

# Glimpses of Humanity and Hope: Children's Picturebook Portrayals of Refugees



SHERRON KILLINGSWORTH ROBERTS & PATRICIA A. CRAWFORD

Childhood is often portrayed as a carefree and innocent time filled with fun, but *Save the Children* (2017) reports that for almost one in five children who live in today's conflict zones, childhood is anything but carefree. In 2017, about 420 million children, the largest in twenty years, lived in conflict zones due to war or armed conflict [CNN, 2019]. Finding picturebooks to aid in including all students, especially refugees, in today's diverse classrooms is important. Therefore, encountering beautiful picturebooks, such as *Stepping Stones* (Ruurs, 2016), which contain quite bleak, yet ironically joyful portrayals of today's vulnerable and threatened lives of refugees, intrigued us as books ripe for exploration. This picturebook delivered interesting perspectives through its unique illustrations using stones to depict equally frightening, yet courageous and hopeful transitions for refugee families, punctuated by threats of hunger, violence, and harsh uncertainties.

Through the rich interanimation (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2008) of words and illustrations, *Stepping Stones: A refugee family's journey* (Ruurs, 2016) is a kind of prototypical tale of the quest for home after forced evacuation. The photographs of actual stones from the area capture the anomaly of being at once a wanderer and one who is vitally aware of the permanent significance of place. Set in Syria, this picturebook gives young readers safe glimpses of refugee life that is both timely and timeless; one in which the rocks offer the sturdiness of home, even a home lost, and the humanity contained within the quest to find a new home.

This book, which was included in a preliminary pilot study by the authors (2018), led to the larger study presented here which explores portrayals of refugees in picturebooks. As exemplified by this book, picturebooks often convey important information in their words and their pictures about war and related events. Moreover, this study was approached with the assumption that these texts serve as powerful tools for seeing impactful events through very human eyes. Teachers and students may consider the statistics surrounding victims of war and displaced individuals as a mass group per the numbers. However, considering the personal perspectives, the consequences on life trajectories, and human portrayals

within the pages of a book for children is quite another experience.

Therefore, this research seeks to explore representations of war-related refugees in picturebooks of the 21st century and to consider prominent patterns that might provide insights for today's classrooms facing today's world situations. By contemplating prominent themes in recent refugee-themed picturebooks as the goal, this piece might also serve as a source for helping young readers develop empathy and affect action. To this end, we engaged in a content analysis of 21st century picturebooks, published from 2000 to 2017, in which the lives of war-based refugees were portrayed. This report also offers a rationale for exploring the lives of war-based refugees in picturebooks as well as our findings and discussion related to implications for children.

## WAR, ARMED CONFLICT, REFUGEES, AND PICTUREBOOKS

Regrettably, war and all its by-products endure at this present moment and are ongoing realities in our world. The United Nations Refugee Agency (2015) in 2015 reported that because of war-torn conflicts, 59.5 million refugees were displaced. The CEO and President of U. S. Funds for UNICEF, Caryl Stern noted, "A staggering 1 in 10 of the world's children – or more than 230 million – currently live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts. Children have the right to grow up happy and safe, and should not have to fear that they will be targeted by combatants... I have seen firsthand the devastating impact that living in a conflict zone – without protection or access to water, medicine, food and school – can have on children" (UNICEF, 2015). War is clearly a worldwide matter; the armed conflicts, the terror, the bloodshed, death, and displacement that accompany war persist as modern issues affecting a disturbing number of young children whose daily lives must navigate horrible, even unthinkable situations. Comparatively, an even greater number of children vicariously experience the violence and depravity of war through related news and social media and our round-the-clock news cycle.

No doubt, war has been a frequent subject addressed in

children's books. Many of these books for younger readers deal with wars set in the past (Crawford & Roberts, 2009; Kidd, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2005). Recently, the publishing world notes an increase of juvenile titles with recent or ongoing armed conflicts, wars, asylum seekers, and accompanying displacements (Dolan, 2014; Dooley, Tait, & Sar, 2016; Nuth & Grote-Garcia, 2017). The overall tone and content of many of these books have also changed, shifting from an emphasis on the seemingly exotic experiences of refugees moving about the globe, to a more grounded look at ordinary, everyday people, who are displaced and living in circumstances that are extraordinarily complicated and difficult (Hope, 2008).

Building on the original pilot study (Crawford & Roberts, 2018), the corpus of children's books about war-related refugee experiences were expanded to highlight the lives of the young children within the pages of the 24 identified books who were caught in the violent turmoil of war. Because picturebooks are multimodal tools (Serafini, 2010), they have the potential to humanize the refugee experience; adding the aesthetic of human faces and emotionally powerful storylines to the daunting, yet sanitized, statistics related to war-based refugees. Prior researchers have noted the realistic, yet positive responses to strife provided in picturebooks (Roberts & Crawford, 2008; Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). Others remind educators and parents that picturebooks serve as vehicles for vicariously experiencing the stressors of life, while simultaneously offering comfort to children during stressful times (Crawford & Roberts, 2009; Crawford & Roberts, 2017; Roberts & Crawford, 2008; Short, 2009). Given the world's abundance of displaced peoples from armed conflicts and war-related contexts, examining picturebooks published between 2000-2017 became the priority for this study. Therefore, this content analysis looks deeply at 21st century picturebooks that depict the complex and fluid messages and themes arising from the journeys of today's refugees as seen through the eyes of children.

