult to distance my own beliefs and experiences, I find it important to have prior knowledge on the topic, which is where theory and history helps. The theory and history presented are what colors my perceptions of the literature, and what I keep in mind when researching and collecting data. Based on authenticity, I may look at the topic as ethically as I can despite my own background. My approach is, therefore, based on exploring perspectives from the experts, as my own experiences are due to expand.

3.0 Data Collection and Results

3.1 Introduction

In the following section, the books and their stories are presented through color palette and artistic choice. As the stories take place during different time periods and occur in different parts of the world, the stories are naturally going to be different. Interestingly, there are similarities regardless of the characters origin story: indicating a sense of relevance to today's era. The stories are then connected through themes such as modes of transportation, hope, refugee camps, piracy, mother figures and community.

3.2 Color and Style

Color palette and style is a creative and expressive choice the illustrator makes, that can say something about how the characters are feeling in that exact moment and affect the emotional connection between the reader, the illustrator, and the characters. Illustrations using a broader color palette is generally thought of as closer to real-life situations, making the reader connect to the stories in a different way than through a more limited color palette (McCloud, 1994). What effect does color *really* have on the visualization of the stories? In this section, I investigate color palette and style of the illustrations in each of the selected books and delve into the impact of the choice of color palette.

The Little Refugee's limited color palette of browns and grays evolves to a more colorful palette when the family arrives in Australia. This visualizes the feelings toward settlement in a new place compared to those during the escape. This choice of color visualizes the characters' hope and affects how the reader empathizes with the characters. More colorful illustrations often point to elated conditions and can be connected to more intense expression, whereas a limited color palette can set the tone of the circumstances (McCloud, 1994). This explains the choice of a broader color palette when the family arrives in Australia. The limited color palette suggests instability, discontent, and danger, and indicates a separation of the present and the past (see image 1). In contrast, a broader color palette signifies contentment, happiness, and a new beginning. Due to the limited color palette, the reader is challenged to consider the depth and saturation that tell the story. In image 1, the darkness of the sky contrasts with the brightness of the clouds, further contrasting the waves of the ocean suggesting the sense of danger and uncertainty of the storm. Although the background is complex and messy creating a chaotic situation, the boat is centered with a different brightness than its surroundings, making the boat a centerpiece and significant as it draws the reader's attention.



Image 1 – Grays (Do & Do, 2011).

The Paper Boat also has a limited color palette, although with a different effect. The colors here are black and white, with specks of brighter colors such as blue, yellow, and pink. Rather than portraying progression in color, this limited color palette visualizes simplicity yet power as the story relies on message through pictures alone (see image 2). Here the story progresses with a colony of ants rather than following the human family. The ants live parallel to the humans and what happens with the family is reflected in the ants. This can explain the choice of color palette, as the more colorful panels are reserved for the humans, whereas the ants are depicted in black and white with specks of color. The scene is set in black and white, and color works here as a highlighter, drawing the readers' attention. The illustrations are made up of linework allowing the story to move forward and challenging the reader to understand what the characters in the books are experiencing (McCloud, 1994).

Emotions are created through this linework combined with the specks of color. This chaotic combination depicts stress, uncertainty, danger, and fear, allowing the reader to empathize with the ants. This combination of color and lines are chaotic, as it is no structure to what is chosen to be in color and what is not: why is it that the lightening is large and yellow, whilst the water and the sky are similarly black and white lines. The reader's attention is brought to the lightening, indicating the dangers that the ants endure (see image 2).



Image 2 – *A Speck of Color* (Lam, 2020).

Similarly, *The Best We Could Do* utilizes a limited color palette of reds and blacks throughout the whole story. Although the color palette does not progress in the story, continuation of the same color palette throughout tells a story on its own. This story takes place in the future talking about instances in the past that lead them to where they are whereas some of the other stories are told in the present. The saturation of red, however, does change according to the situation. The illustrations here are simplistic as they rely on blacks and reds but does so in a clever way through the utilization of saturation of color in each panel. In some instances, red is simply in the background to create depth leaving blacks in control, and in other instances, the red is more prominent (see image 3 and 4). This choice creates movement and creates focus on certain aspects of the illustration, like a highlighter but also a contributor.

The choice of reds and blacks is a powerful one, as it expresses a dominant mood of fear, in which the ones with a larger palette may not (McCloud, 1994). Here too, just like with *The Paper Boat*, the choice of colors is significant, as it indicates the emotions the characters are experiencing. Why is it that the story is portrayed using a mixture of black and red instead of the item's normal color? Such as in image 3, where the characters are in water surrounded by bamboo. In a story using a broader color palette, the bamboo would be green and the water blue: so why is it that Bui has chosen to depict the story with a red hue? Red is a color everyone is familiar with – as it can signify love and happiness, but also blood, danger, and war. In this image it looks as though the characters are bathing in blood, casting danger and fear across the entire spread. In this book, red signifies danger without specifically stating that the characters are in danger. Here in image 3, the characters are hiding from the armed men, and the color choice suggest an internal dialogue and the dangers the characters are facing. In image 4, the character is in a physically dark space, indicating the uncertainty and fear the character is experiencing. Perhaps the saturation of the colors in each panel can indicate the characters feelings: the richer color, the more dangerous.



Image 3 – *Reds* (Bui, 2017, p. 120).



Image 4 – Blacks (Bui, 2017, p. 122).

The Boat relies heavily on black and white, with specks of color like *The Paper Boat*. However, rather than highlighting what happens, the specks of color bring movement and is an additional aspect as the story does not rely on the color. The color brings to life some of the illustrations and brings emotion and movement onto the story. The story is told through illustrations in black and white with an art-style which relies on the textured appearance of brush stroke that suggest movement and texture within the panel (see image 5). This streakiness can be compared to watercolor: a paintbrush with watercolor can create streaks with color on the paper bleeding onto each other and onto the page, indicating a sense of danger, pain and blood that surrounds the characters. An additional element in *The Boat* which the other stories do not have, is the element of audio and movement. As it is an interactive graphic novel, it allows for scrolling, clicking, and moving around as one pleases, offering different opportunities for the reader to alter their reader experience. Although the color palette is limited, the book utilizes audio and movement of illustrations throughout which highlights what happens in a different way than using only illustrations and written text. The book has specks of color throughout where it is appropriate such as to create additional movement and excitement to written text and in instances where the story looks at real-life images from these situations. As the book utilizes movement and audio, it offers the opportunity for simple yet powerful animations and real-life images. The illustrations are complex and powerful as they visualize movement and clarity through blurry lines and brush-like streakiness. Most of the story is in black and white, utilizing a different emotional connection than the stories with a larger color palette.



Image 5 – Black and White Streakiness (Huynh & Le, 2015).

In *When Stars Are Scattered*, the story is visualized through a broad and colorful color palette as it uses a variety of colors (see image 6). Colorful illustrations help the reader connect more easily to the stories, as they are closer to reality. On the surface, illustrations from *When Stars Are Scattered* can seem easier to interpret because it grabs the reader's attention more easily compared to the stories utilizing fewer colors (McCloud, 1994). Although Jamieson and Mohamed have chosen to use a broader color palette compared to some of the other stories, the importance of composition is just as significant, if not more, as the change of color palette becomes certain. When Omar is reminiscing of his past, the colors change to subdued and muted yellow/orange tones (see picture 7). This choice does not only express depth and emotion, but also portray a feeling of insecurity and indicate that it is a part of the past, separating the present from the past. Using the same idea from McCloud, this change of color palette visualizes not only the contentment of staying in a refugee camp and future hope, but also the vulnerability and dangers of their past (McCloud, 1994).



Image 6 – Color (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 16).



Image 7 – Oranges (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 180).

The stories utilize different color palettes. The use of a broad color palette creates rich environments and playgrounds where the reader can more easily interpret the stories and connect them to reality. Comparatively, a more limited color palette challenges the reader to look beyond the illustrations and what the illustrations portray (McCloud, 1994). The composition and saturation of colors and the choice of color palette can suggest more than the eye first sees, as it challenges the reader to look more thoroughly at what the illustrations depict and what this may indicate. In *When Stars Are Scattered*, *The Little Refugee*, and *The Paper Boat* we experience a change of color palette which indicate a change in the storyline whilst separating the present from the past. *The Boat* and *The Best We Could Do*, however, have the same color palette throughout, indicating the realities between these atrocities and the present.

