

Small Island Read 2007

# Activity Pack

Benjamin Zephaniah's

# refugee boy



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Please photocopy as many of these sheets as you need for your group.

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**Answers to Word-Search Quiz:** 1. Milford 2. Great Expectations 3. Spaghetti 4. Ireland 5. Mrs Kumar  
6. Owen 7. Manor Park 8. Forest 9. Pithead 10. Leonie 11. Haile Selasse 12. Tabbas Noor 13. Euro Racer  
14. Ethiopia 15. Gulf War 16. Asmara 17. Fernandez 18. Chile 19. Desta 20. East.

**Communities of Britain:** the names hidden in the box are – **Across:** Scottish, Jute, Irish, English, Tamil, Celt, Indian, Iraqi, Roman, Saxon, Afghan; **Down:** Bangladeshi, Kurdish, Spanish, Vietnamese, Pict, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Japanese; **Diagonal:** Bosnian, Bajan.

# Introduction

*Small Island Read 2007* brings together Aye Write! the Glasgow book festival, the Great Reading Adventure (Bristol and the South West), Hull Libraries and Liverpool Reads to form the largest mass-reading project that has ever taken place in Britain.

2007 marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade and *Small Island Read 2007* is part of a wider national initiative commemorating the ending of the trade and exploring its continuing influence upon Britain.

Confident adult readers in the locations covered by the project are being encouraged to read Andrea Levy's award-winning novel *Small Island*. This has been chosen not only because it is an entertaining and enjoyable read but also because it provides an insight into the initial post-war contact between black Jamaican migrants – descendants of enslaved Africans – and the white 'Mother Country'.

To encourage younger and emergent adult readers to feel part of the project, we are also using Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy*. This has been chosen for the thought-provoking way in which it highlights the contribution to this country made by asylum seekers and other immigrants.

*Refugee Boy* tells the story of Alem, a young boy with an Ethiopian father and Eritrean mother, who is left alone in London and needs all his courage as he faces up to the British justice system. It is a powerful and topical novel that demands to be read.

In this activity pack you will find information about the author Benjamin Zephaniah, a chapter-by-chapter summary of the novel, questions and activities linked to the book, some poems and Word Search quizzes. The pack can be used in supervised classroom activities, in self-directed group-work in schools, colleges, libraries and reading groups, or by individual readers interested in finding out more about the themes and issues raised by the book.

Further information about migration and its links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade can be found on the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com) along with news of the events taking place as part of the project. The website also includes a downloadable version of this pack in PDF and Word formats.

# Benjamin Zephaniah

My full name is Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah which is Christian, Jewish and Muslim. I was born in the district of Handsworth in Birmingham. My poetry is strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and I can't remember a time when I was not creating poetry. This had nothing to do with school where poetry meant very little to me, infact I had finished full time education at the age of 13.

I wanted to reach more people so at the age of 22 I headed south to London where Page One Books published my first book *Pen Rhythm*. My mission was to take poetry everywhere and I was able to do this through performing my poems directly to the people.

I try to write poems that are fun but they should also have a serious message. I am very concerned about racism, animal rights, pollution and I have always believed that boys and girls should be treated equally. I hate wars and I think it is not right that adults should tell children not to deal with disputes by fighting and then those same adults go and fight in wars. I think armies should be banned.

I love jogging, Kung Fu, football, collecting old banknotes and exploring woods and forests. Most of my best friends are animals and I am passionate about being vegan. I have written seven plays, seven books for adults and five books for children which are: *Talking Turkeys, Funky Chickens, Face, Refugee Boy* and *Wicked World*.

I have travelled around the world many times and my favourite countries for performing are in Asia and Africa. I now live in the East End of London right next door to West Ham Football ground but I still support the best team in the world – Aston Villa!

The above biography is taken from the **A Poet Called Benjamin Zephaniah** website – [www.benjaminzephaniah.com](http://www.benjaminzephaniah.com). Visit the website for articles by and about the author along with some of his poems.

# Refugee Boy: Summary

Life is not safe for Alem. His father is Ethiopian, and his mother Eritrean – and with both countries at war, he is welcome in neither place. So his father does an astonishing thing, which at first appears callous, but is in fact the ultimate gift of love from a parent to their child...

This section gives a chapter-by-chapter summary of Benjamin Zephaniah's novel. This summary is designed to help you remember what happened when, so you can go back to the book and refer to what you have read. If you read this before you have read the book your enjoyment may be spoiled as it gives away some of the twists in the plot.