### METHODOLOGY

We approached the texts in the corpus through a critical perspective, believing that picturebooks serve as cultural artifacts with the potential to both reflect and shape sociocultural values and understandings. Picturebooks are tools that can help children to read both the word and the world, offering insights about societal relationships and inviting readers to question why things are the way they are, both in literature and life (Koss, 2015; Short, 2009). They are also texts that have potential to ignite a sense of empathy and action among young readers (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). Since our interest was in looking at depictions of war-related refugees and considering the way their stories could move readers to praxis, we approached this study using critical content analysis, a method used to interpret texts by noting themes and patterns, with a particular eye given to issues of identity and

power (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017).

To expand our prior analysis, the entire population of recent picturebooks depicting refugees of war were identified and analyzed for the portrayals and patterns formerly synthesized as related to refugee displacement due to armed conflict or war. The search engine Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD) and our university and local libraries search engine allowed us to expand our original work to books recently published and available picturebooks meeting the following established criteria: 1) revealed through a search of the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database using synonymous keywords to include war, armed conflict, refugees, immigrant, and displacement, 2) upon first reading, revealed a narrative arc in either a fiction or narrative nonfiction format, 3) revealed a publication date from 2000 and 2017, and 4) aligned with the one-word definition of authentic picturebooks as inextricably linked and interdependent fusion of text and illustration per Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2008).

After procuring the texts that met the search criteria, we then engaged in repeated readings in order to analyze the ways in which the plight of war-based refugees was portrayed for young readers. Our search produced an original cadre of 31 books, which was eventually narrowed to 24. We limited the current study to picturebooks that portrayed the explicit impacts of today's war and armed conflicts, rather than books focusing solely on political dissidents or religious refugees, although certainly these topics often intersect with war. Our initial search produced six additional titles from this publication time period that focused exclusively on new and difficult cultural terrains, without mention of war, that often come with relocation: loneliness, differences, and new friendships. Thus, while we recommend the following outstanding picturebooks, this content analysis was delimited to exclude *One Green Apple* (Bunting, 2006), *I'm New Here* (O'Brien, 2015), *Yoon and the Jade Bracelet*, (Recorvits, 2008), *My Two Blankets* (Kobald, 2015), *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), and *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2010), because we intended to focus our analysis specifically on texts featuring war-based refugees. Another fine book that search engines identified was also excluded from our content analysis for being purely nonfiction with subheadings and chapters; however, *Refugees and Migrants* (Roberts, 2017) would prove quite helpful as a companion text for classrooms and communities looking for ways to engender understanding and caring around this topic.

Based on Johnson, Mathis, and Short's (2018) guidelines, our research questions revolved around (a) *Who are the protagonists portrayed as refugees of war in current picturebooks?*, and (b) *What are common themes or messages might be derived from the narrative arcs of picturebooks portraying the refugee experiences for young children?* In

terms of the first research question, a coding and summary sheet was employed to capture gender, country of origin, year of publication, genre, summary, and possible themes. Then, using a constant comparative method, the emerging themes across texts and refugee representations in 21st century picturebooks (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Marsh & White, 2006) were considered. Since our pilot study had revealed themes related to courage, identity, human connection, and hope, we began our examination with these in mind, as well as the possibilities that the books might offer paths for empathy and action. Separately, the researchers coded and noted themes based on our reading and rereading these 24 picturebooks. We noted the journeys of refugees and the depictions of experiences, emotions, realities, kindnesses, and harm that these books exemplified. Then together, we revisited, developed, revised, and carefully crafted and fleshed out the themes presented in this larger study. Finally, touchstone texts (Sturgill, 2008), books considered highly valued and lending authenticity, were identified as exemplars for the findings regarding each theme.

### FINDINGS

As we began to examine this corpus, we noted that each of these 24 books offer readers invitations for empathetic responses and hope for their futures. Meanwhile, with the exception of the *Seeking Refuge* series books, approximately 80% of these books present clear insights into helpful action that could be taken to improve these human crises.

Our first research question was aimed at better understanding the identities of these literary refugees: *Who are the protagonists portrayed as refugees of war in current picturebooks?* Notably, of these 24 books, 15 protagonists were male (63%), 6 were female (25%), and 3 included dual protagonists, such as siblings, who were both male and female. Various countries of origins were represented in these picturebooks depicting current times and with most settings from Eurasian countries, Africa, and the Middle East. An overview of these findings is presented in Table 1.