3.3 Themes

Although there are differences in context and production, the stories share other factors. Some share ideas around color palette, others share artistic style. All the books, however, include depictions of authentic refugee experiences and share topics such as war, danger, hope, and uncertainties. Some also share themes related to these experiences such as transportation, refugee camps, piracy, and mother figure.

3.3.1 Modes of Transportation

Modes of transportation is a theme throughout all the books as it frames their experiences by outlining their journey from danger to safety. In some cases, the obvious mode of transport is by boat, such as in the books with stories from Vietnam. In other cases, it could be more natural to take the journey by foot walking across borders, such as in *When Stars Are Scattered*. And in some cases, there may be a combination of multiple modes, such as in *The Best We Could Do*. Common for all the stories is danger: danger related to the journey of being transported from one place to another.

In *The Paper Boat*, *The Little Refugee*, *The Boat*, and *The Best We Could Do*, we are presented with dangers from weather, piracy, and starvation that result in sickness and death on a journey by boat. The dangers surrounding weather are surreal and extreme, and brought unimaginable devastation. Although these stories are all different and personal, they all share factors surrounding the weather, indicating that this is a common factor in many refugee experiences. As *The Paper Boat* is wordless, it is natural to use it as the first example as it portrays the devastation in a simple way. In image 8, the reader is presented with images in black and white with color only on the boat and lightning, which draws the reader's attention. The story depicts tall waves going through the boat and lightning all around, damaging both the boat and the ants on it. The ants are holding on for their lives, which suggests how the storm threatens them. With waves taller than the boat, ants being thrown around, and the boat slowly deteriorating, the story depicts the dangers and hardships the characters endured on the boat (see image 8).

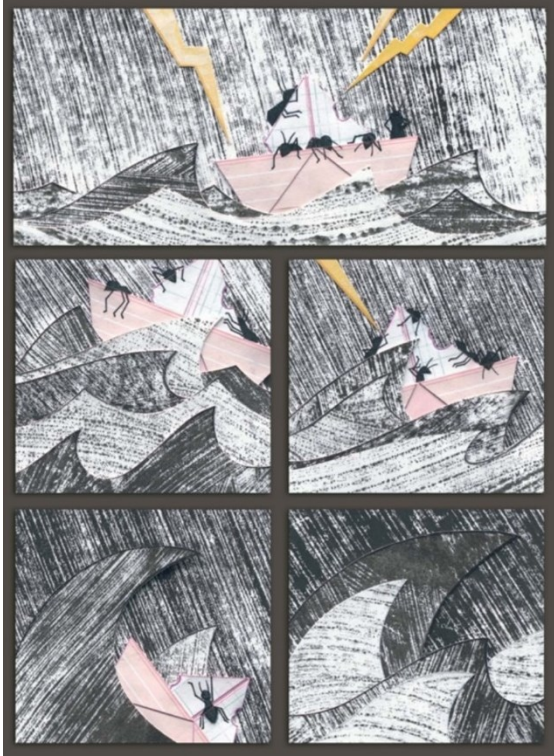


Image 8 – The Storm (Lam, 2020).

The story also depicts the loss of a family member. This is visualized as a bird descending, taking one of the ants, and dropping it in the water (see image 9). This suggests a family member drowning because of dangerous weather or being thrown off due to sickness or death, which is a common occurrence in long and dangerous journeys by boat. The ants are fighting for their lives trying not to be taken by the angry birds that attack the boat before the storm. The next panel then depicts the sadness they experience after the loss of a family member, where some ants are hanging with fatigue and sadness over the sides of the boat and others have a sad and distressed face and mourn the death through comfort from another ant. In one of the final panels of the book, we see that one family member is missing after arriving in the new country and is only present symbolically in a picture frame. This is also the moment the family's story is connected to the ant's story, where an ant was thrown overboard by a bird earlier in the story (see image 9).

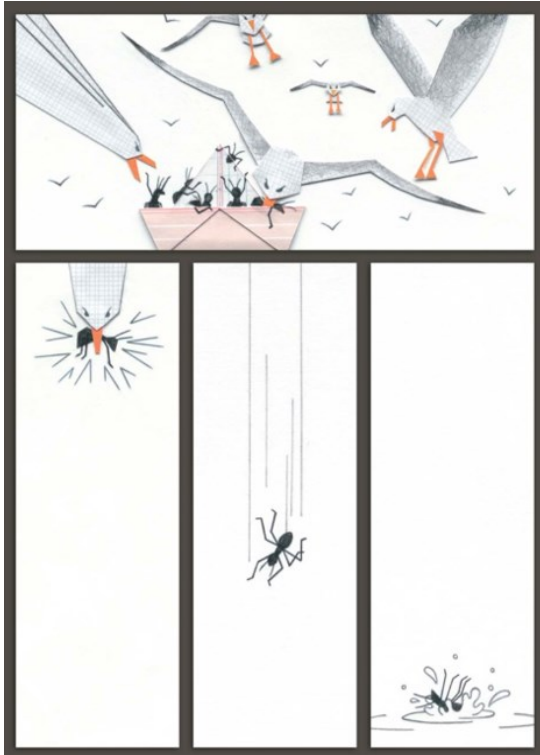


Image 9 – Taken (Lam, 2020).

Whereas *The Paper Boat* visualizes the storm in a simple yet precise way, the other stories add to or remove factors so that it fits seamlessly into their stories. A different visualization of the storm is the creative choices of *The Boat*. Here we are not only presented with the story, but the page, background, panels, and written text move in wave patterns on the screen, more thoroughly depicting the motions of water (see image 10). This detail makes it slightly difficult and unpredictable to read, while giving the reader the opportunity to see and feel the uncertainties and dangers while reading. The animation lasts for only a few seconds, as the images and text settle into new positions. The visualization gives the reader another layer of understanding, while also supporting the less proficient readers in their reading journey.



Image 10 – Movement (Huynh & Le, 2015).

In *The Boat*, we see the journey by boat depicted in vivid detail, using both black and white streakiness but also real-life images combined with physical movement which makes the story come to life in a different way than in the other books. The boat is here portrayed as a crowded and uncomfortable space, with numerous people packed together in tight spaces. The physical journey is fraught with danger, as the refugees face the threat of pirates, storms, and other hazards. Image 11 depicts overcrowded rooms and uncomfortable spaces by depicting people sitting in every open space, some on top of others, their faces showing sadness, fear, and fatigue. This is a vivid and clear depiction of how the journey was for refugees escaping by boat.

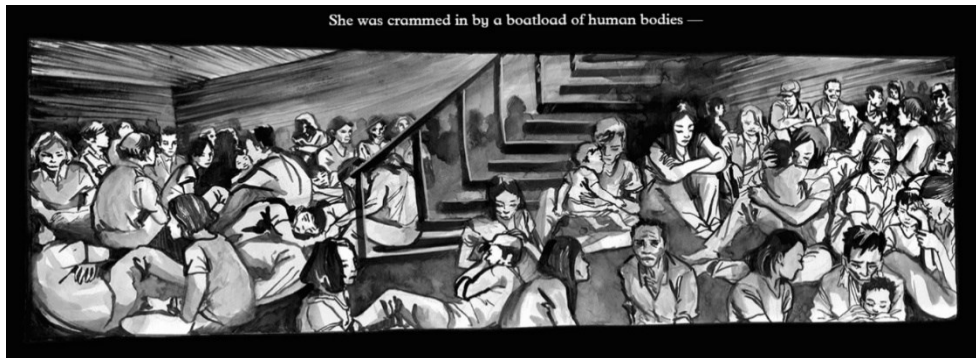


Image 11 – Crowded (Huynh & Le, 2015).

The Little Refugee depicts overcrowded conditions with forty people crammed on a small boat in image 1, with waves growing taller and a darkening sky. Anh describes the storm through words: "But then the sky turned black and an angry storm arrived. Giant waves crashed down on our little boat" (Do & Do, 2011). With distraught eyes, sadness and disappointment on a boat damaged by the storm, the refugees look at the food and water destroyed by the storm wondering how they could survive the remainder of the journey.

