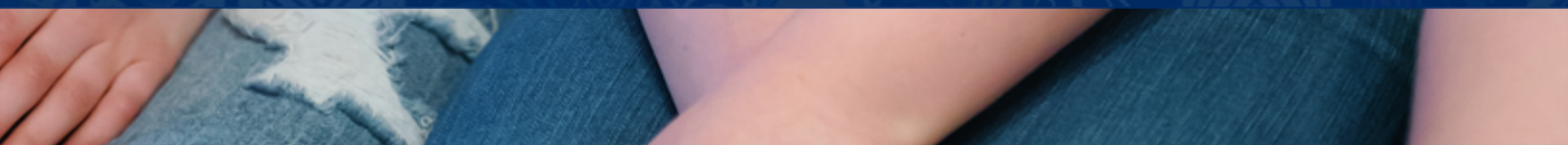




# *Bridges to Belonging:*

**Welcoming Newcomers to the Classroom  
and the Community**

Teacher Implementation Guide



# Introduction

Dear Teachers and Educators,

Welcome to the Teacher Implementation Guide for *Bridges to Belonging: Welcoming Newcomers to Our Classrooms and Community*, a curriculum dedicated to fostering empathy, welcome, and belonging for newcomers arriving to our community. This guide provides five thoughtfully crafted lessons and a range of resources to help you teach about displacement, migration, and the importance of welcoming newcomers through refugee resettlement in the United States. Within these lessons, you'll find essential definitions used in migration work, further learning opportunities both for teachers and students, and recommended books that share the lived experiences of newcomers.

Each lesson includes detailed teacher notes, activity instructions, and suggested questions designed to cultivate meaningful discussions around these topics. Optional video content and flexible options for group or individual activities allow you to tailor each lesson to your classroom's needs. To promote a safe and supportive environment, this guide offers classroom guidelines, sample agreements, and additional resources to navigate sensitive discussions with care. For enhanced collaboration, consider arranging classroom seating to encourage group work, helping students connect as they explore these important themes together.

Thank you for your dedication to building a classroom that embodies belonging, empathy, and respect, helping students understand the value of welcoming newcomers to our communities.

Sincerely,

The Community Belonging Team at Church World Service

Devonne Piccaver, Princeton University Student Intern at CWS

# Purpose of the Curriculum

The *Bridges to Belonging* curriculum is designed to foster understanding, empathy, and a sense of community among students as they learn about the experiences of refugees and newcomers. Through stories, discussions, and activities, this curriculum aims to create a classroom environment where students not only gain knowledge about the global refugee experience but also reflect on the importance of inclusion, kindness, and resilience.

The curriculum's primary objectives include:

- **Developing Empathy and Awareness:** By learning about the journeys and challenges faced by refugees, students are encouraged to imagine life from another perspective. Through stories, discussions, and activities, students learn that every person has a unique story and that our shared humanity calls for compassion and understanding.
- **Promoting Community Belonging:** The lessons are designed to teach students how they can play a meaningful role in welcoming newcomers in their own communities. Through collaborative activities and group discussions, students are empowered to think about practical ways they can help create an inclusive classroom and community.
- **Cultivating Knowledge of Migration and Displacement:** Students will gain foundational knowledge about why people become refugees and the process of resettlement. By exploring global contexts, students can better understand the factors that lead to forced migration, preparing them to be informed, empathetic citizens thus allowing this lesson to meet the K-12 social studies curriculum standards and themes of culture and global connections at both the macro and micro scale.
- **Inspiring Positive Action:** The curriculum encourages students to move from understanding to action, reflecting on how they can make a difference in the lives of others. Students will be equipped with ideas and strategies for welcoming new students or neighbors, fostering a proactive mindset toward inclusion.
- **Enhancing Critical Thinking and Perspective:** This curriculum provides the opportunity for students to engage in critical thinking by exploring complex, real-world issues related to migration and displacement. Through discussions, problem-solving activities, and reflective journaling, students will learn to ask thoughtful questions, evaluate diverse perspectives, and consider the broader social, cultural, and political factors involved in refugee experiences.