Per Johnson, Mathis, and Short's (2018) guidelines for analysis, a reiterative process was undertaken by the co-authors of reading, reviewing, and extracting redundant themes across all 24 books. Without a doubt, collectively and individually, these books provide important glimpses of humanity and hope, exploring both obvious and the nuanced revelations regarding the refugee experience, for readers of all ages. Intertextual messages that plumb the depth of experience, emotion, and reality that accompany the journeys of refugees are found within the art work and the words within. Again, the prominent themes of this study echoed our pilot study and related to courage, identity, human connection, and hope, we utilized our notes from each book to go deeper into common messages or theme statements regarding these. Therefore, in terms of the second research question, *What*

*are common themes or messages might be derived from the narrative arcs of picturebooks portraying the refugee experiences for young children?*, this content analysis of 24 picturebooks arrived at four common themes with deeper theme statements that crossover all of the books: (a) **Courage: The difficult journeys associated with war, conflicts, evictions, and dislocations require courage;** (b) **Identity: The traumatic circumstances of war, violence, dislocation, and loss bring disequilibrium and often necessitate re-centering oneself for personal balance;** (c) **Human Connection: Refugees face unfamiliar and unpredictable situations, but the power of universal human connection can ultimately overcome;** and (d) **Hope: Because war and forced displacement bring such horror, especially to the most vulnerable, hope is an essential ingredient for moving forward.** These themes, and related theme statements, are shared below along with evidence from each of the touchstone texts provided.

### COURAGE

The difficult journeys associated with war, conflicts, evictions, and dislocations require courage. Through the analysis of these texts, the reality of war is the daily context in which refugees, and often their families, must act in authentic and courageous ways. Both the prose and the illustrations in these books highlight not only the harsh general realities of war, but they also convey the true courage individuals had to muster in order to surpass the everyday realities of their war-torn lives. All books exemplified the courage of children in these circumstances, beginning with the more metaphorical *Teacup* (Young, 2016), wherein a young boy must courageously travel alone with sparse possessions to then triumphantly find his strength within. We also analyzed more examples of courage in real life books, such as the *Seeking Refuge* series in children's own voices that introduce young readers to Ali (Glynne, 2014), Rachel (Glynne, 2014), Juliane (Glynne, 2017), Navid (Glynne, 2017), and Hamid (Glynne, 2017).

As mentioned in the introduction, *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* (Ruurs, 2016) exposes a powerful narrative of courage through the dual languages of Arabic and English as well as the unique photographs of arranged rock art from Syria that physically represent the heavy loads that the exiled family must lift along their journeys. The daily burdens pictured on each page embody the critical need for courage and show tangible confirmation of one family's great courage in enduring the journey of refugees. A foreword explains that the illustrator-sculptor, Badr, a native Syrian collected the rocks to depict the hard, yet hopeful paths provided by the stepping stones. The fly pages, with depictions of random rocks, provide the entry into the book's secondary themes of courageous persistence despite sorrow, weariness, and scary circumstances. "The lucky ones, they call us. New memories, new hopes, new dreams. Not of war, but of peace." (n.p.). Bravely carrying their most treasured possessions