Further, the stories told in *The Best We Could Do* are diverse, as they not only depict the story which Bui experienced herself, but also a depiction of the journeys her parents experienced. It is important to keep in mind that this family, escaped over decades for many different reasons as a result of the Vietnam war. Her mother and father had previously escaped by foot and by boat. Although these experiences are significant and depict devastating conditions, they are told as secondary stories true to the family story depicting escape. Bui's firsthand experiences will be discussed in greater detail than her parents' stories. The first step of Bui's journey takes place on a boat to Malaysia after deciding to escape Vietnam. Image 12 depicts an overcrowded boat with limited resources where the family struggles for space as there are people sleeping in every direction in every open space. The dangers and uncertainties are presented through distraught faces filled with pain, fear, and concern, as the family try to live through the night.



Image 12 – Sleep (Bui, 2017, p. 236).

The family avoid the treacherous storm as their journey by boat is short, suggesting a sense of relief. After arriving in Malaysia, the family is swiftly separated as Má is in labor and is sent to the hospital while the rest of the family is brought to a refugee camp. After being in the camp for a few months, the journey to the U.S. continues by plane. At the airport, Má and Bõ help other refugees translate and give directions, before boarding the plane themselves in search of a new life in the U.S. Although the story depicts a safe journey compared to some of the other stories, the insecurity, fear, and hope is just as significant as they embark on a journey without knowing the extent of it and not knowing where they will end up. The family experience separation, sickness, lack of resources, and uncertainty about the future, suggesting the dangers and conditions of their journey. There are numerous instances taking place in the background, challenging the reader to understand the degree of danger and the complexity of the journey refugees may have been through. Leaving one's home through displacement is never simple, as there are many factors influencing the journey. Bui's story is a striking representation of these difficulties and obstacles some refugees need to overcome.

We are also presented with death in various ways in the stories of *The Boat*, *The Paper Boat*, and *When Stars Are Scattered*. Unfortunately, there are many ways in which this could happen: they could be lost to the storm, caught by disease, or murdered. Regardless of how, all these characters lost someone close to them – indicating, unfortunately, that this is a common occurrence in many refugee stories. Losing someone to violence, war, or because of dangerous conditions during escape may be the worst way to lose someone, especially in these instances where the children are forced to move and have no time to grieve and mourn. The characters *When Stars Are Scattered*, *The Paper Boat*, and *The Boat* search for validation and comfort from each other as they experience these traumatic events.

In *The Paper Boat*, the reader experiences the loss of a person – perhaps a grandparent – visualized through the life of an ant (see image 9). *The Boat* depicts a child struggling to fight disease who grows progressively worse day after day until he one night dies (see image 13). Mai describes a feeling of shock and disbelief of Truong's

death as he had seemed fine just the day before: “When Mai had left last night, Truong had been recovering. He’d been fine. He’d been asking her over and over, to sing for him. What could have happened?” (Huynh & Le, 2015). The story ends with his body being thrown overboard as the story fades into nothing: “Once, twice, three times before letting go. Tossing him as far behind the boat as possible. So he would be out of sight” (Huynh & Le, 2015). These instances together paint an image of a distraught, shocked, and afraid Mai who mourns the loss of a friend.



Image 13 – *Gone* (Huynh & Le, 2015).

Similarly, in *When Stars Are Scattered* the main characters Omar and Hassan experience the loss of their father by armed men (see image 14). In image 14, Omar describes the final moments with his father where unknown men started talking with him. The action lines from toys being thrown around and three gunshots in angry action bubbles suggest the haste and shock Omar is experiencing. Omar was playing with his toys, but threw them away with pain, fear, and shock in his eyes as he witnessed the death of his father. This traumatic event is what forces them to leave their mother and search for a safe place.



Image 14 – Dad (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 180).

When Stars Are Scattered differs from the stories from Vietnam in several ways in relation to modes of transportation. A key difference is location. Many refugees from Vietnam escaped by boat to the U.S., Canada, or Australia, although people also escaped by foot to countries nearby. Whereas Somalia and Kenya, where *When Stars Are Scattered* takes place, are neighboring countries, which makes walking a reasonable way of getting there. This also has to do with what kind of injustice was taking place in the countries, where all of Vietnam was a warzone and the people had to get as far away as possible to avoid persecution, but also to escape from the development of a country in a direction they did not want to participate. In Somalia, the people held a deep hope to return to their homes eventually. Because of their location and the type of injustice in the respective countries, the mode of transportation would be different. Many refugees from Vietnam took the journey by boat with their families and sometimes strangers, knowing the danger and uncertainties that the journey may bring, whereas refugees from Somalia met up in large groups, sometimes entire villages, taking the journey by foot seeking a safe place – in this case to a refugee camp in Kenya.

The journey from Somalia to Kenya in *When Stars Are Scattered* is presented in the last half of the book, after Omar and Hassan are selected and brought into interviews for the chance to be resettled. Here, the reader is given the opportunity to learn about Omar and his life in the refugee camp before learning about his journey: allowing the reader to empathize and relate to Omar before dissecting his story and what he has experienced. In image 15, Omar and Hassan have left their mother escaping to who knows where, left in the hands of strangers and neighbors. Their journey is long and full of uncertainties as they did not know where they were going and if it would be safer. They eventually arrived in Dadaab in Kenya after being guided there by other refugees in the group: they took a chance and hoped the journey there would be safe. Due to sickness and fighting, the group grew smaller by the day, until the survivors eventually made it to Dadaab. Even after arriving, though, Omar and Hassan were fighting through sickness, malnourishment, and dehydration. They eventually recovered and made it out of the hospital to settle in their new home with their neighbor Fatuma as their caregiver.

The journey from Somalia to Kenya depicts perseverance, hope, and fear, as they experienced sickness and death. Danger eventually leads to survival and protection.

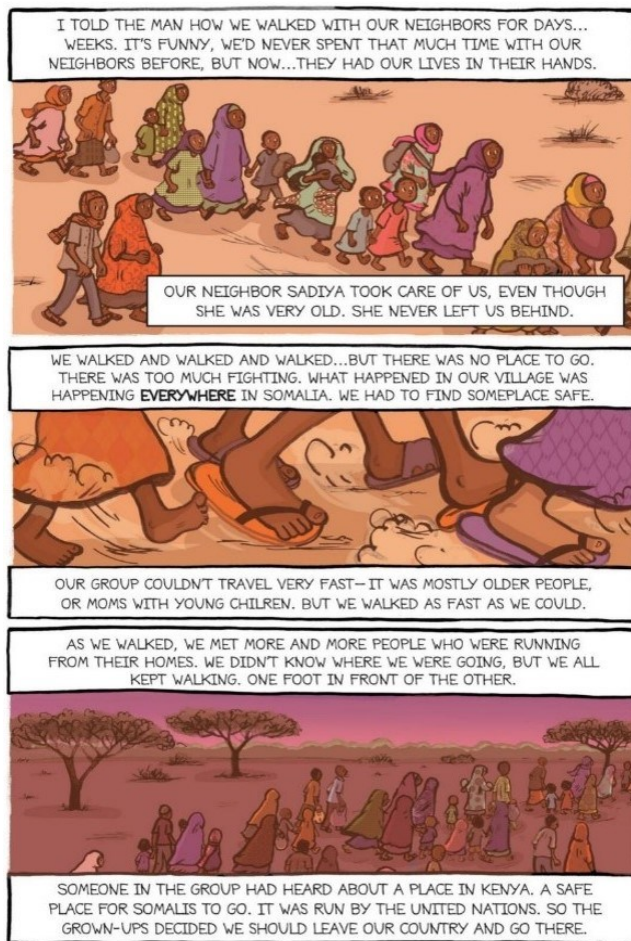


Image 15 – *The Walk* (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 186).

While the books from Vietnam feature journeys by boat, they differ in their style and approach to the topic. *The Paper Boat* is a wordless picturebook that, although the story is real, depicts that journey through ants, while *The Little Refugee*, *The Boat* and *The Best We Could Do* explore the challenges and experiences of real-life journeys through realistic depictions. All these journeys are over several days, weeks, months, or years, and the characters all meet threats and difficulties along the way, such as hunger, thirst, sickness, fear of being attacked, and dangerous weather. Danger and uncertainty connect the stories, as they depict characters who are forced to escape to an unknown location. *The Little Refugee* describe the dangers of the storm through “giant waves [that] crashed down on our little boat” (Do & Do, 2011). *The Paper Boat* depict ants holding on for their lives on a boat which is thrown between waves taller than the boat itself. *The Boat* explains how the storm arrived with brute force: “The reimagining light drained from the hold. Wind screaming through the cracks. She felt panicked limbs, people clawing for direction, the banging and shapeless shouts from the deck above” (Huynh & Le, 2015). In all these instances, the characters describe fear, panic, and loneliness through the dangers of the storm, in what may be the final moments before

death. *When Stars Are Scattered* similarly describes uncertainty and fear from fighting and hiding from bandits and suffering from sickness and malnourishment, and describes characters feeling alone, weak, and distraught from the instances that brought them to where they are.