Through *Bridges to Belonging*, students are introduced to concepts of global citizenship and community belonging, learning that they each have the power to make a positive impact in the lives of others. This curriculum serves as a guide to building classrooms that celebrate diversity and to creating young ambassadors of welcome in their communities.

# Key Definitions

## What is migration?

The movement of people from one place to another, often for reasons like jobs, safety, or family. There are both push and pull factors to migration (ex: A push factor may be war, persecution, or violence and a pull factor may be safety, employment, or family).

## What is displacement?

When people are forced to leave their homes due to conflict, environmental factors, or disasters.

## What is community belonging?

Community belonging is the feeling of being accepted, valued, and connected within a group, such as a classroom, neighborhood, or larger community. It involves creating a space where everyone feels they are an important part of the group, where their presence and contributions matter.

## Who are refugees?

For this curriculum we are going to be speaking specifically about refugees. "Refugee" is a legal term as outlined and defined by the 1951 UN Convention. A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are a leading cause of refugees fleeing their countries.

Under the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, eligibility for refugee protection requires a current or future fear of persecution. However, 'persecution' is not defined as a concept; rather it is inferred as a threat to life or physical freedom. A person may qualify for refugee status under its terms only if they fear persecution on one or more of the following grounds:

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Membership of a particular social group
- Political opinion

A person is deemed undeserving of refugee protection if they have committed a crime against peace, a war crime, a crime against humanity, a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to their admission to the country of refuge or is guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Below are video resources that assist in explaining the different classifications of newcomers arriving to the United States.

## Video Resources:

- [Who are Refugees?](#)
- [Who are Refugees? – The Resettlement Process](#)
- [Who are Unaccompanied Children?](#)
- [Who are Humanitarian Parolees?](#)
- [Who are Asylum Seekers?](#)
- [Client Profile – The Azimi Family](#)
- [Client Profile - Saima](#)



## Who are the Ten National Resettlement Agencies in the United States?

- Bethany Christian Services
- Church World Service
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Episcopal Migration Ministries
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- International Rescue Committee
- Global Refuge
- US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- World Relief Corporation

When refugees arrive to the United States, they are welcomed and offered resettlement services by one of the ten private resettlement agencies that have signed a cooperative agreement with the State Department. Each of these ten agencies have local offices and affiliate offices around the country that are responsible for ensuring that the core services mandated by the Department of State's Reception and Placement Program are provided to every arriving refugee.

# What are Existing Durable Solutions for Displaced Individuals?

To gain refugee status, individuals who have fled their country and cross an international border need to register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the country to which they have fled to gain legal refugee status. UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection to refugees and works to secure the best possible durable solution for each refugee. There are three durable solutions available to refugees:

- **Voluntary Repatriation:** refugees return in safety and with dignity to their country of origin
- **Local Integration:** refugees legally, economically and socially integrate in the host country
- **Resettlement:** refugees are transferred from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country which has agreed to admit them as refugees

Only a small fraction, less than 1%, of the refugee population is referred for resettlement, and being referred by the UNHCR does not guarantee that a refugee will be resettled; the decision to accept a refugee remains with the resettlement country.

## What is the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)?

Historically resettlement was led by faith organizations, but now many other community groups are also part of welcoming and sponsoring refugees. The United States has a public and private partnership among the government and non-profit agencies. The U.S. refugee program was enshrined into law in the Refugee Act of 1980. The United States has been the largest refugee resettlement country in the world, admitting approximately two-thirds of all refugee resettlement referrals worldwide each year. Over the last forty years, the average number of refugees admitted to the United States has been 95,000 individuals per year.

## What is the History of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)?

Following World War II, the United States admitted hundreds of thousands of displaced Europeans. In 1975, the United States again resettled hundreds of thousands of refugees—this time from Southeast Asia. Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized the resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the United States.

The Refugee Act now provides the legal basis for the USRAP that is administered by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migrations in conjunction with the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services and offices in the Department of Homeland Security.

# Trauma-Informed Teaching

As you teach about displacement and migration, it's important to recognize that some students in your class, especially former newcomers, may have experienced trauma. Trauma can deeply affect a student's ability to learn and engage in the classroom, so it's crucial to approach your lessons with a trauma-informed lens.