**Ethiopia** Soldiers kick down the door of a house and tell Alem and his family they must leave Ethiopia or die. **Eritrea** Soldiers kick down the door of a house and tell Alem and his family they must leave Eritrea or die.

**Chapter 1: Welcome to the Weather** Alem and his father, Mr Kelo, arrive at Heathrow and go to a hotel in the village of Datchet near Reading. They spend the next day seeing the sights in London.

**Chapter 2: Alone in the Country** Alem wakes up the following morning alone in the hotel room. The hotel manager gives him a letter from Mr Kelo. It says that his father has gone back to Ethiopia but that it is best that Alem stays in Britain for now where he will be safe. Two women from the Refugee Council called Mariam and Pamela come to visit Alem and ask to hear his story.

**Chapter 3: This is War** Alem tells about the difficulties he and his family faced because of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. They were not welcome in either country.

**Chapter 4: Asylum Seeking** Alem leaves the hotel with Mariam and Pamela and is taken to their office where they fill in his application form for asylum. They have arranged for him to stay at a children's home.

**Chapter 5: Welcome Home** Alem arrives at the home and meets some of the staff and children. He is threatened by a tough boy. Another boy, called Mustafa, tells him that the bully is called Sweeney. Alem shares a room with a boy called Stanley who has a nightmare during the night.

**Chapter 6: Meet the Lads** At breakfast Mustafa gives Alem more advice. Alem gets into a fight with Sweeney.

**Chapter 7: The Road to Nowhere** That night, Alem runs away from the home. The next morning he finds he has been walking in circles and is back near the home again. He goes inside. Mariam comes to see him. She has a social worker called Sheila with her. They have arranged for Alem to visit a foster family. On the way to see the family, Alem is taken to the Home Office for a screening as part of the asylum application process.

**Chapter 8: The Family's Fine** Alem meets Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald and their daughter Ruth and decides he would like to stay with them. He spends a couple of weeks settling in then asks if he can go to school.

**Chapter 9: First Class** Alem starts school and makes friends with a boy called Robert. That evening Mariam comes to see Alem, bringing a letter from his father. It contains bad news: Alem's mother is missing.

**Chapter 10: What the Papers Say** Alem goes back to school. He makes another friend, called Buck. Mariam comes to see him again. She says that the Home Office is not happy with his application for asylum. They will have to go to appeal. She gives him a folder full of newspaper cuttings complaining about asylum seekers.

**Chapter 11: A Way with Words** Alem is told the date of his appeal hearing. It will be early in the New Year. He continues to work hard at school the rest of the term. He spends his Christmas money on a bike.

**Chapter 12: Court in Action** Alem explores the local area on his bike. He goes to court for his appeal hearing and meets Nicholas Morgan, his barrister. The hearing is adjourned until February to allow time for further reports to be prepared.

**Chapter 13: Loved and Lost** Mariam comes to the house with another letter from Mr Kelo. Alem's mother has been murdered.

**Chapter 14: Life After Death** Sheila and Nicholas visit Alem to discuss his appeal. After a few days off, he goes back to school. He brings Robert home to meet the Fitzgeralds.

**Chapter 15: The Africans** The next day, after school, Alem and Robert go to see Buck's band rehearse then visit a friend of Robert's called Asher, a Rastafarian. Alem and Robert plan to go on a bike ride.

**Chapter 16: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner** Alem and Robert enjoy their ride but Alem's bike is stolen on his way home. Unexpectedly, Mr Kelo comes to see him. He and Alem go out to dinner together.

**Chapter 17: Campsfield** The next day Mr Kelo is supposed to be coming to dinner at the Fitzgeralds' house but he has been arrested and taken to a detention centre. Nicholas will be appearing in court with Mr Kelo and will ask for bail.

**Chapter 18: Real Men Cry** Mr Kelo is given bail and moves into a shabby hotel used for asylum seekers. Alem visits him. After a trip to see the Millennium Dome, Mr Kelo takes Alem to the offices of the East African Solidarity Trust.

**Chapter 19: Court Again** Alem goes to his hearing. His application for asylum is turned down. He and Mr Kelo must go back to Ethiopia. They are allowed to put in another appeal.

**Chapter 20: This is Politics** Robert wants to organise a protest about the treatment of Alem and his father. Sheila comes to say that Alem must leave the Fitzgeralds and live in the hotel with Mr Kelo. Alem and Mr Kelo go to a meeting of the protest group and are amazed by the support they have.

