

Refugee, review by Rishik, JAN 2024

Refugee is a book published by Alan Gratz in the year of 2017. This book consists of a total of 352 pages. Additionally it is very unique due to the three situations/stories it narrates. This is with each story being a different situation for which the characters have to seek refuge. Every situation showcases a different event which has taken place in the past involving mass struggle, leading to colossal refugee movements. The story goes into depth of the irregular and unique process of attempting to seek safety. The intertwining perspectives leave the readers on suspenseful cliffhangers, compelling the reader to read through each situation with urgency. This structure balances out the flow and fascinating nature of the book.

The main character from the first refugee situation is named Joseph, who is trying to escape Nazi Germany in 1938 with his sister and parents. His story starts off dark with Nazis bombarding his house sending his father, Aaron, to Dachau, a concentration camp, for practicing law as a Jew. After many days of waiting, Josef and his family hear the good news that his father is being released from the camp. They now start their escape journey by arranging a plan to escape on the MS. St Louis, a ship heading to Cuba. Before boarding the ship, Josef and his mom and sister meet up with his dad at the entrance. This is the moment Josef realizes the significant transformation in his dad's physical and mental being. His dad looks very scrawny and is traumatized, all from his experience in the concentration camp. Right after they exchange hugs, the first sign of his trauma is displayed, when he begins to tell them to quickly sneak into the ship because the Nazis are after them. This however was an overreaction because they already had bought tickets to board the ship and there wasn't much that could deny them. From there on, Josef's pondering starts when the German hosts on the ship start displaying great hospitality: Why are they treated so nicely for the first time by the Germans even though they are Jews? Josef later on sees that the ship is full of Jews full of culture, dancing and having their best time. This helps him comprehend that the ship is full of

only Jewish refugees who are all happy to get to safety, bringing on their happy spirit. After the long period of travel, when the ship arrives an obstacle is put into the passengers' ways: There are multiple refugee ships trying to enter Cuba, limiting the amount being let in. This eventually makes them turn back no matter the efforts from Joseph and the other passengers to stop them from doing so. On the way, they look for many alternatives, with many twists and turns ahead.

The second refugee situation includes a girl named Isabel who is trying to escape Fidel Castro's rule in Havana, Cuba with her family in 1994. Isabel and her family begin to build a boat for sneaky escape through water with their neighbor, the Castillos. They plan on going to the U.S. due to their wet feet, dry feet, policy for Cuban refugees. The only problem is, Cuba is the hometown her and her family have their culture engraved in, not wanting to leave. After hesitation for much time, Isabel's father lets out his anger during a riot one day leading to trouble with authorities. Because of this, they figure their only choice is to escape. After their boat is ready and built, they hurry to the water and make their escape towards Miami, being the closest U.S. state they could get too. Throughout their way, they face violent shark interactions, storms, scarcity of supplies, and many more pressing situations.

The third refugee situation contains a boy named Mahmoud who is trying to escape Aleppo, Syria with his family due to the dangers put in their path from the Bashar al-Assad during a violent civil war in 2015. After their apartment building is destroyed in an air strike, they decide it is finally time to leave Syria. Their goal is to travel to Germany by traveling through Turkey and Greece so that they can rebuild their lifestyle. They first travel by car, at the risk of going through dangerous roads and being caught by armed forces. After reaching Turkey, they see many other refugees and plan to make it to Greece by contacting smugglers, for them to take them in a raft. When boarding the raft, everybody comes to realize it isn't the most durable and is very overcrowded, which leads it to capsize in the long run, leaving them stranded, for coast guards to rescue them. In this process he makes the big decision of handing his newborn sister, Hana, to a full raft refusing to take them along. From this point on, they eventually make it

to Greece and many other places with great resilience and many dangerous situations to get through.

This book's events would put the reader through an emotional spiral, helping them to understand the circumstance the refugees had to live and escape under. The author, Alan Gratz, did a great job of describing refugee life through real life experiences that could have taken place for many. Some may consider the book very sad and violent, because of its unexpected turns, being the parts not being liked by many. However, this book is great for many other teen readers to read, because of its historical and realistic context that it illustrates. Not only does this book provide the life of refugees but also presents how life isn't always the same for everyone.