## What is Trauma?

Trauma refers to a single event, multiple events, or circumstances that a person experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening. These experiences can leave lasting adverse effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. For many refugee students, trauma may stem from war, displacement, loss, or difficult migration experiences.

When discussing sensitive topics such as displacement, migration, or cultural differences, be mindful that certain words, images, or scenarios might trigger memories of difficult past experiences for these students. Therefore, teaching about migration requires not only knowledge of the subject but also sensitivity to the potential impact of trauma.



## Trauma's Impact on Learning

Trauma can manifest in different ways in the classroom, and its effects on learning can be profound. Please note the developmental stage and age of the child can influence how trauma symptoms manifest in a student. Some signs that a student may be struggling with trauma include, but are not limited to:

- Difficulty focusing or paying attention.
- Avoidance of certain topics or activities.
- Emotional outbursts, anxiety, or withdrawal.
- Unexplained fatigue or physical symptoms.

### TEACHING TIP

Consider language access and the role it can play in impacting learning and belonging for a student.

These behaviors are not willful defiance or lack of interest; rather, they may be expressions of how trauma has affected the student's ability to cope with stress or focus on learning. By recognizing these signs, you can better support all students and provide a learning environment that feels safe.

# The Role of a Trauma-Informed Teacher

As an educator, you play a vital role in fostering a compassionate and understanding learning environment. While you are not a therapist, you can take steps to offer a space in your classroom for emotional safety. However, you should not try to diagnose your students. Maintaining professional boundaries is essential, but you can still provide a nurturing space where students feel seen and supported. Here are strategies to help you integrate trauma-informed teaching:

## Safety and Predictability

Establishing a sense of safety for all students is essential, especially those who may have experienced trauma. It is also important to communicate clearly when difficult or sensitive topics are discussed in the classroom, to ensure the emotional, physical, and social safety of all the students. Along with this, setting and maintaining clear, consistent boundaries for behavior and interaction will reinforce respectful communication, ensuring that the classroom remains a safe space for everyone.

## Emotional Support

Teachers play a crucial role in modeling calm, regulated behavior, as students often mirror the emotional tone of their instructor. It can be beneficial to include emotional check-ins, providing students with safe ways to express their thoughts and feelings—whether through writing, art, or verbal discussion. In these moments, validating students' emotions, whatever they may be, without requiring them to share personal details helps build trust. Simple, supportive statements like, "It's okay to have different reactions to these topics," can foster an atmosphere of openness, allowing students to process their thoughts and emotions without feeling pressured or vulnerable.

## Empowerment and Choice

Providing students with choices in their learning, especially when engaging with sensitive material, can be a powerful tool for empowerment. By offering alternatives to certain assignments, you give students the opportunity to engage in ways that feel safe and comfortable to them. Educators should allow students to make decisions about what they feel comfortable sharing, including about their own stories, perspectives, or cultures. It is vital in trauma-informed teaching that students feel empowered to express themselves in a way that honors their individual experiences, without forcing them to relive traumatic experiences.

## Connection and Belonging

Building strong relationships with students by fostering a welcoming and inclusive classroom community can have a profound impact. Simple acts of kindness and respect go a long way in helping students feel they belong. Additionally, promoting peer support through collaboration and empathy-building activities can strengthen the sense of community. When students feel connected to their peers, it reduces feelings of isolation and creates an environment where they feel safe, supported, and understood.

## Maintaining Inclusivity in Trauma-Informed Teaching

When teaching sensitive topics like displacement, it is essential for educators to be mindful of their own personal or political ideologies. Trauma-informed teaching requires that the classroom remain an inclusive space where all students feel respected and safe. Expressing personal or political opinions about displacement can inadvertently create tension or alienate students, particularly those with lived experiences of displacement. Instead, focus on teaching from a balanced and fact-based perspective, providing students with the information they need to understand the topic without imposing your own views. Educators should maintain awareness of what terminology they use in the classroom setting to maintain a safe space. For example, avoid using charged terms such as "illegal" or "alien." This approach ensures that all students feel included and empowered to form their own perspectives in a supportive environment.

