



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

When Stars are Scattered

Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed
(Authors)

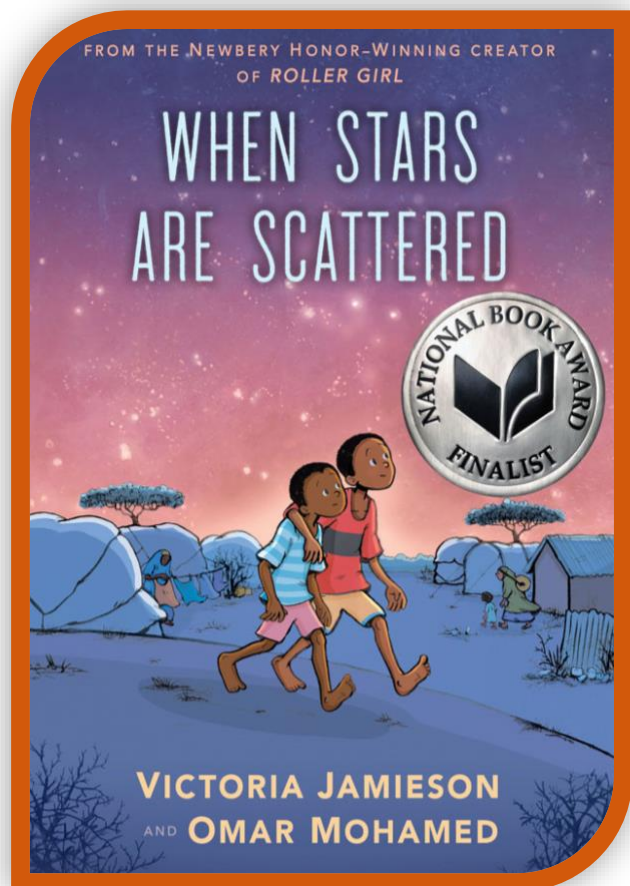
Omar and his younger brother, Hassan, have spent most of their lives in Dadaab, a refugee camp in Kenya. Life is hard there: never enough food, achingly dull, and without access to the medical care Omar knows his nonverbal brother needs. When Omar has the opportunity to go to school, he knows it might be a chance to change their future. It would also mean leaving his brother, the only family member he has left, every day. This graphic novel tells the story of a childhood spent waiting, and a young man who is able to create a sense of family and home in the most difficult of settings.

ISBN: 978-0525553908

Publisher: Dial Books

Year Published: 2020

Age Range: 9-12



Book Themes

Refugees and the Refugee Experience, Family, Sense of Home, Helping Others

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. See also ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|---------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| ■ abandon | ■ frustrated | ■ patient | ■ seizure |
| ■ anxious | ■ grueling | ■ persecution | ■ selfish |
| ■ community | ■ infected | ■ prison | ■ shielding |
| ■ considerate | ■ insane | ■ protect | ■ social worker |
| ■ desperate | ■ interview | ■ Ramadan | ■ temporary |
| ■ dehydrated | ■ jealous | ■ refugee | ■ threatened |
| ■ disability | ■ legal guardian | ■ refugee camp | ■ unrest |
| ■ displaced | ■ mosque | ■ rejected | ■ valuable |
| ■ distraction | ■ neighborhood | ■ resettle | ■ wealth |
| ■ eligible | ■ orphan | ■ resilient | ■ worried |
| ■ exhausted | ■ overlooked | ■ rights | |

Note to Teacher:

This book is about people who are refugees and the refugee experience. Before discussing this topic, it is important to consider that you may have students in your class whose family members or they themselves are refugees or immigrants. Be prepared and sensitive to those students and be mindful as to how you discuss this in your classroom. Students who may not have shared this aspect of their identity previously may disclose it during the lesson and that information should only come from the student themselves.

Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- What do you learn about Omar and Hassan when the book begins? As the book continues, what more do you learn about Omar and Hassan? How does your perspective of Omar and Hassan change and evolve as the story moves along?
- What is Omar's "home" and how does his idea of home change throughout the book?
- How did Omar and Hassan come to live in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya?
- What is life like for Omar and Hassan at the refugee camp? What is difficult or challenging? What is positive and uplifting about the experience?
- What are Omar's feelings about going to school? Why does Omar have conflicting feelings about going to school? What does he decide to do and why?