Table 1: 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Picturebooks Featuring War-Based Refugees			
Title	Gender of Protagonist	Country of Origin	Brief Summary
<i>Alfredo Flies Home</i> (Argueta, 2007)	male	El Salvador	Alfredo's flies back to his home of El Salvador, but struggles with border and identity crossing on his way back to the U.S.
<i>Gleam and Glow</i> (Bunting, 2005)	male	Bosnia	Viktor and his Bosnian family are forced into exile; however, the one affirmation of life are a pair of goldfish abandoned while fleeing the war.
<i>The Colour of Home</i> (Hoffman, 2003)	male	Somalia	Hassan, a young Muslim refugee, was displaced by Somalia's violent civil war, uses art to remember both the beautiful and the horrifying scenes of his past.
<i>Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey</i> (Ruurs, 2016)	female	Syria	Told in both Arabic and English, the almost tangible stones tell the story and show the heavy loads of the courageous, arduous, and painful journey of one exiled Syrian family.
<i>The Journey</i> (Sanna, 2016)	female & male (siblings)	Likely Syria, but many countries	This complicated story of a family forced to leave their home presents the threats along the way, the loss experienced in leaving, and the hope of safe haven for new beginnings.
<i>How I Learned Geography</i> (Shulevitz, 2008)	male	Multiple locations	Throughout his life, a young boy learns from the map his exiled father buys instead of needed bread. This book encapsulates the experiences of refugees as one that is both timeless and timely, as wanderers vitally aware of geography and place.
<i>My Name is Sangoel</i> (Williams & Mohammed, 2009)	male	Sudan	Sangoel is a Sudanese refugee with few possessions, except his Dinka name. Lonely, homesick, and confused, Sangoel creates a way to teach his new class how to say his name.
<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i> (Williams & Mohammed, 2007)	female	Afghanistan	Two Afghani girls emerge from a refugee camp with only two shoes between them. After some thought, they share the sandals which cements their friendship within this harsh, weary refugee camp. When one must leave, they decide to honor the memory of their friendship by each keeping a sandal.
<i>A Path of Stars</i> (O'Brien, 2012)	female	Cambodia	Dara's (meaning Star) grandmother tells of her escape from Cambodia's violent war, using stars to guide her.
<i>Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey</i> (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017)	female	Iraq	An Iraqi family is forced to leave their home and their cat, yet many ordinary acts of compassion and hope result in the reunification of them with Kunkush.
<i>My Beautiful Birds</i> (Del Rizzo, 2017)	male	Syria	When Sami leaves behind a smoky sky of his homeland of Syria, his sad journey is punctuated by many birds, which remind him of the loss of his pet pigeons and of hope.
<i>Oskar and the Eight Blessings</i> (Simon & Simon, 2015)	male	Germany	Travelling alone to NYC in his escape from Kristallnacht with only a photo and his aunt's address, unexpected kindnesses greet him along the way.
<i>Ali's Story: A Real-life Account of his Journey from Afghanistan</i> (Glynn, 2014)	male	Afghanistan	This is a true, straightforward, and sympathetic story of Ali and his grandmother who are refugees fleeing Afghanistan.
<i>Rachel's Story: A Real-life Account of her Journey from a Country in Eurasia</i> (Glynn, 2014).	female	Eurasian country; Predominantly Muslim	This frightening story of Rachel's journey, as though in her own words, conveys a child's sense of loss and struggle as she escapes Eurasia because of the violent aggression toward her Christian mother.
<i>Joseph's Big Ride</i> (Farish, 2016)	male	Sudan	Joseph's dream to ride a bike is unable to be realized in the harsh surroundings of the refugee camp. Later in America, when he repairs a girl's bike, his opportunity is realized.
<i>Muktar and the Camels</i> (Graber, 2009)	male	Somalian orphan on the border of Somalia and Kenya	Seeing a chance to prove himself as a contributing human being, Muktar restores the visitors' injured camel and is offered hope for a new life.
<i>Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan</i> (Williams, 2005)	male	Sudan	This book shows Garang's courage in saving orphaned boys out of certain slavery. They endure daily hunger, drink urine, and mourn the dead. A joyful reunion punctuates the ending.
<i>The Little Refugee</i> (Do & Do, 2011)	male	Vietnam	A beautiful picturebook showing the true story of a young, scared boy conveys a positive spirit despite the frightening, crowded voyage to escape Vietnam.
<i>Somos como las nubes/We are like the clouds</i> (Argueta, 2016)*	male and female	El Salvador/ Central America	This powerful book contains contemplative poems related to the treacherous trek many children take to a new life across the border.
<i>Teacup</i> (Young, 2016)	male	Universal current refugees; forced journeys	With a teacup of his homeland's soil, a little boy takes a lonely, dangerous solo voyage to a new land where he uses his possession to grow an apple tree that provides for him.
<i>Navid's Story: A Real-life Account of His Journey from Iran</i> (Glynn, 2017)	male	Iran (One of Seeking Refuge series highlighting various countries; originally produced by BBC animated series)	Told in his own words, Navid's family is escaping the violence of Iran. This story shares both the harshness and the hope that are revealed in a journey of this intensity.
<i>Hamid's Story: A Real-life Account of His Journey from Eritrea</i> (Glynn, 2017)	male	Eritrea (One of Seeking Refuge series highlighting various countries; originally produced by BBC animated series)	Hamid tells the true story of escaping the violence of Eritrea in his harrowing journey to a safe haven.
<i>Juliane's Story: A Real-life Account of her Journey from Zimbabwe</i> (Glynn, 2017)	female	Zimbabwe (One of Seeking Refuge series highlighting various countries; originally produced by BBC animated series)	Separated from her mother and growing up in an orphanage refugee camp, Juliane tells her true story of reuniting with her mother and fleeing to start a new life together.

throughout this enchanting picturebook, the stepping stones assure both the characters and readers that a bright new future is possible if we have the courage to stay the course.

The long, difficult journeys of refugees require courage by all. The peritext features, including the aforementioned endpapers, an informative foreword, and the extensions provided at the end for future action, supply courageous means to address the difficult journeys of refugees. The author and Syrian sculptor collaborated to share the plight of war refugees while simultaneously fundraising for Syrian refugees caught in the chaos through book proceeds. Young readers

may similarly advance their own charitable actions given the many paths provided on the final pages to "make a difference." Doctors Without Borders, the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNICEF, and Oxfam links allow students to imagine how to contribute in order to assist refugees in garnering the courage for their journeys.

Similarly, Bunting's (2005) *Gleam and Glow* shares the persistent courage needed for this Bosnian family forced into exile with their mom, after the father leaves to fight in the war. "Everyday we heard distant gunshots and saw smoke rise into faraway skies," explains young Viktor and his younger sister Marina. Amidst this poignant and moving plotline, Bunting

inserts a positive and symbolic affirmation of two goldfish left when the owner fled the war and abandoned the fish with his home: "An extra day or two of life is as important to a fish as it is to us." (n.p.). Later, Victor releases these fish to a pond, when his family must also flee before the enemy comes. The desolate emptiness of war's destruction that resonates through Sylveda's rich oils abides in thoughtful contrast to the colorful pond full of fish found at the tale's conclusion, representing the hope of life's enduring qualities. The hopeful pond is revealed after Victor, Marina, and their mom are jubilantly reunited with their dad. Their elongated and courageous stay in the refugee camp and the long, weary journey home seem forgotten when readers see the many vibrant fish, multiplied throughout the war.

