

The Boy at the Back of the Class

ONJALI Q. RAÚF

Reading Guide

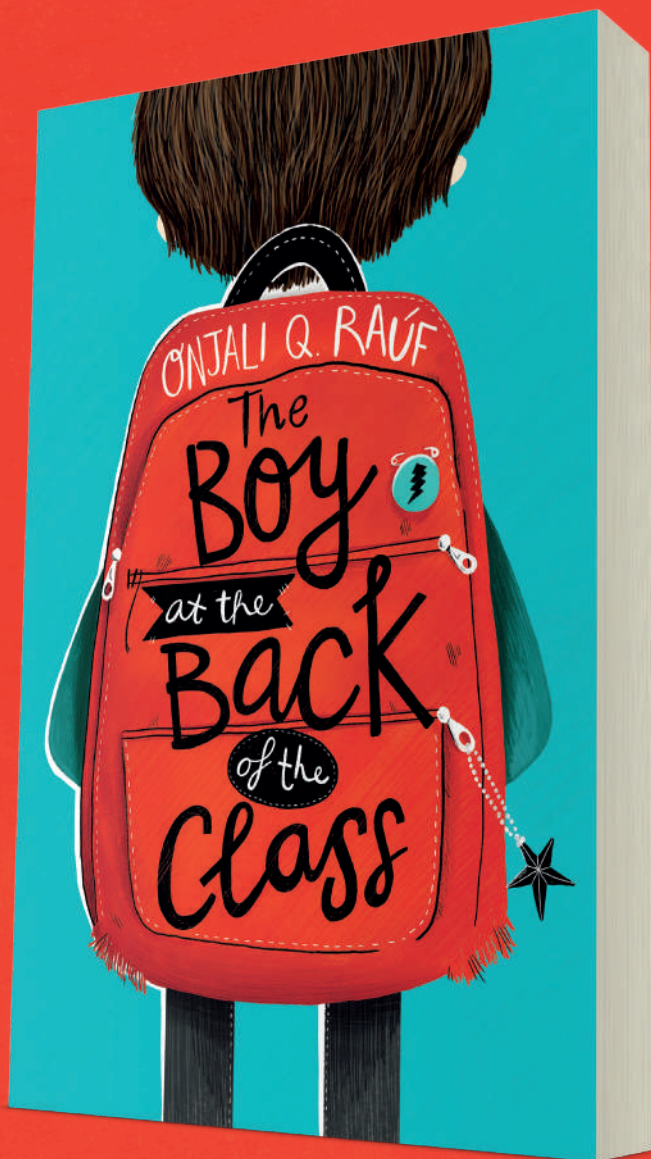
'This is a beautiful, open-hearted debut from Onjali Q Raúf that should help children be the best they can be and realise the power of kindness.'

BookTrust

youngcityreads.co.uk



What is Young City Reads?



WHAT IS YOUNG CITY READS?

Imagine sharing a book with your best friend, your teacher, your family or your bus driver. Reading a book together is a fun experience. Everyone should try it! Young City Reads is a BIG READ for children – a giant book group for schools.

Author Onjali Q Raúf, Brighton Festival and Young City Reads invite you to join us in a citywide read of *The Boy at the Back of the Class* from 7 March to 22 May 2019.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Young City Reads is for everyone: whether you're an avid adventurer, budding bookworm or a simply terrific teacher ... even parents and carers can join in. It doesn't matter who you are, Young City Reads is about opening up the world of words and ideas to everyone.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It couldn't be simpler. The idea is to get young readers (and grown-ups) everywhere reading *The Boy at the Back of the Class* between the beginning of March and the end of May. All you need to do to get involved is pick up a copy from your local library or bookshop and start reading! If you're a teacher you can sign up your whole class to receive class emails and free themed literacy resources, then read the book together in school.

SPECIAL OFFER: The Book Nook in Hove are offering participating schools the selected title for £5.24 (Amazon price match) and FREE DELIVERY straight to your school. To order please contact them on 01273 911988 / info@booknookuk.com



THE GUIDE

This guide provides you with everything you need to know about Young City Reads. It takes you on a whistle-stop tour of *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, providing background information, reading hints, biographical facts and ideas for further reading.

Young City Reads is a Collected Works CIC project.