- What is school like for Omar and the other young people?
- What do you learn from the book about girls' participation in school? What are your thoughts and feelings about that?
- Aside from going to school, what responsibilities does Omar have in his family? What do you think it is like for him to have that much responsibility? How does Omar feel about it?
- What do you learn about Hassan and his disability? How do the other characters view Hassan? Why? Have you seen other people with disabilities being treated that way?
- What does Omar want to be when he grows up? What does a social worker do? (*If students don't know, you can explain that social workers help people cope with and solve their problems in their everyday lives, especially people who need services, resources and access to opportunities.*) Why do you think Omar wants to be a social worker?
- What kind of dreams for the future do Omar and his friends talk about?
- How does Omar feel when he finds out that Maryam is quitting school because her father arranged for her to get married?
- What does Omar share with his class about why he wants to be a social worker?
- How do people at the refugee camp react when they find out that some of their friends are getting resettled in the U.S. and Canada?
- How do some people in the book view life will be like in the U.S.? How do you think the reality of life in the U.S. compare to the dreams and fantasies they have?
- What is Ramadan? [Ramadan is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community.] What is Ramadan like at the refugee camp?
- What was your reaction to Omar telling his story of what happened to his family in Somalia and having to leave? How did you feel? How do you think Omar felt sharing that with people he didn't know well?
- When Nimo gets the news that she will be resettled in Canada, Omar says, "For the first time, it truly dawned on me how scary this must be for Nimo. Dadaab may be a refugee camp, but it's the only home we've ever really known." What does Omar mean by this?
- What was most important or meaningful to you about the essay Omar writes for English class called, "What it Means to be a Refugee"?
- What happens when Omar and Hassan find out that they are leaving the refugee camp and will be resettled in the U.S.?
- What were your thoughts and feelings when you learned that they were leaving?
- What does Maryam's poem, "A Poem of Stars" mean to you? (You can read the poem aloud on p. 255-256).
- The last scene in the book is when Omar and Hassan are on the plane reading Maryam's poem, which ends with, "Be like a star. Shine your light. Shine your story. For stories will lead us home." What does this mean to you?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- Prior to reading this book, what did you know and think about people who are refugees and the refugee experience? How did that change after you read the book?

- *Why do you think the authors called the book *When Stars are Scattered*?*
- *Why do you think the authors chose to tell their story through a graphic novel?*
- *What messages do the authors communicate through the story?*

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Reader's Response Writing Activities

- **What do you think happens next?:** Share a quick summary of the last few pages of the book or elicit a summary from students: Omar and Hassan receive a letter that they are going to be resettled in the U.S. They say goodbye to everyone at Dadaab Refugee Camp and take a plane to the U.S., which is the last time we see them in the book. Engage students in a discussion by asking: *What do you think will happen next? What do you think happens when Omar and Hassan arrive in the U.S.? What is their life like? What is their experience like going to school? Are they able to follow their dreams?* Have students then write and draw (using the graphic novel style of the book) the next few pages based on what they think will happen next in Omar and Hassan's story. Then have students share their additional pages with the class. You may also want to put all these pages together into a new book and share with families and the school community.
- **Diary Entries of a Character:** Have students select one of the central characters of the book: Omar, Hassan, Fatuma, Jeri, Maryam, Nimo, Salan (community leader) or Susanna Martinez (social worker). Then have students write diary entries for the chosen character, writing 5-8 diary entries that the character might have kept before, during or after the book's events. Remind students that the character's thoughts and feelings are very important in a diary as well as their reaction to day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. Invite students to focus on their character's perspective. *How do they observe the events of the story? What assumptions do they make about other characters they interact with? What thoughts might they have that they wouldn't want to share with others, but share in their diary? What are their hopes and dreams?* You may choose to have students engage in prewriting discussions with a partner about their character in order to get their ideas out. After students have completed the diary entries, have them share their writing with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.
- **Get to know the authors:** The book is written by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed. Remind students that Omar Mohamed co-wrote the book based on his life experiences in Somalia, at the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya, and his being resettled in the U.S. Have students select one or both of the authors to learn more about. First, read aloud (or have students read silently) the two "Author Notes" in the back of the book. Then, together brainstorm a list of questions students have about each of the authors and what more they want to know about them, including where they grew up, their inspiration for writing the book, aspects of their identity and their relevance to the book, other books they wrote, their interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Possible sources for their research can include: (1) the authors' websites, (2) their social media posts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (3) articles written about them like [this one](#) and (4) other online research including interviews with them. The final culminating project of their research may include one of the following ideas: an extended "author bio" page, a timeline of their lives, or a video (or audio) simulated interview between the author and a journalist (one student plays the author and another plays the interviewer).

2. Learn More about Refugees and the Refugee Experience

Elicit/explain a definition of refugee as “someone who flees persecution (being continually treated in a cruel and harmful way), conflict or war.” Talk with students about the experiences of Omar and Hassan: they lived in Somalia as young children and then were forcibly displaced because of the war there. They then lived in the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya for many years, and then were eventually resettled in the United States. Elicit/explain that **refugee camps** are temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to refugees. Refugees may live in a refugee camp for many years, even though it's intended to be temporary. Ask: *What did you learn from the book about refugees and the refugee experience? What did you already know? What was new information for you? What other questions do you have?* Share the following information from UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), an organization that supports refugees.