All these stories depict a journey driven by danger and fear, but also of hope. Why put one's family through this devastation and danger if there is no hope that one will come out the other side unscathed or at least alive and in a better place? These experiences must therefore be driven by hope: hoping to survive; hoping to find mom; hope of having food the next day; hope of going to school; hope of making friends; hope of finding shelter; hope of being able to go home; or hope of arriving at a better place. In some instances, this hope is not stated explicitly, challenging the reader to read between the lines. There is no need to state that the boat people hope to arrive safely in a new country, because why else would they take on the journey? There is no need to state explicitly that the characters need food and water to survive, as this is a basic human necessity, and the reader understands the need for food and water to avoid starvation and dehydration. It is more of how the author has chosen to portray this hope. Where *The Little Refugee* state that the kindness of a pirate saved their lives (see image 22), *When Stars Are Scattered* and *The Best We Could Do* depict limited food rations and distribution centers (see image 17). With fear of devastation, and fear for one's life, these characters escape in hope of finding something better. Fear for their life transforms into hope to survive, because why else would you leave everything behind if not for hope? In some instances, like in *The Little Refugee*, *The Paper Boat* and *The Best We Could Do*, the stories are told by families escaping together, whereas in *When Stars Are Scattered* and *The Boat* children are torn apart from their families. In the first stories, the reader experience a depiction of hope of arriving safely in a new destination, while in the latter the characters are hoping to return home to their families but also hoping for safety, of arriving somewhere safe. In these instances, the hope is not stated explicitly: the hope to stay safe is obvious, as they are not going to embark on a journey in which they do not hope to come out of safely. Although this is not necessarily a choice refugees possess, and in some cases it is not a question of wanting to leave, and rather a need to: and then, this hope is a means to survive, because without hope, what do you have?

3.3.2 Camps

Some refugee experiences also include refugee camps as a middle point, a step in the process filled with waiting and hope – hope to return home or be sent somewhere more prosperous. Some refugees must spend an uncertain amount of time in a refugee camp, as they rely on many steps of processing done by external and internal workers before they can leave. The refugees are reliant on someone else and may in some cases not be included thoroughly in the process. Some stay in a refugee camp for a short period of time, such as in *The Best We Could Do*, others stay there for years on end not knowing when or if they will be processed, such as in *When Stars Are Scattered*. For how long can one be expected to wait? Should refugees put their life on hold waiting to be allowed to relocate?

When Stars Are Scattered is certainly focused on this aspect, as the whole story happens in a refugee camp with aspects of life outside it. In image 16, Omar is telling the story of how he and his brother ended up in Dadaab, a refugee camp in Kenya. Confused, frightened and sad brothers are forced to leave their mother hoping to once be

reunited, setting the stage for the dangers and insecurity of their journey. Later, Omar and Hassan are left alone in a refugee camp and are forced to learn how to survive on their own. Omar especially, is forced to take on adult responsibility when he needs to take care of his brother. Omar takes on responsibilities one should not put on a child: fetching water, protecting the ration card, cleaning, taking care of their tent, protecting, and caring for his brother. These responsibilities come before his own personal needs and wants such as school, friends, and obtaining a sense of normalcy in his life. Omar is hesitant to leave his brother because he, understandably so, feels responsible for him, and he experience an expectation that he must protect and care for him.



Image 16 – Flashbacks (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 181).

Every so often, there are distribution days where every refugee is required to fetch their periodical food rations. What is it like to one day be completely out of food? Looking at image 17, Jamieson and Mohamed portray the aspect of “empty days”, and its impact on daily life. The image depicts their food storage shrinking daily until there is nothing left, leaving everyone hungry. Omar describes the situation as taunting and frightening as everyone is affected by the lack of resources. Some faint, some do nothing all day, some continue with their day a little more heated and uptight than usual: “On some days – days like today – everyone is grumpy. [...] Quit breathing on me! [...] Well excuse me for being alive!” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 60). Omar describes a feeling of worry and uncertainty as the bags of food get smaller, and it burdens him with responsibility.



Image 17 – Empty Days (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 61).

When Stars Are Scattered portrays the refugee camp as a challenging environment where living conditions are crowded, with limited access to clean water, food, and medical care. Life in camp is a daily struggle, where Omar fights for life alongside everyone else. The difference is that he, as a child, must take these responsibilities that adults should take. What does he need to sacrifice, and is this a justifiable sacrifice to make as a child? Does he not require a sense of normalcy in camp? There are no correct answers to these questions, as they are all situation-dependent and will change according to the situation and context. It has been years since Omar experienced a sort of normalcy in his life, and he makes these sacrifices to survive. Staying on top of one's issues can make them controllable and more manageable as if there is no longer a need to worry: all one needs to do is adapt and keep going.

As seen in image 18, Omar debates on whether he should go to school. He feels a responsibility to take care of his brother and take on this parental role. He has dreamed of going to school for a long time, but never achieved his hopes because of his responsibilities with Hassan. Now that it might become a reality, all the feelings he has kept hidden for so long resurface and he must take a stand on what he wants to do. This decision affects only him as everyone else will adapt to whatever he should choose. Omar is depicted as feeling selfish, as he is juggling food deprivation, fear, and adult responsibilities. Omar has, understandably so, a lot on his mind – and the last thing he thought he needed to take a stand on is whether he should go to school. When this opportunity suddenly arises, Omar finds himself unprepared and scared as this is a new situation he never expected. His feelings are twofold. He wants to go to school, but he fears leaving others and what others may think. "If I went to school, I'd only be away from Hassan for a few hours. I'd come right home. But... my mom thought she would

come home again too” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 37). This perfectly explains the depth of Omar’s decision, as he is affected by past trauma and wants to prevent further pain for his brother.

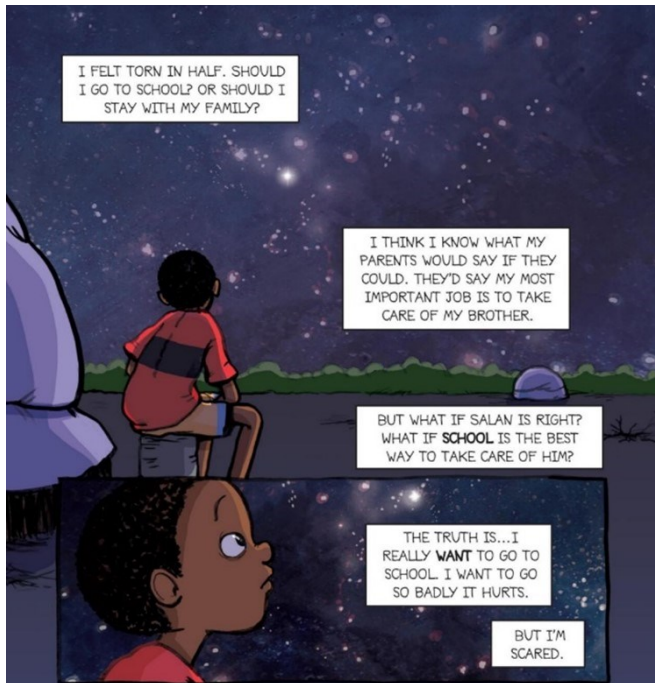


Image 18 – Wants Over Responsibility (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 38).