COLLECTED WORKS CIC

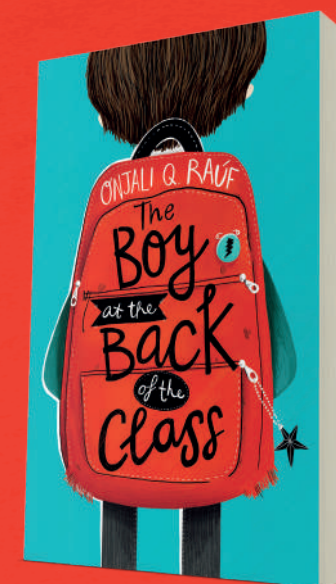
Collected Works CIC is an award-winning social enterprise that believes in the power of literacy. Its Young City Reads initiative works with schools, bringing together young readers across Sussex, to help them connect over books and stories and inspire them to read for pleasure. The organisation is led by Artistic Director Sarah Hutchings.

For up-to-the-minute information visit: youngcityreads.co.uk

The Boy at the Back of the Class (shortlisted for the Blue Peter Book Awards, the Waterstones Children's Book Prize and nominated for the Carnegie Medal 2019) is the story of new boy Ahmet, a refugee from Syria. It is told from the point of view of one of his classmates who goes to great lengths to make friends and give Ahmet a sense of belonging. The unexpected adventure that follows strikes the perfect balance between humour and poignancy, topped off with a terrific twist. The result is an unforgettable story that will find a home in the heart of every child. Onjali Q. Raúf portrays the refugee crisis through the eyes of a child in a way that's accessible, warm and funny. It's a story about friendship and how naturally children celebrate, rather than fear, all our differences.

*'We are thrilled that Onjali Q. Raúf has agreed to be the Young City Reads Author for 2019. Her book **The Boy at the Back of the Class** has all the qualities that we look for – empathy, kindness, adventure and humour. In 2018, nearly 2,000 children took part in the project with 1,438 coming to the final event at Brighton Festival. I know that our Young City Readers will love getting to know Ahmet and his friends.'*

Sarah Hutchings, Director of Collected Works CIC



SPOTLIGHT ON ONJALI Q. RAÚF



Onjali Q. Raúf is Founder and CEO of Making Herstory: a human rights organisation working in partnership with other movements to end the abuse, trafficking and enslavement of women and girls in the UK and beyond. She has been shortlisted for several awards for her work in the women's rights sector, including the Care2 Impact Award, the Emma Humphreys Memorial Prize and The Independent's Happy List (2017). Previously the Campaigns Manager at Women for Women International (UK) and Assistant Editor for emel Magazine, she is an alumna of the Cambridge Coexist Leadership Programme (CCLP) and a regular contributor to BBC Radio 2's Pause for Thought. She is also an appointed Adviser to the Women's Refugee Centre Dunkirk.

*'I am utterly thrilled to have had **The Boy at the Back of the Class** chosen for Young City Reads!*

It is such an honour. I hope all human "beans" (of every age!) reading and engaging with it, reach its end feeling a little more understanding and hopeful about what we can all do to ease the plight of refugee children the world over. Sometimes the best, most joyous things start with a story, and my deepest wish for this book is that it helps inspire lots of interesting discussions and ideas about one of the biggest humanitarian crises of our times. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping to make this happen.'

Onjali Q. Raúf, Young City Reads Author 2019





SPOTLIGHT ON PIPPA CURNICK (ILLUSTRATOR)

Pippa Curnick studied at Camberwell College of Art before graduating from the University of Derby with a First Class degree in illustration. From 2012–2014 she worked as a Designer for Alison Green Books. She now works as an illustrator and freelance designer.

Events



ONJALI Q. RAÚF LIVE AT BRIGHTON FESTIVAL INTERACTIVE SCHOOLS EVENT

Wednesday 22 May, 10.30-11.30am (book signing afterwards)

BRIGHTON DOME CONCERT HALL

Tickets £3 (early bird offer £1.50 when booked by phone or at Brighton Dome box office between 22 Feb and 22 Mar)

YOUNG CITY READS 2018 LAUNCH

Selected schools celebrate World Book Day Thursday 07 March

LIBRARY VISITS FOR YOUR CLASS

Participating schools can book a FREE class visit with Brighton & Hove City Libraries.