### IDENTITY

**The traumatic circumstances of war, violence, dislocation, and loss brings disequilibrium and often necessitates re-centering oneself for personal balance.** These books highlight many types of border crossings, including physical and the emotional crossings. All of the books provide insights into the cognitive dissonance that often comes with changing identity, with strong examples of the theme related to identity being seen in *Muktar and his Camels* (Graber, 2009), *The Little Refugee* (Do & Do, 2011), and *Somos Como las nubes/ We are Like the Clouds* (Argueta, 2016). Although leaving home and adjusting to new physical surroundings can be daunting, navigating shifts in identity that come with these border crossings can be even more difficult. Protagonists in the midst of the refugee experience must address complicated questions: Who am I in this new place? Who was I in my once upon a time home? Where do I belong? What home is my real home? What is my culture? Mirroring these changing roles, Argueta's poem (2016) entitled "We Introduce Ourselves to the Border Patrol" echoes the themes of identity with these lines,

"I remember my name.  
It is Misael. I came from El Salvador,  
from Soyapango.  
I'm from San Jacinto....  
on my way to Washington...  
Here in the desert  
We are a huge family of stars." (n.p.).

Another book exemplifying how refugees wrestle with questions of identity, also by Argueta, is entitled *Alfredo Flies Home* (2007). In an atypical, nonlinear plot, young Alfredo returns to El Salvador for a visit, after fleeing their violent homeland only four years ago. Alfredo's multifaceted, interwoven emotions, including the joy of reuniting with family and friends, the comforting surroundings where people know and understand, the excited release of finally going home, and then, the disappointing dissonance as he

must leave again to return to the United States. Ultimately, Alfredo realizes that he is a person who will live in two worlds, not one home, after his struggles with where he "really" belongs. Alfredo, although now a resident of the United States, realizes his heart will always be crossing borders.

Similar themes of shifting identities are also apparent in *The Colour of Home* (Hoffman, 2003). Readers are introduced to a young Muslim refugee, Hassan, who was displaced by Somalia's violent civil war, through the illustrator's (Littlewood, 2003) impressionistic watercolors in beautiful, full-page spreads. In this powerful picturebook, Hassan's new teacher gives him art supplies which free his mind to reveal both the realism of the pastoral scenes in his childhood African village as well as the realism in the horrific, recent scenes of Hassan being hidden under his bed while bullets whizz all around him. Hassan's therapeutic artwork stimulates him to move from his traumatic, gray experiences with war toward his new life, full of color, and of his new identity. This poignant narrative closes on a positive note as Hoffman and Littlewood's fusion of words and illustrations point readers to a clear understanding, revealed through Hassan's artwork, of the vibrant colors of his new home. Often as characters move between their identity and the worlds of the past and the future, the known and the unknown, it is the human connection that releases them to realize a better place.

### HUMAN CONNECTION

**Refugees face unfamiliar and unpredictable situations, but the power of universal human connection can ultimately overcome.** Children thrust into refugee status enter a world that is quite different from their comfortable past, but that is also frightening, unsettling, and often includes poverty, hunger, isolation, scarcity, and unending accommodations. The picturebooks in this study reveal a depth of trauma to its audiences that is undeniable. Several of the harshest portrayals of war, such as *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), *Stepping Stones* (Ruurs, 2016), and *Oskar and the Eight Blessings* (Simon & Simon, 2015), however, remind readers of the human connection and kindnesses offered by complete strangers to refugees. Despite the harrowing journeys thrust on these young characters, these picturebooks all point to a common lifeline in the midst of trauma: the human connection. Whether themes rely on a new relationship, as in *Joseph's Big Ride* (Farish, 2016), or rely on a lifelong, special friend, as in *Brothers in Hope* (Williams, 2005); over and over, human connections reveal the potential to make tremendous differences in the lives of refugees.

The theme of human connection is also clearly present in Williams and Mohammed's (2009) *My Name is Sangoel*. An eight year old Sudanese refugee, Sangoel, comes to America with his mother and sister. Except for the Dinka name bequeathed by his late father and grandfather, who died in the war, Sangoel has very few possessions. In the midst

of so many new and confusing experiences, Sangoel's loneliness is punctuated by the fact that despite his learning some English, none of his new mates can correctly pronounce his name. This picturebook's soft watercolor illustrations by Stock and the striking prose by Williams carry readers to an isolated and sad place alongside Sangoel. Wanting to show his new colleagues how to say Sangoel, his futility is met with a memory of an old man's sage advice, "Remember, you will always be a Dinka. You will be Sangoel. Even in America." (n.p.). When he decides to draw a sun and a soccer ball on his t-shirt to teach his new comrades to say Sun-Goal! Eureka, his old and new identities are simultaneously maintained and celebrated. Current or recent immigrants, as well as others in our diverse classrooms, will particularly appreciate the themes resonating throughout this book of belonging, fitting in, friendships, and the importance of human connection. The peritext of this heartfelt book includes a quite stimulating appendix of all sorts of concepts regarding the salience of cultural names, Americanized monikers as well as interesting facts and important statistics about the current state of refugees.

Another favorite text by Williams and Mohammed (2007) depicting the refugee experience, *Four Feet, Two Sandals*, foregrounds the power of the human connection set in a Peshawar refugee camp, and beyond. Two Afghani girls in the refugee camp are in search of needed shoes and clothing, as a relief worker provides aid. Curiously, each girl emerges from the search in possession of a single sandal. They resolve the situation, after some thought, by deciding to alternate sharing the sandals, with Lina wearing the pair one day and Feroza wearing the sandals the next. The problem solved, their friendship's enchanted rhythm is interrupted when one of the girls learns she and her mother are approved to go to the United States. With this new problem, what's to become of the shoes? How will they decide their fate? Although each clearly values the utility of the sandals, they prize their relationship during this hard time even more, so they each take one shoe, splitting the pair, as a reminder of their special friendship and as a glimpse of better times, looking forward to their futures with hope.