**Chapter 21: The Freedom Dance** Alem moves into the hotel. The protest group has a campaign meeting. There is a benefit gig at the school.

**Chapter 22: The Word on the Street** Hundreds of people attend a rally in support of Alem and Mr Kelo and present a petition to the local MP.

**Chapter 23: This is War Too** Alem is awarded a Positive Pupil Certificate at school. Alem goes back to the hotel to show his father his certificate. He is not there. Sheila and Mariam arrive to say that Mr Kelo has been shot dead in the street. Alem goes back to live with the Fitzgeralds. He has a date for his new appeal.

**Chapter 24: The News** There is a news report about Mr Kelo's death. The police think the killing was political.

**Chapter 25: Judgement Day** Alem is granted leave to stay in Britain.

**Chapter 26: The End?** Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace treaty.

**Chapter 27: Let Me Speak** Alem makes a personal statement.

# Refugee Boy: Questions for Discussion

- ▶ Why do you think Mr Kelo tries to put on an upper-class English accent when he talks to the customs officer? (P14) How do people judge one another by the sound of a voice? Why do people use stereotypes?
- ▶ What does Mr Hardwick mean when he says 'I've never forgotten my roots'? (P20) What do you mean when you refer to your own roots?
- ▶ What changes do you think Alem would like to have made to London? (P22) How would you describe his reaction to being in a foreign city?
- ▶ How do you think Mr Kelo felt when he was planning the trip to England with Alem? How do you think Mrs Kelo felt back home?
- ▶ Why does Alem feel humiliated by what happens during the screening at the Home Office? (P83) How would you feel in that situation?
- ▶ How does Alem cope with the news about his mother's disappearance? (P114) How does this differ from his response to the news he receives later of her death?
- ▶ Apart from his parents, what do you think are the things Alem misses about his life back home? What do you think the word 'home' means to him?
- ▶ Why do you think Robert wants to tell Alem that his own parents were refugees? (P176)
- ▶ Why do you think Alem is so keen to keep going to school despite all that happens to him? What does an education mean to him?
- ▶ How do the Fitzgeralds react to Alem's experiences? To what extent are they able to support Alem? Who are the most helpful people he meets?
- ▶ Why do you think Mr Kelo wants Alem to know that real men cry? (P216)
- ▶ Why can Alem sense that something is wrong at the second hearing, even before the adjudicator gives his decision? (P231) Were you surprised by the verdict? Why?
- ▶ What does Alem mean when he says 'everything is politics' (P239)? Do you agree? Why?
- ▶ What words would you use to describe Alem? To what extent is he changed by his experiences?
- ▶ How does the author present people in authority in the book?
- ▶ Which characters did you find the most interesting? Why?
- ▶ How would you describe the tone of the book?
- ▶ What have you learnt about the treatment of asylum seekers from reading this book? How effective is the book in raising awareness of this issue?
- ▶ Benjamin Zephaniah has said of *Refugee Boy*: "I would like to know that anyone who reads the book would think before they accuse refugees of looking for a free ride. We all want to live in peace, we all want the best for our families. The Celts, the Angles, the Saxons, the Jamaicans are all refugees of one sort or another. What kind of a refugee are you? And what are you scared of?" Do you think this book will change people's attitude to refugees? Why? What books have you read previously that have changed your point of view?

# Role Playing

Read again the description of queuing in the supermarket on pages 271-273.

- ▶ **In small groups, decide who is going to play each of the different characters in this scene. These include:**

Alem

Mr Kelo

The cashier on the vouchers queue

A cashier on one of the other queues

One of the other people waiting in the vouchers queue

One of the other shoppers in the supermarket

**Keeping in character, take it in turns to tell the others**

Who you are

Why you are here

What you are feeling at this moment

What you think about the other people around you

What you would like to say to them

- ▶ **What might happen if these characters were in a different situation? If, for example, they were trapped in a lift or were patients in a hospital ward or were in the middle of a war zone?**

Experiment with different situations and see how this might change the way the characters act and feel, and how they might respond to one another.



# Refugee Boy: Word-Search Quiz

► Find the missing words in the Word Search box below. Answers can run vertically, horizontally and diagonally. Letters can be used more than once.