To book please contact Jo Rosenberg on 01273 296977

libraryclassvisits@brighton-hove.gov.uk



Remarkable Journeys

– Further Reading from Brighton & Hove Libraries

If you loved *The Boy at the Back of the Class* then you'll love these other fantastic tales of remarkable journeys, available from Brighton & Hove Libraries:

A Dangerous Crossing
by Jane Mitchell

A Story Like the Wind
by Gill Lewis

Azzi in Between
by Sarah Garland

Boy Overboard
by Morris Gleitzman *

Boy 87
by Ele Fountain *

Child I
by Steve Tasane *

Dreams of Freedom : In Words and Pictures
by Amnesty International UK

Girl Underground
by Morris Gleitzman *

Give Me Shelter
by Tony Bradman

I Am David
by Anne Holm

Illegal
by Eoin Colfer & Andrew Donkin

In the Sea There Are Crocodiles
by Fabio Geda *

Jackdaw Summer
by David Almond

Kick
by Mitch Johnson *

Kundush: The True Story of a Refugee Cat
by Marne Ventura & Beidi Guo

Me and My Fear
by Francesca Sanna

My Name Is Not Refugee
by Kate Milner

Nadine Dreams of Home
by Bernard Ashley

Now is the Time For Running
by Michael Williams *

Once
by Morris Gleitzman *

Oranges in No Man's Land
by Elizabeth Laird

Refugee
by Alan Grantz *

Running on the Roof of the World
by Jess Butterworth

Shadow
by Michael Morpurgo

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey
by Margriet Ruurs & Nizar Ali Badr

The Arrival
by Shaun Tan

The Bone Sparrow
by Zara Fraillon

The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas
by John Boyne *

The Day War Came
by Nicola Davies & Rebecca Cobb

The Fox Girl and the White Gazelle
by Victoria Williamson *

The House with Chicken Legs
by Sophie Anderson *

The Island
by Armin Greder

The Journey
by Francesca Sanna

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane
by Kate DiCamillo *

The Red Pencil
by Andrea Davis Pinkney

The Unforgotten Coat
by Frank Cottrell Boyce *

Under the Hawthorn Tree
by Marita Conlon-McKenna

Wave Me Goodbye
by Jacqueline Wilson *

Welcome to Nowhere
by Elizabeth Laird *

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit
by Judith Kerr *

Where the Streets Had a Name
by Randa Abdel-Fattah

Wisp, a Story of Hope
by Zana Fraillon
& Grahame Baker-Smith



hachette
CHILDREN'S GROUP





Chapter Summaries

CHAPTER 1

It's a brand-new term at school and friends Tom, Josie, Michael and our narrator have a wonderful new teacher, Mrs Khan. Three weeks in there's a knock on the classroom door from the Head Teacher, Mrs Sanders. After a whispered conversation with Mrs Khan, the Head points to the empty chair at the back of the class... Mrs Khan introduces Ahmet, the new boy who will be sitting in the empty chair.

CHAPTER 2

There is much excitement and curiosity about Ahmet but the school day goes by without anyone learning anything about him, and as a result, rumours begin to circulate. The narrator is determined to befriend Ahmet and as the school day ends, offers him a lemon sherbet.

CHAPTER 3

At school the narrator continues to be friendly to Ahmet, sending him lots of happy glances and smiles. The class begin a new

project on photosynthesis, where each pupil is given a plant to nurture and grow. It is here we are introduced to Brendan-the-Bully-Brooker. Rumours continue to circulate about Ahmet, fuelled mainly by his 'seclusion' during break times from the rest of the students.

CHAPTER 4

The narrator gives Ahmet sweets every day at the end of school in the hope of getting to know him, but Ahmet stays silent. One day, whilst waiting for Ahmet, the narrator and pals overhear some grown-ups at the school gates chatting about Ahmet being a refugee. The adults have differing opinions about Ahmet and the children are affected by what they hear. The narrator offers Ahmet an orange with a smiley face drawn on it, and after a warm reaction believes it won't be long before they become friends.

CHAPTER 5

At home, the narrator stays up late waiting for their mum to

arrive back from the local library where she has worked many hours a day since the narrator's father died. The narrator asks lots of questions about Ahmet being a refugee. After the discussion they go to bed, but before falling asleep, the narrator thinks of questions to ask Ahmet about his life.

