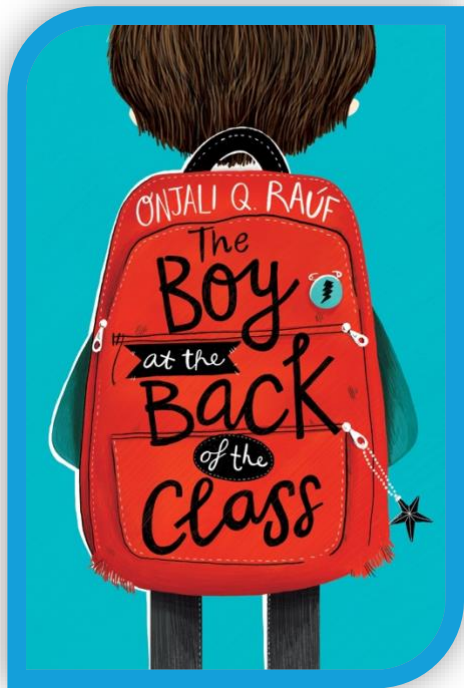




# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

**About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide:** 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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



## The Boy at the Back of the Class

Onjali Q. Rauf (Author)

ISBN: 978-1984850782

Publisher: Delacorte Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2018

Age Range: 8-12

### Book Themes

Anti-Muslim Bias, Refugees, Bullying and Ally Behavior, Friendship

### About the Book

There used to be an empty chair at the back of Mrs. Khan's classroom, but on the third Tuesday of the school year a new student fills it: nine-year-old Ahmet, who is a refugee from Syria. The whole class is curious about this new boy; he doesn't seem to smile, and he doesn't talk much. But after learning that Ahmet fled a war and was separated from his family along the way, a determined group of his classmates bands together to concoct the "Greatest Idea in the World"—a magnificent plan to reunite Ahmet with his loved ones.

### Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their

responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the story?
- When you first meet the main character and narrator (Alexa) what are your thoughts about her and how does that change throughout the book?
- Alexa overhears someone talking about Ahmet and refer to him as the “refugee kid.” What did you think when you first heard that?
- What do you know about people who are refugees? What did you learn about the refugee experience by reading the book? If you could ask Ahmet a question, what would you ask?
- How does the book explore differences and diversity?
- What are some examples of bullying behavior that take place in the book? What are some examples of ally behavior shown in the book?
- How did you feel as you read Ahmet tell his classmates his story?
- Why do you think Alexa and her friends were so determined to come up with a plan to help reunite Ahmet with his family?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think is the overall message of the book?

## Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

### 1. Bullying and Ally Behavior

Talk with your child about bullying and the ways bullying takes place in the book. Define **bullying** as when a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed. Explain that when bias and bullying take place, there are different behaviors that people can engage in, eliciting examples from the book. The different roles include:

**Aggressor:** Someone who says or does hurtful things on purpose and over and over.

**Ally:** Someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of prejudice.

**Bystander:** Someone who sees bullying or prejudice happening and does not say or do anything.

**Target:** Someone who is bullied or treated in harmful ways by a person or group of people on purpose over and over.

**Target:** Someone who is bullied or treated in harmful ways by a person or group of people on purpose over and over.

Point out that Brendan is referred to as “Brendan the Bully” in the book. Ask your child what they think about this “label.” Explain that referring to Brendan as “the bully” is harmful because it makes it sound like Brendan is only and always a bully; there are no other aspects of his identity, and his role is fixed. It is better to label his behavior, rather than his whole identity, as bullying because he likely engages in other behavior as well. Highlight the fact that most people engage in all these behaviors (aggressor, ally, bystander, target) at different times or in different situations. Tell your child about

times when you have been in all four of these roles in the past, and how you feel looking back on your experiences. Ask your child about the times they have engaged in each of these behaviors, why they acted as they did, and how they felt in those situations. Emphasize that there are many different ways you can act as an ally in bias and bullying situations, using ADL's [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) resource. Talk with them about how you have acted as an ally and explore ways they have engaged in ally behavior.