While these strategies can help in promoting a safe learning environment, they may on their own not be adequate in addressing a student's trauma. Educators should be able to identify instances and situations where the support of a trained mental health professional is needed. Please keep in mind that when appropriate, engaging parental or guardian support, as well as reaching out to the school counselor or designated mental health provider, is an essential component of providing trauma-informed education.



## The “4 R’s” of Trauma-Informed Teaching

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has developed a framework known as the “4 R’s” to guide trauma-informed care, which can be invaluable when applied to the classroom setting. This framework—Realize, Recognize, Respond, and Resist Re-traumatization—offers a structured approach to creating a classroom environment that is not only supportive but also sensitive to the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Many of the students you work with, particularly those from refugee backgrounds, may carry invisible burdens due to their experiences with displacement, conflict, and instability. A trauma-informed approach requires an intentional shift in how you view, interact with, and teach these students. Let’s break down each of the “4 R’s” to understand how they can shape your classroom practice.

### **Realize the Widespread Impact of Trauma and Understand Potential Paths for Recovery**

The first step in trauma-informed teaching is to understand the profound and widespread impact that trauma can have on a student’s development. Trauma affects not only emotional and psychological health but also cognitive processes and social interactions. For refugee students, trauma may stem from war, violence, loss, or forced migration and displacement, which deeply affects their sense of security and stability. As a teacher, realizing the significance of these experiences means acknowledging that trauma can shape how students learn, how they respond to classroom dynamics, and how they engage with their peers and the curriculum. Understanding that trauma has a ripple effect on every aspect of a student’s life is crucial for creating an environment where healing and recovery are possible. While you may not be their therapist, your awareness and sensitivity can contribute significantly toward establishing safety, understanding, and acceptance in the classroom.

## Recognize the Signs and Symptoms of Trauma in Students

Once you've realized the impact trauma can have, the next step is to develop the ability to recognize its signs in your students. Trauma often manifests in both subtle and overt ways and being observant of these cues is essential. Students may demonstrate changes in behavior such as withdrawal from social interactions, difficulty concentrating, emotional outbursts, or even a sudden decline in academic performance. These behaviors are often not indicative of disinterest or defiance but rather are coping mechanisms developed in response to the overwhelming stress caused by trauma. Recognizing the signs might also mean noticing heightened sensitivity to particular topics, avoiding eye contact, or expressing anxiety during certain discussions. By tuning in to these behavioral and emotional signals, you can better understand what your students need in the moment and adjust your teaching approach to support their well-being. Please note that the symptoms of trauma a student or child displays can vary by age, gender, culture and various other factors. Refer to the UNHCR "Guidance for teachers on stress and trauma" guidebook for additional information on possible symptoms.

## Respond by Fully Integrating Your Knowledge of Trauma into Teaching Practices

After recognizing the signs of trauma, the next step is to assess the level of support that the child needs. This may look like consulting with a colleague, supervisor, or designated mental health professional in the school. Along with consultation and seeking support, you can respond by thoughtfully integrating trauma-informed strategies into your teaching methods. This means adopting flexibility in your approach, both in the way you present material and how you assess student participation. Offering students different formats for learning—such as visual, auditory, or hands-on activities—can help reduce the stress and cognitive overload that trauma can cause. For some students, engaging with material in a non-traditional way can make learning feel more accessible and less intimidating. Similarly, consider alternative assessments or ways of participating that honor the emotional needs of the student. Responding effectively also means creating a classroom culture that encourages emotional safety, where students feel they can express themselves without fear of judgment. This might involve normalizing discussions about emotions, offering supportive feedback, and allowing students to step away from discussions if they feel overwhelmed. A trauma-informed response is about creating a supportive learning environment that adapts to the emotional and cognitive needs of each student.