CHAPTER 6

The following morning, the friends meet at the bus stop and talk about what they learnt about refugees from their parents. Josie's dad has warned her to stay away from Ahmet because he thought he was likely to be a criminal; Tom and Michael's parents have told them to be extra nice to him. There is much excitement in class as Ahmet has a new class assistant, Ms Hemsî, who speaks his language. After the school day, the friends wait for Ahmet and give him sweets, puddings and fruit, which he thanks them for. Tom invites him to play football with them the following day and he accepts. The friends learn from Ms Hemsî that Ahmet

is Syrian and speaks a language called Kurdish. The narrator's happiness is soon replaced by anxiety as Brendan-the-Bully has been watching their exchange and doesn't look happy.

CHAPTER 7

The next day at break time, Ahmet shows off his football skills and a crowd gathers to watch, including Brendan-the-Bully and his mates who push their way onto the pitch, snatching the ball from Ahmet and kicking it away. The commotion causes stern Mr Irons to come and investigate. When Brendan tells him that the friends wouldn't let him join in their game, Mr Irons gives them detention. The friends explain the injustice to Mrs Khan who resolves the issue.

CHAPTER 8

It's Sunday and the narrator starts the day by asking their mum questions about Syria and importantly what fruit Syrians like to eat. Mum knows that their Auntie Selma cooked a dish

from the Middle East that had pomegranates in it and guesses that might therefore be a popular fruit in Syria. The narrator is desperate to buy one to give to Ahmet and they go on a search for one, finally finding a small store where a very kind man finds and gives them two pomegranates.

CHAPTER 9

The next morning on their way to school the narrator recalls the Unexpected Adventure to Josie, Michael and Tom and proudly shows them the pomegranate. At break time, the narrator gives the fruit to Ahmet, who responds with a smile and quietly says "home". This moment is suddenly interrupted as Brendan-the-Bully appears and snatches the fruit away. Ahmet retaliates by punching Brendan. Mr Irons and Mrs Sanders break up the fight and issue punishments.

CHAPTER 10

As the narrator predicted, Ahmet becomes the most popular boy in school which leaves Brendan-the-Bully reeling, and strange and unfortunate things start to happen to Ahmet. Just two days after the 'Big Fight' Ahmet's photosynthesis plant is found smashed to the floor and stamped on. Then Ahmet discovers his work tray filled with worms. Most devastating of all, Ahmet's rucksack is filled with baked beans. Everyone knows it's Brendan-the-Bully, but it can't be proved. Ahmet delivers a presentation to his classmates about his life in Syria, his family, the war and his journey to the UK as a refugee.

CHAPTER 11

After hearing Ahmet's story the friends are bursting with questions for him; they decide to write them down over the half term holidays and show them to Mrs Khan when they return in hope of asking Ahmet himself. On the final Sunday of the school holidays the narrator's mum explains that Uncle Lenny is coming for a roast lunch and game of Scrabble with his wife Aunt Christina and their baby Jacob. The narrator adores Uncle Lenny, but not Aunt Christina or the cousin. The narrator talks to Uncle Lenny about Ahmet and whilst doing so

learns that their gran was also a refugee.

CHAPTER 12

Back at school after half term Ahmet is more famous than ever, with everyone trying to ask him questions, even though they're not supposed to. Although most of the children are curious and kind to Ahmet, Brendan's bullying becomes worse, with regular name-calling. Ahmet refuses to be scared of him. The narrator brings one of their Tintin comics in to show Ahmet, so he can empathise with the characters in it. Ahmet explains that his dad used to read Tintin to him. Ahmet opens up about what happened to his family on their journey from Syria and how he doesn't know where his parents are.

CHAPTER 13

The narrator is unable to sleep for thinking of Ahmet's family. The following morning, they overhear a conversation between two adults on the bus about a newspaper article stating that the UK is closing its borders and will no longer accept refugees. Once at school, the narrator meets with Josie and Michael and explains that Ahmet may never see his mum or dad again. The friends decide this is an emergency and rush to tell Mrs Khan and Ms Hemsi what they have learnt. The teachers explain

that everything will be OK, but the friends don't believe them and decide to take matters into their own hands by going on their First Ever Top Secret Mission.

CHAPTER 14

Tom, Josie and Michael share their plans to help Ahmet reunite with his mum and dad. Tom has written a letter to the Prime Minister, Josie has come up with a Special Appeal letter to a newspaper and Michael suggests that they find the name of the High Court Judge and write to them for help. The friends, excited by Michael's suggestion, head to the library to begin their research. They discover the name and address of the judge; however they learn that there won't be enough time to contact her before the UK border gates close. They must come up with another plan!