- As of 2020, 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes.
- Among those, 73% are being hosted in neighboring countries, and 68% of those originated from just five countries (Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Venezuela, South Sudan and Myanmar); the remaining 32% are from other countries.
- Among them are nearly 26.4 million refugees, about half of whom are **under the age of 18**.
- People have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order.
- Learn more at [UNHCR's website](#).

After sharing this information, brainstorm a list of what other questions students have, what more they want to know about refugees, the war and current situation in Somalia, the Dadaab Refugee Camp, other countries that have a high number of refugees and why, their state's policy on refugee resettlement and local organizations that support refugees, or other topics. Have students identify a topic of further interest and then have them work in small groups to research that topic and create a presentation that demonstrates what they learned. The culminating project can be a research paper, PowerPoint presentation, timeline, personal profiles of refugees, or something else.

3. Diverse Concepts of Home

[Note: While you're having this discussion, be mindful that some students may not have a permanent home, their current home situation may be challenging or difficult, etc. As you are talking about the book or doing this activity, monitor for inaccurate assumptions such as (1) All people in their classroom or community have homes. If this happens, teachers should gently remind students that they don't know this; (2) That home is always a safe place for everyone, especially for children but also some adults; (3) That home always means family and that family is always genetically related and (4) That home is always the place where you sleep, eat, live, etc. For some people, their school, work place, house of workshop, or other community place feels like home. For some, home is someone else's home.]

The concept and theme of home plays a strong role in the book. Elicit from students that Omar, Hassan and everyone currently living in the refugee camp has left their home. Omar and Hassan's home is Somalia and they talk a lot about going back home to Somalia. Omar also yearns for a permanent home and there are times in the book where he says he doesn't have a home, but wants one desperately. There are other points in the book when Omar says that his home is the Dadaab Refugee Camp because that's where he lives and he is surrounded by people who love and support him. Upon learning that he'll be leaving the refugee camp, he says: “It's hard to imagine that anyone would miss living in a refugee camp. And yet, it's the place I call home.” Elicit from students that the refugee experience includes three components focused on home: (1) leaving their original home and

all the feelings associated with that, (2) coming to their new (and sometimes) temporary home of a refugee camp and the, often tumultuous and difficult, journey to get there, and (3) their new home of where they (in some cases) are “resettled,” and all the feelings associated with living in a new and unfamiliar place. There is also an exploration of temporary vs. permanent homes, which may resonate with students. Ask students: *What is the meaning of home in the book? How does that change and evolve for Omar and Hassan throughout the book? What does home mean to you? What are the essential ingredients?* Then have students create a collage of what home means to them. They can do a drawing of what their home looks like from the outside (house, apartment, shelter, etc.) and then they can write words, draw items or find images (photos, online, magazines, etc.) to place there that represent what home means to them. This can include: other people/family members, feelings associated with home like love and support, safety, a job, a place to sleep, items that are important to them, food to eat, family traditions and activities. When students have completed their home collages, have them share with the class.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on the refugee (and immigrant) experience, people who are Muslim and about welcoming others.

Curriculum Resources

Migrant Caravan and the People Seeking Asylum, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/migrant-caravan-and-the-people-seeking-asylum.

Who are the Rohingya People in Myanmar?, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-are-the-rohingya-people-in-myanmar.

We Were Strangers Too: Learning about Refugees through Art, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art.

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. (Also in Spanish.)

Eight Facts about Immigrants and Immigration

www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheets/myths-and-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration-en-espanol

This resource contains information and sources that will hopefully help mitigate the damage caused by bigotry, disinformation and misconceptions about immigrants.

11 Ways Schools Can Help Students Feel Safe in Challenging Times

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/11-ways-schools-can-help-students-feel-safe-in-challenging

In incidents of alarming images and biased language in schools and universities, use these prevention, intervention and education strategies to promote inclusive school environments where young people can learn, thrive and become their best selves.

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk

Provides the tools parents and family members need to engage their families in conversations about important news stories and other timely discussions about societal and world events. Includes discussion guides containing a topic summary, questions to start the conversation and dig deeper, ideas for taking action and additional resources. See "[Refugees, Reactions and World Response](#)."

Welcoming the Stranger: ADL's Commitment to Protecting Refugees

www.adl.org/news/article/welcoming-the-stranger-adls-commitment-to-protecting-refugees

Provides information and resources on the refugee crisis as well as ways to take action.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity & Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[207\]=207](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[207]=207)

Religion & Religious Bigotry: Muslim/Muslim-American, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[229\]=229](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[229]=229)