## 2. The Refugee Crisis

Talk with your child about refugees and the refugee crisis, which is featured in the book. You can also discuss the examples of bias directed towards refugees. If your child doesn't know the word "refugee," define refugee as "someone who flees persecution, conflict or war." Explain that persecution is when people are continually treated in a cruel and harmful way, often due to their race, religion or political opinions. Explain that there is a very serious and large refugee crisis happening today and some of that is illustrated in the book through Ahmet's story. You can ask your child what they learned from the book about refugees, from Ahmet's story as well as other information shared throughout the book. Here is some information you might share with them about the refugee crisis:

- The current refugee crisis has been named the largest refugee crisis since World War II. More than 65 million people have been forced from their homes.
- Around the world, one in every 122 people is currently a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum.
- There are refugees fleeing Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria, and dozens of other countries.
- Roughly 11 million people from Syria have left their homes in search of safety and assistance since the country's civil war began in 2011. The refugees have been fleeing civil war, persecution and terror—traveling at great lengths and great risk to survive.
- Instead of being met with compassion and open arms, many of today's refugees have encountered closed doors and hateful language directed at them.

Talk with your child about the refugee experience, which typically includes three distinct parts: (1) leaving home and escaping the tragedy that has driven them from their homeland, (2) the dangerous journey people who are refugees take in search of safety and (3) their life in a new home and adjusting to a foreign land, where often everything is different. Talk with them whether they know anyone in this situation and share any additional information you may have. If you want to learn more, you can use the resources below as well as: [The Refugee Crisis](#) (Newsela) and [Figures at a Glance](#) (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).

## 3. Being Welcomed and Welcoming Others

In the book, Ahmet is a new student in the class. Over time, the other students learn that he is a refugee from Syria, a country engaged in civil war. Ahmet and his family traveled a great distance and at great risk to leave Syria and now Ahmet is in England, without his family. Ahmet is new to Mrs. Khan's class, the community and the country. He faces many challenges including not being with his family, not knowing the country or the language and being a new student in class. Talk with your child about whether they have ever been new to a place or situation. This can include being new to a school, club, community, country, etc. Ask them what that felt like and whether other young people helped to make them feel included and welcomed and the extent to which they didn't. You can also discuss when your child has welcomed other children who are new—and how they welcomed them. Remind them that is what Alexa and her friends did in the book (e.g., invited Ahmet to play football, talked to him, gave him sweet treats after school). You can also reflect on your own experiences of

being welcoming and welcomed, either as a child or an adult in new and uncomfortable situations. Explain the importance of trying to make everyone, but especially those who are new, to feel safe, included and welcome.

## Other Books You May Like



*Amina's Voice* by Hena Khan, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/aminas-voice](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/aminas-voice)



*Refugee* by Alan Gratz, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/refugee](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/refugee)



*The Journey* by Francesca Sanna, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-journey](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-journey)



*We Are Like the Clouds/Somos Como las Nubes* by Jorge Argueta, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/we-are-like-the-cloudssomos-como-las-nubes](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/we-are-like-the-cloudssomos-como-las-nubes)

## ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on bullying, refugees, bullying and identity-based bullying.

### Curriculum Resources

Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Being an Ally, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/anti-muslim-bigotry-and-being-an-ally](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/anti-muslim-bigotry-and-being-an-ally)

Identity-Based Bullying, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying)

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](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art)

Who Am I? Identity Poems, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems)

### Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol](http://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.)

Education Resources on Immigration, Immigrants and Anti-Immigrant Bias

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti)

A collection of education resources for educators, parents and families on immigration, immigrants and anti-immigrant bias.

### Education Resources on Refugees, Muslim People and Anti-Muslim Bigotry

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/refugees-muslim-people-and-anti-muslim-bigotry](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/refugees-muslim-people-and-anti-muslim-bigotry)

Resources for educators and others to address the topics of Muslim people, anti-Muslim bigotry and refugees with young people.

### Labeling Behavior, Not People

[www.adl.org/blog/labeling-behavior-not-people](http://www.adl.org/blog/labeling-behavior-not-people)

There is a disconnect between being labeled a “bully” and actually engaging in bullying behavior. This blog discusses how understanding this difference empowers and motivates young people to move from being a bystander to an ally.

### Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources)

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

### Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk](http://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 Table Talk “[What Bullying Is and Is Not](#).”

## Children's Books

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

Bias, Discrimination & Hate: Anti-Immigrant, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[178\]=178](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[178]=178)

People, Identity & Culture: Middle Eastern, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[211\]=211&tid\[226\]=226](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[211]=211&tid[226]=226)

Religion & Religious Bigotry: Islamophobia, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[211\]=211&tid\[226\]=226](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[211]=211&tid[226]=226)