CHAPTER 15

That evening the narrator wakes from a series of nightmares and, unable to sleep, becomes distracted with Tintin comic books. Inspired by the story, the narrator comes up with The Greatest Idea in the World and maps out a plan.

CHAPTER 16

The following day the narrator shows the picture of the The Greatest Idea in the World to their friends, who are all very impressed. The classmates talk excitedly about the plan throughout the day but keep it a secret from Ahmet. After school, the four friends meet and put the plan into action – penning a letter to the Queen explaining Ahmet's plight.

CHAPTER 17

The narrator posts the letter and back at school on Monday waits eagerly for a response. By Tuesday there is still no reply from the Queen and so the narrator draws up an Emergency Plan: visiting the Queen at Buckingham Palace in person to explain Ahmet's situation. Although they are concerned about being punished, the friends decide that it's the only way to help find Ahmet's family. The narrator and Tom decide to go, while Josie and Michael will stay behind to cover for them.

CHAPTER 18

The following morning the friends meet at the bus stop to discuss the final points of The Plan and then wave each other off. Tom and the narrator head to the station and after some help buy

a ticket and are on their way to Buckingham Palace. After a short taxi ride with a friendly cabbie who inform them it's the Changing of the Guard soon, they arrive close to the Palace.

CHAPTER 19

The two friends walk down the Mall towards Buckingham Palace, nervously noting the large police presence. The two manage to push themselves to the front of the crowds where the ceremony is starting and then attempt to ask the Guards if they can deliver their note to the Queen. The palace gates open and the friends realise this could be their only chance to hand their note over. Looking to one another they decide what they must do. The narrator, clutching the note, clambers over the barrier and runs out into the road and towards the Queen's Guard with an "EXCUSE ME, SIR" and is suddenly surrounded by guards with guns. Overwhelmed, they faint.





CHAPTER 20

The narrator wakes up lying on a stretcher about to be lifted into an ambulance and examined by a paramedic. Tom stands nearby sobbing and tries to explain to the police that they weren't intending to hurt anyone. The narrator sits up, thrusting the note at the policeman, pleading for him to give it to the Queen. The Guard reads the letter and promises to give it to Her Majesty. The chapter ends with Tom and the narrator in a police car being safely delivered back home.

CHAPTER 21

At the opening of the chapter, the narrator explains that their mum is the angriest she has been, but eventually calms down and asks for an explanation of the events of the day. Following the narrator's story and before the narrator's mum can respond, the doorbell rings. Neighbours have seen what has happened on the news and come to gawp, congratulate or offer 'unwelcome views'. Once the doorbell stops ringing, the two sit and watch the news on the television. One reporter suggests that what has happened was a 'terrorist' event, which sparks a conversation about heritage, race, culture and ignorance.

CHAPTER 22

The following morning the friends are mobbed by the press at the school gates but ushered in by Mrs Sanders to discuss what has happened with her, Mrs Khan, Ms Hemsli and Ahmet. The children think they are going to be in serious trouble but it turns out that their teachers are bowled over by their kindness. After recounting the previous day's events, Mrs Sanders shows the children the front-page appeal headline 'Who is Ahmet and How Can We Help?' along with the story.

CHAPTER 23

Brendan-the-Bully and his friends make up a cruel song about Ahmet as teacher Mr Irons watches on and does nothing. The narrator and friends plus Ahmet retaliate with a fight. The children all receive detentions. But for Brendan, his bully friends and Mr Irons the punishment is worse – the reporters who had gathered at the gates had captured their cruelty, proving their guilt.

CHAPTER 24

Eight days have passed since the Emergency Adventure and the narrator and friends are concerned that Ahmet's parents still haven't been found. On their way home from school they are confronted by a reporter who asks them to respond to a Mr Fry's comments. The puzzled children respond as usual with 'no comment' but later discover that Mr Fry, the local MP, has been stirring up hateful headlines. The narrator's mum believes that it is time for all the children to share their version of events with the world and answer the journalist's questions. The next morning their story makes the headlines and everyone is hopeful that Ahmet's parents will be found.

CHAPTER 25

Back at school, the friends believe they might be in trouble when they are ushered out of class to Mrs Sanders's office. Far from it, they are greeted by Ahmet, Mrs Hemsli and the Queen's Guards, who have come to deliver an important letter and an invitation to have tea with the Queen. But to the narrator's disappointment, the Queen says she can't do anything to help Ahmet herself.