The author of *The Best We Could Do*, depicts the harsh reality of life in refugee camps. Bui describes the crowded living conditions, the lack of basic necessities such as food and water, and the absence of privacy. The camps are portrayed as a chaotic and dangerous place where people are constantly at risk of disease, violence, and exploitation. Bui’s stay in Palau Besar, a camp in Malaysia, differs from *When Stars Are Scattered* in terms of duration. However, the experiences are similar as they both depict processing of documents, limited food rations and distribution centers, and a sense of community between the residents of camp. Although *The Best We Could Do* depicts a safe environment with a similar ration distribution and limited resources, daily life is different. In Palau Besar, children were not given the opportunity to go to school, as they were only staying for a few months – suggesting a more peaceful environment compared to in *When Stars Are Scattered*. Further, in Dadaab residents fetch clean water from a water spigot every morning, whereas Thi and her family gets dirty water from a ditch (see image 19). Bent over a ditch, Thi explains how they got their water: “Water came out of ditches dug by the previous residents and had to be boiled before drinking” (Bui, 2017, p. 274). A major difference between the books, is the expectation of arriving somewhere better. In *When Stars Are Scattered*, refugees stay in the refugee camp for an unknown amount of time and may be selected to be allowed to relocate to a random place. Comparingly, in *The Best We Could Do* this is depicted as a choice each family can make deciding where they would like to go which can be hurried by sponsors filling out forms (see image 20).



Image 19 – Water (Bui, 2017, p. 274).



Image 20 – Processing (Bui, 2017, p. 274).

In both books, the refugee camps are depicted as difficult and dangerous environments, where refugees face a lack of basic necessities and are at risk of violence and exploitation. The characters form close relationships with other refugees, creating a sense of community and belonging despite, and because of, their shared experience of displacement. There are also several differences between the stories. An obvious difference in the books, is the duration of time in which the characters spend in the refugee camp. Bui's family stay in the camp for a relatively short time, whereas Omar and Hassan stay in Dadaab for several years. As a result, *When Stars Are Scattered* provide a more in-depth depiction of life in a refugee camp and the challenges one can face there. Another major difference between the two stories, is the presence of family. Omar and Hassan in *When Stars Are Scattered* are left entirely to themselves, making them reliant on each other, Fatuma and the others in camp. In contrast, Thi's family travels together, making them reliant on each other and keeping to themselves. Má here provides motherly comfort in which Omar and Hassan receive from Fatuma. She also provides their food rations, whereas Omar is required to retrieve them with the help of his brother. Therefore, the responsibilities which lie on Omar is greater than on Thi. Where we in *When Stars Are Scattered* experience the importance of education, resources, and delving in the possibility to create a better future for themselves, *The Best We Could Do* focus more on leaving camp and on the theme of family through telling the family history, exploring the impact of displacement on relationships and personal identity.

3.3.3 Piracy

Many refugees also experience piracy, especially those escaping by boat. In modern society, piracy can be considered as an act of stealing – such as downloading something illegally or theft. Some time ago, piracy may have had a different definition as

it was more related to the act of plundering, pirates stealing something, usually from ships at sea. However important and relevant both definitions may be, the latter will be of focus in this thesis – more specifically the fear of loss of resources and fear of being caught and sent home. Regardless of what definition one goes with, the characters in these books experience fear related to it: they are fearful for losing their resources, but also fearful for their lives.

In *The Little Refugee*, we are presented with piracy in its best and worst form – fear of loss of basic necessities combined with hope and kindness. As Anh and his family escape by boat, they experience not only dangerous weather but also the gruesome act of piracy. In image 21 the reader is presented with pirates invading their boat and taking all their belongings. “These men were pirates. They stole everything we had – rings, bracelets, necklaces, even people’s gold teeth (Do & Do, 2011). In image 21, the fear the characters are experiencing gets progressively worse as the characters lose all their belongings. The pirates stop at nothing to get what they want as Anh describes the threats of throwing a baby overboard. With distraught, concerned, and fearful faces, Anh tells the possibility of losing a baby to the pirates’ demand: “The pirate dangled the baby over the side of the boat, threatening to throw him in [...] That baby was my brother, Khoa” (Do & Do, 2011). The fellowship presented between the members on the boat is clear as they are all willing to risk their life to save the baby (see image 21).

A pirate grabbed hold of a baby. He lifted up the baby and ripped open his nappy. A tiny slice of gold fell out. The pirate dangled the baby over the side of the boat, threatening to throw him in. My father screamed, 'We must save the child!'

All the scared, hungry people on our boat stood up ready to fight these pirates to save the baby's life.

The pirate changed his mind and tossed the child at his mother's feet. His life was spared. That baby was my brother, Khoa.



Image 21 – *What We Lost* (Do & Do, 2011).

As the refugees now have lost all their belongings, it looks dark and depressing – how are they going to survive this already dangerous passage with no resources? As they are left with slim chances of survival, one of the pirates show a glimmer of compassion and kindness as he gives them a bottle of water – which without they would have not survived the remainder of the trip (see image 22). “As the pirates were leaving, one of them felt sorry for us, and threw us a bottle of water. It wasn’t much, but it saved our lives” (Do & Do, 2011). This accentuates the refugees’ desperation as it suggests an alarming level of resources, and the hope of survival slipping through their fingers.



As the pirates were leaving, one of them felt sorry for us, and threw us a bottle of water. It wasn't much, but it saved our lives.

Image 22 – Kindness? (Do & Do, 2011).

Similarly, Thi and her family fear pirates in *The Best We Could Do* – though in different, a less incriminating way than what Anh and his family experience. After boarding the boat, and trying to stay hidden, Thi's uncle Hải spot a larger ship in the distance which follows them: "Those are Thai fishing boats. Could be pirates. [...] How do you know? [...] I DON'T! But we still have gas, food, and water. We stay the hell away from them! [...] Look! When I turn, they follow" (Bui, 2017, p. 242). The uncertainty of who may be on that boat is expected to be worse than the opportunities of which the boat may bring: there is a possibility that the bigger boat could help them, however, the fear of being caught is greater than the possibilities may ever be. Thi's father, Bõ, must think of his family and made the executive decision that boats brings danger, strangers bring danger, therefore they must avoid them at all costs (see image 23). He manages to maneuver the boat safely away from the pirates, and through the dangers of the water before arriving in Malaysia to go to Palau Besar Camp. Hải and Bõ display feelings of stress, uncertainty, and anger after noticing the boat, and feelings of content, relief, and peace after successfully outrunning the other boat (see image 23).



Image 23 – *Saved* (Bui, 2017, p. 243).

With Omar in *When Stars Are Scattered*, we experience a different kind of fear – fear of theft from other refugees in the same situation as oneself. Compared to piracy in the form of plundering, this is less of fear for one’s life and more fear of someone being more desperate than oneself. This kind of piracy is connected to desperation: when opting to steal, why steal from someone in a refugee camp who may have even less than you have yourself? What kind of desperation does one need to get to, to steal from someone who struggles as much or perhaps more than oneself – do they not already suffer enough? Omar’s fear of losing his belongings is swiftly mentioned, as if normal conduct in the very first chapter of the book, and is not mentioned after that, indicating that this is no all-consuming factor of life in the refugee camp (see image 24).



Image 24– *Valuables* (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 15).

The books portray uncertainties in seeking refuge which include piracy and stealing: in seeking refuge, you find danger. In many of these stories, especially with the

ones portraying a journey by boat, there is a fear of being caught and sent home. From where does this fear originate? There are familiar stories of immigrants entering illegally, and surely the refugees have heard about these stories too and are afraid that they may serve the same purpose. In all stories of focus here, the characters made their way to the other side: some received help from strangers, others from UNHCR. Throughout, the characters depict a sense of fear: fear of being caught, fear for their lives, fear of uncertainty. However, they also depict hope: hope to end up somewhere better than from where they were originating, hope of finding family, hope of survival. These stories depict a fear for one's life and fear of loss of resources and one's belongings, making the reader question one's own privileges. What is it like not having the resources necessary for survival? And what is it like not having enough resources to be comfortable? What is it like not having a notebook and a pencil; not having proper school attire or clean clothes; not having access to cold and clean water; not having enough food to get through the day; not having a safe place to stay; and not having a parent to take care of you?

3.3.4 Mother Figure

A common denominator shared with most of the books, is the separation of child and parent and how the mother is connected to the stories. UNHCR claims that 40%, or 153 300 people, of the world's refugee population are unaccompanied and separated children (UNHCR, 2023b). This proves the relevance of the stories by Jamieson and Mohamed (2020) and Huynh (2015), as they depict unaccompanied children who are separated from their families. Further, several sources agree that around 80% of the world's refugee population consists of women and their dependent children (Ross-Sheriff, 2013; Cohen, 1995). This further proves the relevance of the stories by Bui (2017), Do and Do (2011), and Lam (2015), as they depict a woman and child together and how they rely on each other. Males, fathers, grandfathers, and uncles usually take on a few separate roles: either they are separated from their families to serve in the military, killed, or organize the entire journey from home country to a new place. Women, however, are required to stay and take care of their children despite the atrocities, danger and suffering they may endure (Ross-Sheriff, 2013).