1. Alem goes to Great \_\_\_\_\_ School.
2. His class is reading \_\_\_\_\_.
3. One of his favourite foods is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald were born in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Alem's form teacher is called \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Alem reads the poetry of Wilfred \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The Fitzgeralds live in an area called \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The hotel for asylum seekers is at \_\_\_\_\_ Gate.
9. Buck's band is called \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The local MP is Mrs \_\_\_\_\_ Ranks.
11. Asher has a picture of \_\_\_\_\_ on his wall.
12. The Palestinian man Alem meets is called \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Alem plays the computer game \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Tibra's family comes from \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Stanley's father was killed in the \_\_\_\_\_.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ is a city in Eritrea.
17. Robert's real surname is \_\_\_\_\_.
18. His family comes from \_\_\_\_\_.
19. The woman from the Refugee Council is called Mariam \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Alem catches the train at \_\_\_\_\_ Ham Underground station.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G | S | P | A | G | H | E | T | T | I |
| R | A | P | I | T | H | E | A | D | M |
| E | A | S | T | J | F | L | B | X | R |
| A | W | R | Z | Y | O | V | B | T | S |
| T | M | A | N | O | R | P | A | R | K |
| E | L | I | N | E | E | P | S | H | U |
| X | C | E | L | O | S | Q | N | A | M |
| P | A | H | O | F | T | U | O | I | A |
| E | G | S | I | N | O | T | O | L | R |
| C | N | I | M | L | I | R | R | E | B |
| T | W | C | H | A | E | E | D | S | K |
| A | E | U | R | O | R | A | C | E | R |
| T | V | D | E | S | T | A | E | L | O |
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| N | G | U | L | F | W | A | R | S | N |
| S | F | E | R | N | A | N | D | E | Z |

# We Refugees by Benjamin Zephaniah

I come from a musical place  
Where they shoot me for my song  
And my brother has been tortured  
By my brother in my land.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where they hate my shade of skin  
They don't like the way I pray  
And they ban free poetry.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where girls cannot go to school  
There you are told what to believe  
And even young boys must grow beards.

I come from a great old forest  
I think it is now a field  
And the people I once knew  
Are not there now.

We can all be refugees  
Nobody is safe,  
All it takes is a mad leader  
Or no rain to bring forth food,  
We can all be refugees  
We can all be told to go,  
We can be hated by someone  
For being someone.

I come from a beautiful place  
Where the valley floods each year  
And each year the hurricane tells us  
That we must keep moving on.

I come from an ancient place  
All my family were born there  
And I would like to go there  
But I really want to live.

I come from a sunny, sandy place  
Where tourists go to darken skin  
And dealers like to sell guns there  
I just can't tell you what's the price.

I am told I have no country now  
I am told I am a lie  
I am told that modern history books  
May forget my name.

We can all be refugees  
Sometimes it only takes a day,  
Sometimes it only takes a handshake  
Or a paper that is signed.  
We all came from refugees  
Nobody simply just appeared,  
Nobody's here without a struggle,  
And why should we live in fear  
Of the weather or the troubles?  
We all came here from somewhere.

This poem is from Benjamin Zephaniah's  
*Wicked World* published by Puffin Books  
(ISBN 0 14 130683 1).

© Benjamin Zephaniah

# Ethiopia and Eritrea

Alem's family is caught up in the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The conflict between the two countries began in 1998 in the border region of Badme, where Alem was born. The Ethiopians accused the Eritrean army of occupying land there that belonged to Ethiopia, but the Eritreans claimed the land belonged to them.

Eritrea was ruled as a province of Ethiopia from 1962 to 1993. When Eritrea first gained its independence, ownership of Badme did not seem to be of interest to either side. However, as relations between the two neighbours deteriorated, the border dispute escalated into a war in which hundreds of thousands of people died.

The Eritreans' claim to the disputed territory was based upon a treaty drawn up in 1902 between the Italian government and the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II. At that time Eritrea was an Italian colony while Ethiopia was an independent state. During the nineteenth century, the most powerful European countries had divided much of Africa up into colonies so they could claim the gold, cocoa, diamonds, palm oil, ivory and other valuable goods produced there. Although the colonies are now independent, the divisions created then can still lead to conflicts and people being forced to live as refugees.

*Refugee Boy* ends with the signing of the peace treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea in December 2000. Use the internet and newspapers to find out what is happening in this region of Africa today and write a short news bulletin report based on what you find.

Read *Chapter 3: This is War* again. Imagine you are one of the Eritrean children who pick on Alem at school. Why do you want to hurt him? Do you *really* hate him because his father is Ethiopian? Or are you just joining in because you don't want to be left out by the other children? What does it feel like to be a bully? Write an imaginary diary entry about what you think about Alem and why you treat him the way you do.



