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Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (2001): **Immigration and multiculturalism in our lives**

Introduction and Objectives:

This activity is designed for students in Upper Secondary Education (1st or 2nd of Bachillerato) or early university students.

This set of activities aims to make students reflect on the refugee crisis present in the 21st century, which has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The chosen book is *Refugee Boy* (2001). This book tells the story of Alem, a 14-year-old boy, who is taken to London by his father due to the outburst of a civil war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Alem has a mixed heritage and he is in danger. He is left alone in London with nothing but a letter. In it, his father explains that he would be safer in a different country. From that moment, Alem is in the hands of the social services and the Refugee Council, foster parents and asylum applications. This "a story that [...] many refugees would recognize" (Zephaniah 6).

By presenting students the multiethnic and multicultural reality we live in they will acquire their own critical standpoint and become self-aware of the importance of their role in these current processes. This set of activities will appeal to students' emotions and encourage tolerance, solidarity and a respectful attitude towards the so-called 'Others'. It will contribute with a further dimension to students' own identities in a society fraught with different needs and circumstances. Reading Refugee literature helps learners to avoid the effects cultural stereotyping and prejudice as well as to develop social values encouraging them to become responsible and inclusive citizens.

Pre-Reading Activity

Read the following poems by Benjamin Zephaniah paying special attention to the tone and mood:

Refugee Writes

Dear Mother,

I keep shedding tears,
Even in these my tender years
I don't have dreams
I have nightmares
Dear Mother how I cry.

Dear Father,

How I really wish
That you could watch me learn English,
Each thought of you I now cherish,
How often can we die?



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Dear Africa,

You must unite
And let your unity ignite
And then your people will shine bright,
Your greatness must be known.

Dear Britain,

I've found refuge here,
But all of us came from somewhere
And I can't simply disappear,
Compassion must be shown.

After reading the poems answer these questions:

Who is the speaker?

What situation is the speaker in?

How do these poems make you feel?

How do you think the person who wrote these poems feels?

Do you think the speaker was happy to leave his home and everything behind?

How would you feel if you had to leave your home?

What circumstances do you think that make people migrate?

A discussion will take place in which students will share their views and impressions about multiculturalism, immigration and the refugee crisis taking place around the world. They will also evaluate as a group to which extent our society is tolerant and respectful with these topics. This activity will serve as an introduction to prepare students for the reading of the selected book.

Reading Process

University students will read the whole book whereas Upper Secondary Students will read the following selected chapters:

- Chapter 1: Welcome to the weather
- Chapter 2: Alone in the country
- Chapter 3: This is home
- Chapter 5: Welcome Home
- Chapter 6: Meet the Lads
- Chapter 7: Road to nowhere
- Chapter 8: The Family's Fine
- Chapter 17: Campsfield
- Chapter 18: Real Men Cry
- Chapter 22: The Word on the Streets
- Chapter 23: This is War too
- Chapter 24: The news
- Chapter 25: Judgement Day
- Chapter 26: The end?



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Post-Reading

First phase

After the reading step, students will complete the following prediction chart based on (Hwang & Tipton Hindman 48).

My predictions before reading the book	Why did I predict this?	My opinion after reading the book

Second phase

Students will do a final task after reading the selected chapters or the book (which depends on the educational stage they are in). The final task will consist in **writing a letter to an asylum seeker welcoming them**. Letters will be collected and handed in to the different reception centers in the city.

Many students in state-funded schools come from reception centres. *Refugee Boy* (2001) has been chosen as a way of promoting tolerance, empathy and free students from prejudices and narrow-minded conceptions, making them realize that there is always a hard story behind just as Alem's. These types of activities are part of what is known for community-service learning, an approach that encourages students to get involved in taking care of those around them.

References:

Hwang, Sang, and Janet Tipton Hindman. "Strategies for Adopting Children's Refugee Literature in the Multicultural Classroom." *Journal of Arts & Humanities* 3.12. (Jan 2014): 42-53.

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