Starting off with a common separation of mother and father in *The Paper Boat*. Mom and child are here escaping together after being separated from the father, and other males, as they are leaving in a different direction with luggage (see image 25). As this is a book entirely without written text, it is never revealed where the males go and why there is a need to be separated, suggesting the insecurity, worry, sadness and fear the child experiences. In image 25, feelings of uncertainty, abandonment, fear, stress, and love are shared between the mother, father, and child, depicting how they are feeling in the moment they are separated.



Image 25 – Separation (Lam, 2020).

The mother acts as a safe place for the child as they withstand dangerous situations, and the child relies heavily on the mother for comfort and safety. In image 26, the mother guides them through fields of grass and across military camps, all while staying in hiding from the men armed with rifles. The child is not only experiencing war, insecurity, and danger, but also the loss of their home and separation from their family and may not understand why. Therefore, the mother has a vital role in the child understanding and coping with what is happening. In image 26, the child depicts the dangers of armed men combined with fear of getting caught, when the mother lifts them out of the tall grass to safety.



Image 26 – Help (Lam, 2020).

Just like the child receives comfort from their mother, the mother also relies on the child. Image 27 visualizes the mother's circumstance as she is afraid for her own and her child's life, but also fears loss and uncertainty of her partner. The image depicts how sometimes one does not need words, one simply needs action – and in this case comfort and love in the form of a hug saying "I understand you, I feel with you and I am here for you." This explains a connection between mother and child where they display similar experiences of being scared, confused, sad, and alone, and together depicts a relationship where they are both able to comfort and rely on each other.



Image 27 – Comfort (Lam, 2020).

Common for many of the stories is the uncertainty the children are experiencing, as they may not understand what is going on and why. Just like in *The Paper Boat*, Anh in *The Little Refugee* depict what was going on in Vietnam at the time: "I didn't know there was a war going on. Outside our house, in the jungles and in the villages of Vietnam, many people were dying. Lots of them were soldiers, but some were mothers and fathers, and some were even children" (Do & Do, 2011). When the war in Vietnam ended, the lives of Anh's father and uncles were in danger after fighting on the losing side, forcing them to escape. Anh is especially comforted by his mother who explains the situation and holds him tightly through the dangers of the storm. This portrays the close relationship between Anh and his mother and describes a balanced nature of a father fighting in the war and a mother who is left to support and comfort the children.

What is it like being separated from your loved ones and left alone? *When Stars Are Scattered* visualize this in a concerning, touching, powerful and impressive way as Omar is left alone in care of his younger brother after the loss of their father and being separated from their mother. The brothers are quickly left in the hands of neighbors and strangers when running for their lives and hiding from the dangerous armed men. When they arrive at Dadaab the boys are again separated from the others and are left to fend for themselves. As children, they have no experience being alone: when do you learn to take care of yourself, let alone someone else? Omar is now faced with these struggles and is forced to find solutions for himself and his brother. Fortunately, the brothers receive guidance from a single woman in another tent close by – Fatuma. She, over time, becomes the closest to a caregiver the boys have, and provides stability, comfort, food, and ensures that the boys have as close to a normal upbringing as they can in the years that they are in Dadaab. Although the boys are essentially left to fend for themselves, Fatuma brings love and motherly comfort which they cannot receive from anyone else (see image 28). In image 28, Omar explains the feeling of not fully understanding what is going on, how they got there, why they had to leave their home and mother, and why they are not reunited. The image depicts a scared, sad, and confused child being comforted by an understanding and concerned mother figure. Although Omar and Hassan are separated from their family, they are supported by not only Fatuma, but also

everyone else in camp. They form close, long-lasting relationship with other refugees and UNHCR workers, who become like a family to them (see image 29). From an early age, Hassan struggle with serious seizures. Omar helps him as much as he can, but he relies mostly on Fatuma and her ability to hold him and calm him down. “He is like my own son, and I will treat him as such [...] The next time Hassan had a seizure, Fatuma was right there next to him, holding down his tongue, rocking him and singing to him” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 193).



Image 28 – Mom? (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 184).

It is ironic how Hassan’s only spoken word is “Hooyo” as it translates to “mama” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 254). When was the last time Hassan saw his mother and does he remember her? What kind of connection does he have with her? Or is it perhaps the lack of connection prompting this remark? Omar is constantly reminded of his mother through his younger brother, as this is all he has ever said, but he cannot remember the last time he said “Hooyo” (see image 29). This aspect of the brother’s life is revealed moments before freeing Omar and Hassan of the camp struggles, indicating that the reader may go the entire book not realizing the significance of the word. What kind of impact can this have on the reader? The reader then might conclude that Hassan chose a random sound or word and stuck to that. However, as the word actually has a meaning, the reader is then forced to re-evaluate Hassan, who he is and what impact this experience has had on him – and most likely may have had on other children in similar situations. Image 29 take place at the very end of the book, depicting Omar as he reflects on life in a refugee camp while leaving Dadaab after several years: “In a refugee camp, you are reminded of the things you have lost. It is a valiant and agonizing struggle to focus not on what you have lost... but on what you have been given” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 257).

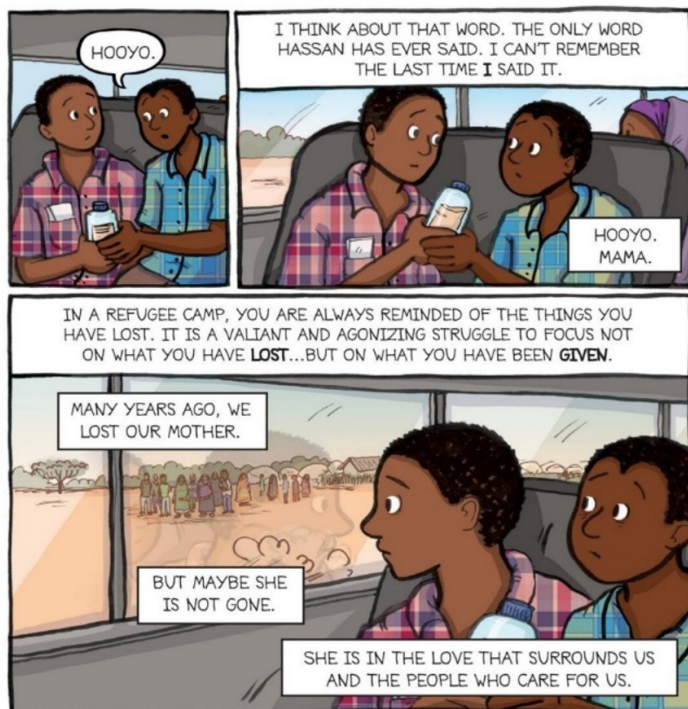
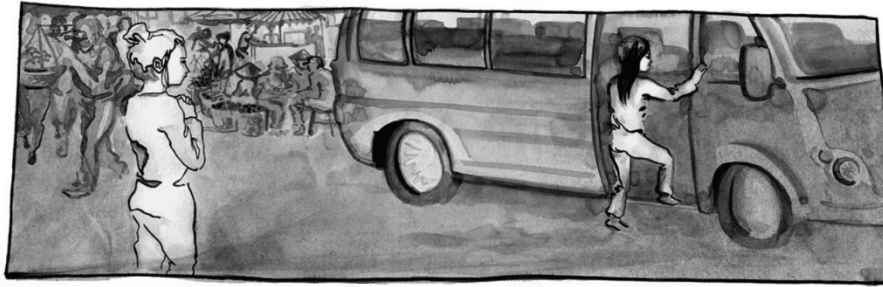


Image 29 – Hooyo (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 254).