### HOPE

**Because war and forced dislocation bring such horror, especially to the most vulnerable, hope is an essential ingredient for moving forward.** Despite the younger picturebook audience, the majority of the books in this study artfully temper the horrors of war, showing how war can displace, wound, hurt, and kill those caught in its grip. However dark the portrayals of war, each picturebook reviewed also revealed rays of hope and light. When the young characters in the pages of these books are forced to confront the harsh realities of war, each book also models how important a sense of hope is to proceed. Young characters, such as Sami in *My Beautiful Birds* (Del Rizzo, 2017), and the family in *Lost*

and *Found Cat* (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017) persist through their unshakeable hope throughout their life-threatening journeys. Even inanimate stars offer hope in *A Path of Stars* (O'Brien, 2012), and they continue to serve as the next generation's hopeful namesake.

One book that provides powerful windows into both the horror and hope is *The Journey*, written and illustrated by Francesca Sanna (2016). Sanna's draws us into the darkness of the unknown, with lovely artwork and into the light with almost whimsical font to tell a tale of those forced to flee to a new home through unknown and scary paths. The book spares the reader by using symbolic terms to present the terrifying details of a family running away through shadowy forests, escaping detection, crossing vast emptiness and oceans, and hiding from dark forces through multiple, full-page spreads. The author-illustrator's interviews with two young girls in an Italian refugee center give this book its authenticity as a true story of refugees. Readers will also appreciate the images of birds migrating, flying free across the page, as a metaphor for understanding the melancholy of leaving home and the arduousness of the journey. Barbed wire, drips and drops of red give tiny glimpses of the intensity and reality of war. Through the eyes of a child, the associated losses and grief reverberates through this line, "The further we go... the more we leave behind" (n.p.). In spite of that reality, Sanna's text also calmly and sensitively offers young readers strong, yet small, peeks of safe havens, new beginnings, and solid hope for the future.

Another book considered a touchstone in this study and recognized as a Coretta Scott King Honor Award is aptly titled. *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams, 2005) explores how young 'lost' boys facing one of the most violent wars in modern history maintain their stalwart faith and persistent hope. This book opens with an impactful Foreword to respectfully reveal a startling fact, that more than 2 million people, mostly southern Sudanese, were killed in this civil strife. Working in a refugee resettlement agency, the author also founded the Lost Boys Foundation in 2001. This powerful picturebook also works to raise awareness and funds by telling the horrifying and unsettling story of the Lost Boys. Forced to travel nearly 1,000 miles to seek refuge, this picturebook tells the saga of some 30,000 southern Sudanese children, mostly ten and under, and their journey. Forceful brushstrokes in dark browns, greens, and tans with occasionally magenta backdrops simultaneously camouflage and capture the journey's wide mood swings of danger and desolation as well as the green, vibrant mood of exhilaration and hope for the future. Told in first person from Garang, this narrative exhibits courage, friendship, and hope as he leads about 35 Lost boys to ultimate safety. Telling his account to Tom, an aide worker, harsh existences are not precluded for the audience, as we learn of the severe hunger pain of no food, of forced to drink their own urine to survive

dehydration, of the deaths and mourning along the way, and of a jubilant reunion with his little buddy, five year old Chuti.

Despite the pain of sharing his loss, Garang is encouraged by Tom to share the Lost Boys' journey: "Your story can help prevent war from creating more lost children, and you can help find a home for yourself and your brothers. Your words can move caring people to help." (n.p.). When Tom's aid work takes him away for years, Garang and others forge on, tutoring, feeding, and nurturing their Sudanese brothers. This picturebook spares few details as we learn how the Lost Boys endure incomprehensible challenges, yet the book comes full circle when Garang (now 21) and Chuti are reunited finally with Tom who presents the lost boys with the most hopeful gift: a home in the United States. Some of the most impressive components of this picturebook are the abundance of rich peritext features, maps to trace the unbelievably long journey in Africa, and additional Foreword and Afterword statistics with photographic updates that describe the resettlement efforts in 2000 of some 3,800 Lost Boys. The last lines of the book resonate with Garang's courage and hope: "I was no longer afraid. I would find the strength to make a new life. I would find a new future." (Williams, 2005, n.p.). All of the books in this content analysis were similar in the ways that the harsh realities of situations and emotions were juxtaposed with the need for courage, and all similarly served as clear reminders that personal balance in our identities and the power of human connection can resonate throughout life circumstances and relationships to engender the hope needed for survival.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS: GLIMPSES OF HUMANITY AND HOPE