## Resist Re-Traumatization by Being Mindful of Potential Triggers

Perhaps the most delicate and crucial aspect of trauma-informed teaching is resisting re-traumatization. This involves being acutely aware of potential triggers that could bring students back to painful memories or feelings of helplessness. For refugee students, these triggers could include graphic descriptions of war, discussions about family separation, or images of destruction. Even well-intentioned lessons about displacement or migration can inadvertently cause distress if not handled sensitively. To avoid or limit the risk of re-traumatization, it's important to focus on themes that emphasize resilience, strength, and hope, rather than dwelling on the traumatic aspects of their experiences. Discussing the courage that it takes to rebuild a life in a new country, the sense of community that can form in a supportive environment, or the resilience displayed by those who have faced adversity can provide a more empowering narrative. By focusing on positive, forward-looking discussions, you create a space where students can engage with the material without feeling overwhelmed by their past. Strive to offer students the option to disengage from a lesson or activity if they demonstrate signs of stress, overwhelm, or other symptoms of re-traumatization.



## Classroom Activities with Trauma in Mind

When planning classroom activities, it's important to make them trauma-sensitive, especially when discussing challenging topics such as migration and displacement. Here are a few strategies to consider:

- **Reflection Journals:** Provide a private space for students to reflect on their thoughts and feelings after sensitive lessons. These journals allow students to process emotions privately, without the pressure of sharing publicly, which can be especially helpful for those with trauma histories.
- **Artistic Expression:** Encouraging students to create art related to migration and displacement allows them to express complex emotions in a therapeutic way. This non-verbal outlet can be a powerful tool for processing difficult experiences, particularly for students who might find it challenging to articulate their feelings.
- **Empathy Exercises:** Engage students in activities that build empathy, such as role-playing scenarios where they practice welcoming a new student to the class. These exercises encourage students to step into the shoes of newcomers, fostering a sense of inclusion and understanding.
- **Communication with Parents Through Letters Home:** It is essential to maintain open communication with parents, especially when sensitive topics are being discussed in class. Sending daily letters home can help keep parents informed about the subjects covered in class, allowing them to support their child emotionally. Additionally, for families who may have lived through experiences of displacement, a letter sent prior to the lessons can explain the upcoming topics and offer the option to opt their child out of specific discussions if they may be too triggering. These letters should also offer guidance on how parents can continue the conversation at home and include access to mental health resources if needed.
- **Additional classroom activities** can be found in [UNHCR Guidance for Teachers on Trauma and Stress](#), included in the recommended resources below.

## Additional Considerations

Being a trauma-informed teacher does not require you to have all the answers or be a mental health provider. Instead, it involves recognizing the potential impact of trauma on your students and taking intentional steps to create a classroom that is safe, inclusive, and supportive for all, especially those who have experienced displacement or trauma. Your role is to provide a consistent, nurturing space where students feel emotionally secure, valued, and understood. By adopting trauma-sensitive teaching strategies and fostering a compassionate, respectful classroom environment, you contribute significantly to your students' capacity to engage with the material, build positive relationships, and develop resilience.

Remember, trauma-informed teaching is an ongoing process of learning and adapting. The most important takeaway is that by being aware of your students' emotional and psychological needs, you are helping them not just academically, but holistically, empowering them to thrive in both their education and personal development. It is important to acknowledge your own scope of knowledge and capacity when engaging with students in a trauma-informed way. This section is a brief summary that provides information on trauma-informed teaching. It is helpful to consult with a mental health provider if you have identified a situation that may require further intervention. We hope this curriculum becomes an essential part of your classroom curriculum to build an inclusive, welcoming classroom that honors the diverse experiences of all students.

## Suggested Responses for Sensitive Situations

In teaching about displacement, migration, and community belonging, questions or discussions may sometimes touch on sensitive topics. This section provides guidance for navigating such moments with empathy and respect, helping students feel valued and understood. Here are some suggested responses for teachers to use when addressing common sensitive situations:

### **If a student asks why people can't return to their home countries:**

When students wonder why refugees and others cannot go back to their original homes, it's helpful to offer a compassionate, simple explanation. You might say, "That's an important question. Many people leave because they face dangers like war or threats to their safety, which makes it very hard to return. That's why some countries, including ours, work to help people find new places to live safely." This response helps students grasp the difficult reality faced by many newcomers and reinforces the concept of safety as a basic human need.