In *The Boat* after Mai's father is left blind and is hospitalized, her mother decides to stay to take care of him. Mai leaves her mother and father to go on this journey with an uncle she has never met who would guide her to the next safe zone (see image 30). Image 30 depicts the fear and uncertainty Mai is experiencing, as she searches for her mother's face in the crowd with hope that it will tell her everything is going to be ok. The journey starts on a bus, before she eventually reaches the boat which is the main event. She meets other people equally scared, alone, and uncertain, but who find security and comfort in each other as they are all going through the same things. During her journey, Mai becomes close with another refugee named Chi. Their relationship grows deep and is characterized by loyalty, strength, and support as they rely on each other for friendship and emotional support through the dangers of their journey. In image 30, Mai begins her journey alone after leaving her mother.



On the bus, Mai looked out the back window —

searching for her mother's face —



Image 30 – *Left Alone* (Huynh & Le, 2015).

The Best We Could Do is slightly different from the others, as the story is driven by multiple aspects and stories. The theme of the mother figure is a complex and nuanced exploration of the ways in which mothers can both shape and be shaped by their families. The main character tells her own story as well as her family history, and thus their relation to their mothers and caregivers. They tell stories as they grow up while struggling with “normal” issues in addition to dangers from war and persecution. The child protagonist escape with her siblings and both her parents. Although, they have slightly different roles as the father tries to find a safe escape route and take care of outside conditions, whereas the mother takes care of the children. In this instance, the children become reliant on their mother as the father is elsewhere doing his fatherly duties. The mother, in many instances, provides not only motherly comfort and love, but is also organized and protecting as they indulge in a sense of normalcy while escaping. Thi’s relationship with her mother, is complex, as her mother’s trauma is always present and affects her story. Thi’s mother is a source of strength and resilience, as she is constantly fighting to protect her family and ensure their survival through this journey from Vietnam. She has multiple jobs to be able to take care of her children and family and sacrifice her own needs and wants to ensure stability and give her family the best opportunities. Her determination to escape the war-torn Vietnam is a key factor throughout the book. Thi’s father is protective, as seen in image 23, while the mother provides comfort, as seen in image 12.

Although these stories are all quite different, they all portray dependence on or the lack of a parental figure – especially a mother figure. All children are different: some gravitate towards their mothers, some towards their fathers, some towards other family members. But it is interesting to consider the importance of a mother figure in all these stories, as most depict either a close connection to the mother, an absent mother figure, or a stranger adopting this motherly function. There is no correct answer to this, as every story is different, and there are many aspects that are never brought up here. However, the connection, or lack thereof, to a mother figure tell a story of abandonment and

comfort which is something many children can relate to, while also challenging the reader to consider how they may feel to not have this connection. *The Boat* and *When Stars Are Scattered* depict protagonists separated from their families, who are supported and comforted by the refugee community through the hardships they endure. *When Stars Are Scattered* describe this community as the love and protection which surrounds them: "Many years ago, we lost our mother. But she is not gone. She is in the love that surrounds us and the people who care for us" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 254). Omar and Hassan waited years to be reunited with their mother, but during that time, they developed bonds and connections with other loving, understanding, and protective individuals in the refugee camp which helped them survive. *The Paper Boat*, *The Little Refugee*, and *The Best We Could Do* depict families escaping together, where the mothers create comforting environments for the children who experience fright, sadness, fatigue, and confusion. Although the difference in the absence or presence of a mother figure is vast, there is one thing in which all stories agree: the importance of community. Regardless of the refugee's struggles and hardships, they are never alone and are always supported by the community in which they are surrounded.

4.0 Discussion

In this section, I will more thoroughly reflect on the books and how they relate to my theoretical framework; how they contribute to useful resources for teaching about the immigrant and refugee experience; and how they can help learners develop empathy and understanding. Firstly, these are great examples of books appropriate for various age groups and proficiency levels which can be highly motivational for young readers. They offer opportunities to learn about language, while also learning about the world and those who inhabit it. As the combination and relationship between written and visual elements vary, readers can get appropriate assistance during the reading process wherever they need it. The books present a reality in an engaging way through visual storytelling, they are easy to read due to the combination of visual elements and comprehensible written text, and they are of manageable length making them easy for a young learner to pick up, get invested in, and complete: making stories representing refugee experiences easily available. "Reading in English means understanding and reflecting on the content of various types of text on paper and on screen, and contributing to reading pleasure and language acquisition" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). Therefore, visual literature help reach the goal and purpose of developing individuals' capable of self-growth and understanding, contributing to the development of a satisfactory community of individuals keeping the community's best interests in mind.

These stories are similarly complex, but the depiction of them is not: as there are differences in color, style, and placement of visual elements. All the books help develop literacy skills by challenging the reader to understand written text, visual elements, and other multimodal approaches such as movement on page, audio, placement of written text and image, and use of color. *The Little Refugee* and *The Paper Boat* are great for reluctant readers as they offer opportunities to familiarize oneself with the medium before delving into longer stories. The reader is not only examining stories of a manageable length, but developing motivation to keep reading, allowing the reader to understand and use these stories as platforms going forward. As a completely wordless picturebook, *The Paper Boat* is the simplest alternative to reading about refugee experiences. Despite its simplicity, it can provide great opportunities for reading and writing as it challenges the learner to read the images and discuss with classmates to fully engage with the story's potential. *When Stars Are Scattered* and *The Best We Could Do* offer similar opportunities as, where the reader is supported and challenged where appropriate. In the first, the reader is presented with a good amount of text which utilize a slightly less demanding vocabulary, whereas the latter offer slightly longer and more demanding texts. All, however, present the refugee experience in a clear way, utilizing a combination of written text and visual elements which together develop understanding of refugee experiences. *The Boat* can be highly motivational as visual elements on the page draw the reader's attention. The language is slightly more demanding, suggesting the need for a higher level of understanding, whilst challenging and supporting the reader where appropriate. The written text is supported by visual elements, creating an engaging storytelling of someone's experiences. Here, the reader can develop reading comprehension and vocabulary while learning about genre and medium as well as an authentic refugee experience. As there are visual elements and written text that move around sporadically on the page, the reader can effectively develop visual, textual, and multimodal literacy: similar to *The Best We Could Do*, *When Stars Are Scattered*, and *The Little Refugee*, where the reader is exposed to visual image, written text and everything in between.

The books are valuable resources for teaching about the immigrant and refugee experience as they are motivating and engaging for the EFL learner as they effectively develop literacy whilst supporting and challenging the reader. They are great alternatives for developing motivation for reading and in general to develop a broad vocabulary and a broader understanding of texts of various lengths. In addition to developing language comprehension and reading competence, they offer great opportunities for discussion of history that has shaped the world and of experiences alike and unlike one's own. The reader is presented with a world of war, tragedy, and perseverance, offering opportunities to discuss what happens around the world. The books present worlds filled with devastation and pain, and the extent of that can be difficult to comprehend. They alter the way we look at the world and others, what we experience, hope for, and expect.

One of a teacher's responsibilities and challenges is finding ways of creating an inclusive classroom in a world that is everchanging and diverse, and which correlates to the curriculum of LK20. However vague the curriculum is, this choice of structure and content of a lesson will always be the teacher's. A teacher makes decisions according to how they believe to best reach these set goals. All teachers have preconceptions: we all have things we prefer and things we find uncomfortable, and, naturally, the education and classroom will be a mirror of a teacher's beliefs. Students *and* teachers need to be educated on topics that make them uncomfortable, such as topics presented in this thesis. It is a shame, really, that what might make a teacher uncomfortable might limit a student's development and learning. Every child has a need and right to be seen and understood by classmates and by adults they may encounter. Therefore, it is important to keep an open mind and to educate oneself on topics that may affect students. To discuss topics and research how to teach them to students may make a difference: that one book, discussion, image, or attitude may change a person's life; give them courage to stand up for themselves; or give them strength to keep pushing for equality and inclusivity (Bishop, 1990).

An example of how to develop this idea and to reach the goal of meeting every student individually, is through a wide range of diverse texts. "[...] learners can be trained to read texts in a non-judgmental manner that helps them to take on the roles of the characters and follows their lives, thereby developing empathy and understanding" (Murty, et al., 2021, p. 172). Diverse texts offer the chance for students and teachers to learn about other children and their belonging to a cultural group; about historical incidents which has shaped the world and its inhabitants; about their own stories, attitudes and perceptions; and they provide important opportunities for discussing difficult themes such as war, death, devastation, safety, perseverance, and hope.