Each of these multilayered, sensitive themes throughout this corpus of children's books exemplified humanity, displaced and wandering. Because war often brings exacting and irrevocable outcomes to children, picturebooks in this study could not help but portray associated nightmares, but they also find a way to show hope as a necessary ingredient to survive. The High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was created by the United Nations in 1951 to focus on the growing numbers of refugees, approximately one million then. Again in 2008, the UNHCR brought attention to and raised funds to address an estimated 33 million refugees. This number has continued to mushroom, with almost 60 million reported in 2015, and sadly reportedly increasing (UNHCR, 2015). Each of these books was heartbreaking and complicated; yet, in each book, readers will find glimpses of the courage needed to make difficult journeys, ways to frame difficult questions related to identity, the power of humanity to form important connections, and the hope necessary for a better life in order to offer children positive paths to productive adulthoods. The picturebooks analyzed here present themes that evoke empathy, and even action, through their glimmers of compassion

and hopefulness in the face of dark and confusing times for children. Furthermore, Wolk (2013) strongly asserts that "[g]iven how destructive the twentieth century was, with wars and genocide and poverty and ecological damage, teaching caring may be the most important..." (p. 38). Therefore, literature circles, teacher read-alouds, text sets, book groups, inquiry groups, class discussions, and free reading utilizing these salient portrayals of refugee circumstances for today's world are vital and necessary (Gangi & Barowsky, 2009; Hope, 2008; Lacina, Baumi, & Taylor, 2016; Nath & Grote-Garcia, 2017). When the next world crisis is revealed on the news, many will immediately see the multifaceted relationships to refugees and war, armed conflicts, refugees, poverty, and genocide. When all seems lost, children's literature often posits hopeful stances that stand courageously beside war's cruel impacts on vulnerable children and families. The work of Johnson and Grasiwicz (2016) notes that the plight of refugees is presented as undesirable, yet in our analysis of these beautiful and sensitive pages, each offered glimpses of hope in situations that seem hopeless. While the themes of picturebooks cannot truly counter the terror of war, they can offer hopeful, positive perspectives of the vulnerable and fragile contexts of war torn displacements. Some might even say that these picturebooks, while specifically focused on war-based refugees, offer broader lessons of courage, identity, human connection, and hope for all of life's challenges. The picturebooks in this study offer more nuanced images, contextualized themes, and profound life lessons surrounding the full humanity of individuals experiencing the challenges involuntary displacement due to war. Yet, despite these often unimaginable and devastating impacts on the human condition surrounding violent armed conflicts and war refugees, the books in this study allow readers critical glimpses of humanity and hope, so as to envision positive possibilities and lay claim to their futures.

### REFERENCES

- Botelho, M. J., & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- CNN. (2019). *Almost one in five children live in conflict zones*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/14/af-rica/1-in-5-children-live-in-conflict-zones-intl/index.html>
- Crawford, P. A., & Roberts, S. K. (2009). Ain't gonna study war no more?: Explorations of war through picturebooks. *Childhood Education*, 85 (6), 370-374.

- Crawford, P. A., & Roberts, S. K. (2017). Literature as support: Using picturebooks to assist young children in coping with natural disasters and human crises. In Szente, J. (Ed.) *Assisting Children Caught in Human Crises and Environmental Disasters: A Resource Book for Early Childhood Teacher Educators*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Dolan, A. M. (2014). Intercultural education, picturebooks and refugees: Approaches for language teachers. *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, 2(1), 92-109.
- Dooley, K., Tait, G., & Sar, H. Z. (2016). Refugee-themed picturebooks for ethical understanding in curriculum. *English Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 11, 95-108.
- Gangi, J. M., & Barowsky, E. (2009). Listening to children's voices: Literature and the arts as a means of responding to the effects of war, terrorism, and disaster. *Childhood Education*, 85,(6), 357-363.
- Hope, J. (2008). "One day we had to run.": The development of the refugee identity in children's literature and its function in education. *Children's Literature in Education*, 39, 295-304.
- Johnson, H., & Grasiwicz, B. (2016). Examining displaced youth and immigrant status through critical multicultural analysis. In Johnson, H., Mathis, J., & Short, K. G. (Eds.) (2018). (Eds.) *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnson, H., Mathis, J., & Short, K. G. (Eds.). (2018). *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kidd, K. (2005). "A" is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and the "children's literature of atrocity." *Children's Literature*, 33, 120-149.
- Koss, M. D. (2015). Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 41, 32-42.
- Lacina, J., Baumi, M., & Taylor, E. R. (2016). *Promoting resilience through read-alouds*. *Young Children*, 71(2), 16-21.
- Leland, C., Lewison, M., & Harste, J. (2013). *Teaching children's literature: It's critical*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Marsh, E. E., & White, M. D. (2006). Content analysis: A flexible methodology. *Library trends*, 55(1), 22-45.
- Nath, L., & Grote-Garcia, S. (2017). Reading refugee stories: Five common themes among picture books with refugee characters. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 5 (2), 130-141. Retrieved from [http://www.texasreaders.org/uploads/4/4/9/0/44902393/5-2-tjle\\_nath.pdf](http://www.texasreaders.org/uploads/4/4/9/0/44902393/5-2-tjle_nath.pdf)
- O'Sullivan, E. (2005). Rose Blanche, Rosa Weis, Rosa Blanca: A comparative view of controversial picture book. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 29, 152-170.
- Roberts, S. K., & Crawford, P. A. (2008). Real life calls for real books: Literature to help children cope with family stressors. *Young Children*, 63(5), 12-17.
- Serafini, F. (2010). Reading multimodal texts: Perceptual, structural, and ideological perspectives. *Children's Literature in Education*, 41, 85-104. DOI 10.1007/s10583-010-9100-5
- Short, K. G. (2009). Critically reading the word and the world: Building intercultural understanding through children's literature. *Bookbird*, 47(2), 1-10.
- Sturgill, I. (2008). Touchstone texts: Fertile ground for creativity. *Reading Teacher*, 61(5), 411-414. DOI: 10.1598/RT.61.5.5
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR. (2015). The number of people displaced by war has reached a staggering high. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/6/558193896/worldwide-displacement-hits-all-time-high-war-persecution-increase.html>
- UNICEF. (2015). UNICEF: More than 1 in 10 children living in countries and areas affected by armed conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.unicefusa.org/press/releases/unicef-more-1-10-children-living-countries-an>
- Wolfenbarger, C. D., & Sipe, L. (2007). A unique visual and literary art form: Recent research on picturebooks. *Language Arts*, 83 (3), 273-280. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/gse\\_pubs/32](http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/32)
- Wolk, S. (2013). *Caring hearts and critical minds: Literature, inquiry, and social responsibility*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