# Communities of Britain Word-Search

- Hidden in this box are 21 names describing some of the many people who have made their home in Britain, all of whom are mentioned somewhere in this pack. Can you find them? Words run horizontally, vertically and diagonally. Letters can be used more than once.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | S | C | O | T | T | I | S | H | H | A |
| A | O | J | U | T | E | I | R | I | S | H |
| N | C | S | T | W | N | V | F | Y | N | J |
| G | C | E | N | G | L | I | S | H | M | A |
| L | T | A | M | I | L | E | C | T | B | P |
| A | C | E | L | T | A | T | I | R | J | A |
| D | B | V | R | H | I | N | D | I | A | N |
| E | V | A | A | V | L | A | M | N | M | E |
| S | K | S | J | O | M | M | P | I | A | S |
| H | U | P | T | A | E | E | I | D | I | E |
| I | R | A | Q | I | N | S | C | A | C | M |
| D | D | N | Y | F | B | E | T | D | A | V |
| G | I | I | R | O | M | A | N | I | N | B |
| B | S | S | S | A | X | O | N | A | A | T |
| N | H | H | A | F | G | H | A | N | I | Y |

# Asylum Seekers

Mariam gives Alem a file filled with cuttings from newspapers that criticise asylum seekers.

The word 'asylum seeker' is used to describe someone who has entered a country and asked for protection by applying for refugee status. Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their own country. They might have been at risk because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or some other thing that made them a target. If the authorities in the country they flee to do not believe they are at risk and therefore do not recognise them as being genuine refugees, their application for asylum will be turned down. When this happens they are usually sent back to the country they came from.

Some people in Britain worry that there are too many people seeking asylum here and the country cannot afford to support these newcomers. They fear that Britain may be seen as a 'soft touch' by accepting applications, and that more and more people will come here to take advantage of our health and education systems. While they are waiting for their applications to be processed, asylum seekers are often sent to live on housing estates where the local people may resent them because they think they are getting special treatment. Those whose applications are unsuccessful are frequently called 'bogus' by the press and this label is then used to describe any asylum seeker, as if they are all trying to trick their way into the country with false claims.

It is fears like these that lead to the headlines in Mariam's folder.

Not all people respond to this issue in the same way. Search through newspapers and the internet for stories about asylum seekers and immigrants and see if you can recognise the different viewpoints being presented. Do you think news reports should be neutral or should they take a particular point of view? Is it possible for media coverage to avoid generalisations and stereotypes when referring to groups of people? Why? Read the Personal Stories on the following page. To what extent are voices like these reflected in the media coverage you've seen?

Read Benjamin Zephaniah's poem 'We Refugees' in this pack. Imagine something happens in this country that forces you to become a refugee and to seek asylum elsewhere. It could happen to anyone at anytime. Imagine you have had to leave your family and all your possessions behind you. You may have already been forced to flee another country to get here and are having to move again. Are the people in the country you go to kind to you? Or do they treat you with suspicion or hatred? Write your own poem about how it feels to be forced to look for a home in another country.

## Personal Stories

The following words are from a group of young people from Afghanistan living in Britain. They worked with Bluecoat Arts Centre and Humberto Velez for the Welcoming project commissioned by Liverpool Biennial: *International 06*, during the summer of 2006.

“Whenever I go to play football and they ask me where I am from, I say Afghanistan. They look at me somehow. They think that Bin Laden is Afghani and we are all like Bin Laden.”

“Can I talk about my wishes and hopes? While I’ve been here, I have been everywhere. Like they took me to a few places for a month, and I didn’t know where I was or who I was living with. In the past five months I have been to five cities and I didn’t know where I was. I never had time to go to college or do anything. So how can I talk about my hopes and dreams? I can’t go back to my own country because I’m a minor and I don’t have anyone to look after me. As you know, I should have someone to look after me.”

“I just want to tell everyone to believe us. We are all in the same situation. Some of us have been through a lot, like cousin Reza, and they didn’t believe them. They said Reza was married with children, and how can he be? How can he be married with children? He is only 15.”

“We had so many problems. Like when I was growing up the Taliban came to power and we don’t know where they came from. They ruled the country for six-seven years and they just suppressed everybody. Like if someone stole an egg, they used to cut their hands off and hang them from the ceiling and tell other people to look and say ‘this is what happens if you do this.’ It was horrible. We had so many problems.”

“I think we are just frightened to go out. If we have a problem and we want to ask someone, well, we just avoid doing that. We just keep ourselves away from them. And that is not good, if you can’t ask.”