In an inclusive classroom, learners are able to develop an understanding of human dignity, identity and cultural diversity, critical thinking, and ethical awareness: through developing a classroom built on ideas of democracy and citizenship, and health and life skills, as presented in the core values of LK20 (Ministry of Education, 2017). LK20 encourages appreciation and respect for cultural diversity, and development of self-awareness and identity. How to do this is vague, but an alternative is through literature that help develop respect and tolerance which support competence aims outlined in LK20 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). One of the main goals of education is to provide insight into history and culture to help unite people in our country, and to support development of personal growth and identity, creating self-reflecting, self-aware, respectful, and understanding citizens of society (Ministry of Education, 2017). A way of achieving this goal is through including diverse and inclusive texts of high quality,

providing reading experiences and the use of literary texts to discuss and gain insight into historical events such as war, refugee, immigrant and displacement experiences, and safety, trauma, and death. To control the development of students' progress in reading and discussing literature and topics within it, LK20 has certain competence aims on developing the ability to "listen to, read and talk about the content of simple texts, including picturebooks [...] and self-chosen texts", indicating the importance of visual mediums and bringing a wide range of literary texts into the EFL classroom (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

All stories represent families being torn apart, forcibly leaving their homes, and facing injustice, insecurity, and persecution because of war. Together, these stories shape our understanding of not judging a book by its cover, you never know what one has been through; you never know their entire stories and their depths. As works depicting reality, children are challenged to consider how life may have been for this group of people at this time and how it may be today. The stories presented here take place in different time periods, where those from Vietnam takes place between the 50's and 80's, while *When Stars Are Scattered* is situated in Kenya in the early 90's up until 2010. This gap in time indicates the relevance of the stories, as though they take place in different times, they portray the same difficulties of fear, lack of resources, and separation from family, challenging the reader to consider what life would be like after being put on hold and forced to leave one's home. An increasing number of children experience such incidents daily, indicating the importance and relevance of discussing such experiences. Literature of such relevance can help participants belonging to such communities overcome their struggles with the idea of "if one person did – or many did – I can too", promoting a sense of belonging to a diverse classroom and developing the idea that everyone has the same value, everyone is equal, and no one is alone.

Many children have never experienced something similar, and then it can be challenging to discuss and understand the intensity of how reality may look for someone. How can children outside these communities be expected to understand what it has been like when they, in some cases, have never experienced anything traumatic and may have nothing to relate to? The texts discussed here, are powerful stories which do a magnificent job of portraying what it was like on treacherous waters, in a refugee camp, in hiding from armed men, and they do so in a way that the reader is able to relate to and empathize with the protagonists without having to personally experience it.

Looking at the stories portraying dangerous water for instance: who may relate to these stories? Times have changed and depending on a person's location, a refugee may never take a journey by boat. Perhaps the refugees take another approach to arrive in a safe place. Who, then, may relate to these stories, as it is all dependent on context and its surroundings? Number one: refugees. Refugees seeking refuge under dangerous conditions, those experiencing displacement, and those forced to leave their home relate to the fear and danger found within the depiction of the journey. Number two: someone who has experienced traumatic experiences such as a storm or other natural hazards. Though this may not be on purpose, any who has experienced dangerous weather may relate to the fear which the protagonists explain. The point of these stories is to shed light on the experiences of refugees, but it can be much more multidimensional than that, as people can relate to different experiences for different reasons. Therefore, these stories allow the reader to, not only relate to and find comfort to own trauma, but also develop empathy and understanding for those who have experienced similar atrocities. In many cases, the reader can relate to some emotional aspect in some degree of the

stories and can then only begin to imagine the extent of what the protagonists may experience. Those with similar backgrounds may find solace and guidance in these stories and may find them therapeutic as they can help them develop perseverance, strength, and courage to continue fighting for equality and inclusivity. Bishop (1990) explains this as a way of seeing the world through windows depicting the struggles of reality, at mirrors reflecting stories like our own, and through sliding glass doors constructing a bridge between imagination and reality.

5.0 Conclusion

After researching refugee studies and analyzing picturebooks and graphic novels on the topic, I am confident that the chosen materials are suitable for children of varying levels. The books presented are suitable for 1st grade and up, with varying language and difficulty. Having a wide range of texts like these allows a teacher to fill up their resource banks with valuable resources that are suitable for a variety of proficiency levels and age groups. This offers the opportunity to discuss the topics in early grades, and then discuss them again later, together building a solid foundation for the development of empathy for others, self-awareness, strength to stand up to oneself and to keep pushing for equality and inclusivity. A common denominator for the books chosen in this thesis, and for many other refugee experiences, are the topics transportation, refugee camps, piracy, and mother figures. These allow for discussion of historical events and development of understanding for refugees in similar situations.

An increasing number of refugees are displaced from their homes daily: some settling in refugee camps and some spreading across the world. This contributes to an increasingly diverse classroom all over the world including Norway. Refugees may be a minority in most Norwegian classrooms, which may result in a majority of students who may never fully comprehend their stories and experiences. Experiences such as the ones presented in this thesis may be distant for many, however, every child can relate to some aspects of struggle. If the intention is to shed light on refugee experiences, a learner may relate to aspects of starvation, separation, or dangerous weather, or at the very least the learner may relate to the feeling of fear that overcasts them. For children belonging to the refugee community, reading about experiences like one's own may be therapeutic.

I have worked as an English teacher for children in a diverse classroom and have used some of these literary texts during English lessons and in small groups. What I learned, is how engaging the stories were to the children. I did not tell them about the reality of the stories at first and focused more on language, the ability to understand longer texts, and to discuss their content with their peers. Once I told them that the stories were real, it opened opportunities for more than reading as the students were open to asking questions on what was going on and the extent of it, and they seemed more interested and expressed worry and pain by the stories. The students explain how the visuals added to the written text and how the visuals helped them understand the stories better, and how the composition of images, color, text, and the placement of these elements, created emotional connections to the stories in which they had rarely experienced in previous reading circumstances. They explained how the reality of the stories made them aware of their classmates' experiences and hardships, and how they could never imagine such atrocities. And some explained how they felt seen and understood, as classmates were able to see and ask questions surrounding what they have been through, to some extent, without having to make themselves vulnerable and in the center. And this is the teacher I want to be. I want to be the kind of teacher that helps students see others and to help those who struggle, giving them opportunities to learn about themselves and others, while simultaneously growing compassion, empathy, and respect:

Those of us who are children's literature enthusiasts tend to be somewhat idealistic, believing that some book, some story, some poem can speak to each individual child, and that if we have the time and resources, we can find that book

and help change that child's life, if only for a brief time, and only for a little bit. (Bishop, 1990).

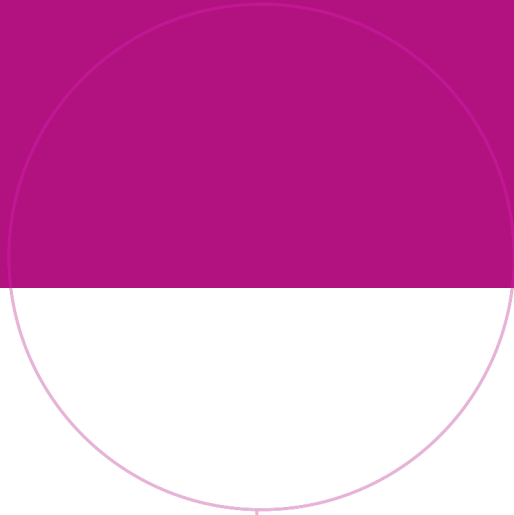
I am pleased with my selection of books and their variety of placement, content, and style of visual and verbal elements. I am pleased with the honesty these stories represent, and their value in the EFL classroom. Visual literature does not only offer opportunities to scaffold and challenge readers of varying proficiency levels, but are also motivational with comprehensible language and how they are of manageable length.

I have learned a lot about refugee experiences and the devastation that may arise. I find it important to educate myself on conditions which my future students may have experienced, so that I can be a resource and a safe space for students whenever they need me to be. I want to create inclusive classrooms where students are able to develop, be inquisitive and be heard, seen, and understood by classmates and adults. Through the use of these books, I believe I can help children see themselves and others, and that they will learn something about historical events. I also believe they will develop the capability to see others for who they are, what they bring with them and their struggles. Finally, I believe I, together with my students, can help children be seen, heard, and understood, and to find their belonging in a diverse group.

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