CHAPTER 26

Two weeks have passed since the children gave their interview and today the narrator turns 10 years old. The narrator doesn't feel like celebrating and is happy when the class doesn't know what day it is. On their way back to class after break, Ms. Hemsli ushers Ahmet quickly away. Ten minutes into the next lesson there is a knock on the door and the narrator's mum enters with a birthday cake and candles, followed by Ahmet, Mrs Sanders, Ms Hemsli, Ahmet's foster mum, his case worker and another woman they do not know. After a rousing happy birthday for our narrator, Mrs Khan introduces Ms Duncan from the Home Office, who has a very important letter. Due to the collaborative work of many of the people who heard Ahmet's story, his parents have been located and granted asylum in the UK.

The book ends happy and emotional with our narrator stating this to be the best adventure ever!



DID YOU KNOW?

There are currently over 65 million refugees trying to flee ongoing wars, man-made environmental disasters, economic destitution or political persecution.

That's more than the total number of refugees who fled Nazi persecution during World War II (UNHCR, 2016).

Described as 'the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time' by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the ongoing wars in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan (and many more), mean an increasing number of people are trying to find a safe home elsewhere.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

The word 'refugee' has a very special meaning, and is different to the word 'immigrant'.

An 'immigrant' or 'migrant' is someone who has deliberately moved to a new country (immigrant) or another part of their home country (migrant) because it is what they wanted to do – it was their choice. There are lots of reasons why people want to move to a new part of the world. They may want to live in a nicer house (like Dena's parents) or somewhere with more trees, they may have found a brand new job, or they may simply want to be closer to people they love.

But a 'refugee' is not an 'immigrant' or a 'migrant', because they have been forced to leave their homes and countries suddenly, and risk a chance of death if they do not do so. According to international law, it is legal to leave your country to try and find safety in another country – and to travel as far as you need to until you find a home.

WORLD WIDE WHISPERS

Contrary to the whispers you may have heard, the UK has taken in less than 1% of the world's refugees.

In fact, it is mostly countries outside Europe that look after 4 out of 5 of the world's refugees.

Can you guess which ones?

Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan and Ethiopia each take care of millions of refugees, and between them, outweigh the numbers of refugees taken in by all the 50 countries of Europe combined.



Themes for Discussion



SWAPPING STORIES

The book is told to us by an unknown narrator in the class. How might the story change if it was written from the perspective of Ahmet? What do you think you know about the narrator so far?



STEP INTO AHMET'S SHOES

How do you think Ahmet feels walking into the class for the first time? How do you think it would feel to move to a new place where you don't know anyone, or know where anything is? How would you welcome someone new to your class? And how would you want to be welcomed?

NEW FOOD

Ahmet is given a pomegranate by the narrator, whose mum thinks that they might be a commonplace fruit in Syria. Have you ever had a pomegranate? When did you last try a new food and how did you feel before and after? What's the most unusual thing you've ever eaten, and where did you eat it?

LEARNING A LANGUAGE

Ahmet speaks Kurdish and is only just learning English. If you had to choose 10 important words in English to teach someone, which words do you think would be the most important to learn first and why? Do you know any words in another language?

FAIR PLAY?

Brendan-the-Bully lies to teacher Mr Irons, telling him that Ahmet's new friends wouldn't let him join in their game of football. As a result, Mr Irons believes Brendan's story and the friends all get detention. Has anything like that ever happened to you, where you got the blame for something you didn't do? What happened and how did you deal with it?



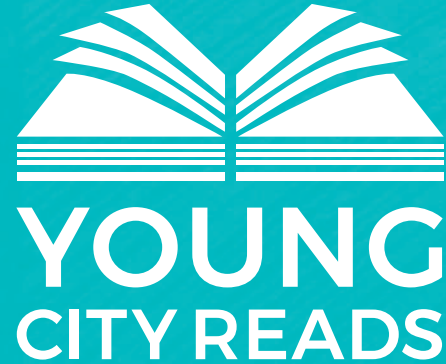
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

When Brendan-the-Bully snatches away the pomegranate from Ahmet, Ahmet retaliates by punching Brendan. Do you think this was the right thing to do? How else could Ahmet have handled the situation? What would you have done in the same situation?



LIFE AS A REFUGEE

What do you think life would be like for a refugee? Why do many people become refugees? Can you think of any times in history when people have become refugees? Have you ever met a refugee? What do you think the hardest thing about meeting new people is for a refugee?



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