### **If a student expresses strong disagreement or discomfort about newcomers in their community:**

It's natural that students may have diverse opinions about newcomers. If a student shares a strong or uncomfortable viewpoint, you might respond by saying, "It's okay to have different opinions, and we're here to learn from each other. Let's focus on listening to and understanding different perspectives, even if they're not the same as ours." This approach respects individual viewpoints while emphasizing empathy, understanding, and the value of diverse perspectives in learning.

### **If a student shares a traumatic personal story in class:**

In discussions around migration, a student may sometimes share a personal story involving trauma or hardship. If this occurs, acknowledge their courage in sharing and gently offer follow-up support. You might say, "Thank you for trusting us with your story. If you'd like to talk more about it later, we can find a time and a quiet space to do so, or I can help connect you with someone who's here to support you." This response shows appreciation for their openness while also providing a path for additional support outside of the classroom setting if needed.

## If a student uses insensitive language unintentionally:

When students use language that might be hurtful or insensitive without realizing it, it's an opportunity to guide them toward more respectful communication. You might respond with, "You might not know, but that word can make people feel hurt or uncomfortable. Let's find other words to express our thoughts respectfully." This gentle correction allows students to learn from the situation without feeling judged or embarrassed, helping them grow in awareness and empathy.

## Continued Learning Opportunities

Expand your Learning as an Educator

- [Welcoming America: Building Welcoming Schools: A Guide for K-12 Educators and After-School Providers](#)
- [Strategies for Supporting Newcomer and Immigrant Families Navigating the School System](#)
- [Promoting Equity and Excellence for All: Welcoming and Teaching Newcomer Children in U.S. Schools](#)
- [Creating Compassionate Schools: Supporting Unaccompanied Refugee Children](#)

# Setting Classroom Guidelines

## for Conversations on Migration and Displacement

Before we begin learning about migration and displacement, we recommend the classroom works together to create a classroom contract, if the classroom doesn't already have one. This contract can help ensure that everyone feels safe, respected, and valued during our discussions. A classroom contract sets clear expectations for how we listen, share, and treat one another, especially on topics that may be sensitive for some classmates. With a shared understanding in place, we can build a supportive environment where everyone feels comfortable participating, learning, and sharing. Below are some suggested guidelines to consider including in your contract as we begin exploring these important topics together.

- **Listening Carefully and Using "I" Statements:** When someone is talking, let's all listen carefully. When it's your turn to share, talk about what you think or feel by using "I" statements, like "I think" or "I feel." This helps keep the focus on sharing our own experiences and ideas, which makes it easier for everyone to feel comfortable.
- **Respecting Each Other's Privacy:** Some of us may have personal stories about moving or leaving a place, but no one should feel they have to share their story unless they want to. Talking about personal experiences can sometimes be hard, so we won't ask classmates to share if they don't bring it up themselves. This way, everyone can feel safe to participate in a way that feels right for them.
- **Keeping Stories Private:** To keep our classroom a safe place to share, we won't talk about who said what when we leave class. You can talk about what you learned, but don't mention anyone's specific stories or personal experiences. This builds trust and helps everyone feel comfortable speaking up.
- **Think About How Words Affect Others:** It's important to remember that sometimes, even if we don't mean to, our words can hurt. If something we say or do upsets someone, we'll take responsibility for it and try to make it right. This helps us all learn to be mindful of each other's feelings and build a respectful classroom.