**CHILDREN'S BOOKS CITED**

- Argueta, J. (2007). *Alfredito flies home*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books. Illustrated by L. Garay.
- Argueta, J. (2016). *Somos como las nubes/ We are like the clouds*. Berkeley, CA: Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press. Illustrated by Alfonso Ruano.
- Bunting, E. (2005). *Gleam and glow*. New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers. Illustrated by P. Sylveda.
- Bunting, E. (2006). *One green apple*. New York, NY: Clarion Books. Illustrated by Ted Lewin.
- Choi, Y. (2001). *The name jar*. New York, NY: Dell Dragonfly Books.
- Del Rizzo, S. (2017). *My beautiful birds*. Toronto, CA: Pajama Press.
- Do, A., & Do, S. (2011). *The little refugee: The inspiring true story of Australia's happiest refugee*. Sydney, AUS: Allen & Unwin Books. Illustrated by Bruce Whatley.
- Glynne, A. (2014). *Ali's story: A real-life account of his journey from Afghanistan*. London, UK: Wayland Publishers Limited, from BCC animated *Seeking Refugee* series. Illustrated by Salvador Maldonado.
- Glynne, A. (2014). *Rachel's story: A real-life account of her journey from a country in Eurasia*. London, UK: Wayland Publishers Limited, from BCC animated *Seeking Refugee* series. Illustrated by Salvador Maldonado.
- Glynne, A. (2017). *Juliane's story: A real-life account of her journey from Zimbabwe*. North Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books, from BCC animated *Seeking Refugee* series. Illustrated by Karl Hammond.
- Glynne, A. (2017). *Hamid's story: A real-life account of her journey from a country in Eurasia*. North Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books, from BCC animated *Seeking Refugee* series. Illustrated by Tom Senior.
- Glynne, A. (2017). *Navid's story: A real-life account of his journey from Iran*. North Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books, from BCC animated *Seeking Refugee* series. Illustrated by Jonathan Topf.
- Graber, J. (2009). *Muktar and the camels*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. Illustrated by Scott Mack.
- Farish, T. (2016). *Joseph's big ride*. Toronto, CA: Annick Press. Illustrated by Ken Daly.
- Hoffman, M. (2003). *The colour of home*. London, UK: Frances Lincoln Children's Books. Illustrated by M. Littlewood.
- Hope, (2008). ??
- Khan, R. (2010). *Big red lollipop*. New York, NY: Viking/Penguin. Illustrated by S. Blackall.
- Kobald, I. (2015). *My two blankets*. New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers. Illustrated by Freya Blackwood.
- Kuntz, D., & Shrodes, A. (2017). *Lost and found cat: The true story of Kunkush's incredible journey*. New York, NY: Crown Books for Young Readers. Illustrated by Sue Cornelison.
- O'Brien, A. S. (2012). *A path of stars*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.
- O'Brien, A. S. (2015). *I'm new here*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.
- Recorvits, H. (2008). *Yoon and the jade bracelet*. Toronto, CA: Douglas & McIntyre. Illustrated by G. Swiatkowska.
- Roberts, C. (2017). *Refugees and migrants (Children in our World)*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series. Illustrated by Hanane Kai.
- Ruurs, M. (2016). *Stepping stones: A refugee family's journey*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers. Translated by Falah Raheem. Illustrated by sculptor Nizar Ali Badr.
- Sanna, F. (2016). *The journey*. New York, NY: Flying Eye Books.
- Simon, T., & Simon, R. (2015). *Oskar and the eight blessings*. New York, NY: Roaring Brook Press. Illustrated by Mark Siegel.
- Shulevitz, U. (2008). *How I learned geography*. New York, NY: Ferrar Strauss Giroux.
- Williams, K. L., & Mohammed, K. (2009). *My name is Sangoel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. Illustrated by C. Stock.
- Williams, K. L., & Mohammed, K. (2007). *Four feet, two sandals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. Illustrated by D. Chayka.

Williams, M. (2005). *Brothers in hope: The story of the lost boys of Sudan*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books. Illustrated by R. G. Christie.

Young, R. (2016). *Teacup*. New York, NY: Dial Books. Illustrated by Matt Ottley.