- **Being Brave When Things Feel Hard:** Learning about new things can sometimes feel uncomfortable, but that's okay. If you feel safe doing so, try to be open to new ideas, even when they feel a little challenging. If something feels too overwhelming, it's okay to take a step back.
- **It's Okay to Disagree:** We may not all agree on everything, and that's okay. Disagreeing is part of learning! Let's focus on understanding each other instead of trying to change each other's minds. Respectful disagreement helps us learn from each other and see things in new ways.
- **Inviting Each Other to Learn Together:** If someone says something that might seem hurtful, let's invite them to learn more about why those words could be upsetting, rather than "calling them out." This helps everyone feel safe to learn and grow together.
- **Understanding Different Points of View:** Remember, we can hold more than one idea in our heads at the same time. Different experiences can mean different truths, and it's important to respect each perspective. This helps us appreciate each other's backgrounds and stories.
- **Balancing Talking and Listening:** Everyone should have a chance to share. If you're usually quiet, try to share a bit more. If you're usually talkative, try listening more. This way, everyone gets a turn, and we can all learn from each other.
- **It's Okay to Share "First Draft" Ideas:** When we're learning together, it's okay if our ideas aren't fully formed or perfect. Think of what you say as a "first draft." This is a space where we can share, even if our ideas aren't fully worked out. We're here to help each other learn and grow.

# Building a Classroom Library for Long-Term Learning

To encourage long-term learning about refugee experiences and global stories of migration that foster empathy and understanding among students, we encourage teachers to build a classroom library. The main reading tool in this course is *Brothers in Hope* by Mary Williams, which offers rich opportunities for discussion and activities to deepen students' understanding of the refugee experience. Many activities are included in the presentation slides to guide students through exploring themes of courage, resilience, and hope presented in the book.

For teachers looking to incorporate additional or alternative books, here is a curated list that provides diverse perspectives on displacement, migration, and belonging:



- ***When the Stars Are Scattered* by Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson:** This graphic novel, based on a true story, follows the journey of two brothers in a refugee camp in Kenya, capturing the challenges and friendships that shape their lives.
- ***Refugee* by Alan Gratz:** A suspenseful novel that intertwines the stories of three young refugees across different times and places—Nazi Germany, 1990s Cuba, and modern-day Syria.
- ***We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* by Malala Yousafzai:** A powerful collection of real-life stories from refugee girls, told by Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai, that highlights courage and hope.
- ***Welcome to the New World* by Jake Halpern:** A graphic novel based on the true story of a Syrian family adapting to life in America, which introduces readers to the challenges and resilience of newcomers.
- ***Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga:** A beautifully written novel-in-verse that tells the story of a young girl from Syria adjusting to a new life in the United States.
- ***Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhà Lai:** A moving novel-in-verse about a young girl fleeing Vietnam with her family and finding herself in a completely new environment in Alabama.
- ***A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park:** Following the dual stories of two young people in Sudan, this novel offers insight into survival, hope, and the resilience.
- ***The Night Diary* by Veera Hiranandani:** A historical novel set during the partition of India and Pakistan, told through the diary entries of a young girl grappling with identity and belonging.
- ***Alone: The Journeys of Three Young Refugees* by Paul Tom:** A nonfiction account that follows three young refugees from different parts of the world, capturing their challenges and determination to rebuild their lives.

These books offer students diverse perspectives and real-life insights into the challenges and triumphs faced by refugees and newcomers. Including these books in your classroom library supports students' ongoing learning about empathy, resilience, and global citizenship. You might consider organizing your library into thematic categories (e.g., "Personal Journeys," "Courage and Resilience," "Finding Belonging") to guide students toward books that resonate with their interests.

# Closing Thoughts

Thank you for your dedication to fostering a welcoming, inclusive classroom environment with *Bridges to Belonging: Welcoming Newcomers to Our Classrooms and Community*. Through this curriculum, you are empowering students to understand the value of compassion, empathy, and community belonging. Each lesson, activity, and resource are designed to support meaningful conversations and inspire students to embrace diversity, appreciate the strength of newcomers, and become global citizens and local ambassadors of welcome in their communities.

We hope this guide serves as a valuable tool, helping you lead thoughtful and trauma-informed discussions on topics of migration, displacement, and belonging. As you work with students to create a classroom where everyone feels valued and supported, know that you are building bridges of understanding that can have a lasting impact on each child's perspective and sense of global citizenship.

Thank you for bringing these important lessons to life, and for helping to build a generation of compassionate, informed, and welcoming young people. We encourage you to reach out to us with any questions about the implementation of this tool or to share images of your classroom utilizing this toolkit [refugeewelcome@cwsglobal.org](mailto:refugeewelcome@cwsglobal.org).



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