“I don’t need to be here because I haven’t got any money, because we had lots of money, but we couldn’t live there, there was no where to live. That’s why we left Afghanistan. Even now if I know it is safe, I wouldn’t stay here for more than one hour. I want to go back, if Afghanistan is safe. If it is not safe, we are not comfortable to live there.”

# The British

## Serves 60 million

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures  
And let them settle,  
Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.  
Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years  
Add lots of Norman French to some  
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.  
Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,  
Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,  
Vietnamese and Sudanese.  
Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians  
And Pakistanis,  
Combine with some Guyanese  
And turn up the heat.  
Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,  
Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some  
Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese  
And Palestinians  
Then add to the melting pot.  
Leave the ingredients to simmer.  
As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish  
Binding them together with English.  
Allow time to be cool.  
Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,  
Serve with justice  
And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

This poem is from Benjamin Zephaniah's *Wicked World* published by Puffin Books (ISBN 0 14 130683 1).

© Benjamin Zephaniah

# Coming to Britain

Alem meets lots of people in England who were not born here or whose parents moved here from another country.

People have been living in Britain for about 12,000 years. People did live here before that time – maybe as much as 700,000 year ago – but they died or moved away because of the coming of the Ice Ages. The first ever human beings on Earth lived in Africa about five million years ago. Then, very slowly, they gradually spread out across the rest of the world. That is why in *Refugee Boy* Robert tells Alem: 'I'm an African too.'

Many different groups of people have come to Britain and settled here. Some have chosen to come because they wanted a better life or were invited to work here. Many have had no choice but were forced to leave their own homes and become refugees.

Among the people to come to Britain have been:

- Jewish people escaping persecution in Russia in the nineteenth century and from the Nazis during the 1930s.
- Irish people driven from Ireland by the famine of the 1840s and by mass unemployment in the 1920s.
- Indian labourers who helped to rebuild the bombed cities of Britain after World War Two.
- Pakistani workers recruited to the textile mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the 1960s.
- Ugandan and Kenyan Asians forced to leave Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- Tamils escaping the fighting in Sri Lanka that erupted in the 1980s.
- Somali people escaping the civil war in Somalia, which began in 1991.

You can find out more about migration in the Migration section of the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com).

Read Benjamin Zephaniah's poem 'The British' in this pack. Using local history books, newspapers and the internet, find out about the different groups of people who have come and settled in your own area. The people may not have come from other countries but they may have come from elsewhere in England or Scotland. Write a short report about what you have found out or give a presentation to your class or group. To illustrate your report or presentation, create a map that shows where people have come from (outline maps are provided in this pack).



# Map of the World



# Great Britain and Northern Ireland



# The Transatlantic Slave Trade

**One of the biggest migrations in history was the forced movement of around 15 million enslaved Africans who were transported by ship to the European colonies in America and the Caribbean. This was the Transatlantic Slave Trade.**

The Transatlantic Slave Trade had three stages.

- Stage 1: European traders took goods such as pots and pans, guns and cloth to trading centres on the African coast. There they met with African traders who exchanged people they had enslaved for the goods.
- Stage 2: The enslaved Africans were transported by ship across the Atlantic to colonies owned by Europe in North and South America, and around the Caribbean Sea.
- Stage 3: Having sold the slaves, the traders loaded their ships with goods that had been produced in the colonies using slave labour and took these back to Europe to sell.

2007 is a special year because it marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of the Act that ended the British slave trade. Britain still used enslaved people to work in the colonies and this did not end until the 1830s. However, from 1807 British merchants could no longer trade for slaves in Africa and British ships could no longer carry slaves across the Atlantic.

All the places taking part in *Small Island Read 2007* can be linked to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Slave ships left for Africa from Liverpool, Glasgow, Bristol and other ports in the South West. Hull was the home of William Wilberforce who was among the many people working to bring an end to the slave trade. Any one living in these areas at that time is likely to have used something produced through slave labour – tobacco, sugar, rum, cotton, cocoa and coffee – and might also have been involved in producing the goods that were taken to Africa to trade for slaves.

The slave trade was ended for a number of reasons. One of these was that thousands of people joined together to protest about the treatment of enslaved people. The people who campaigned against the slave trade were called abolitionists. In Britain protest meetings were held, speeches were made in parliament, posters and pamphlets were produced describing the terrible conditions on board slave ships, and people refused to buy goods produced by enslaved people. Out on the plantations the enslaved Africans refused to work, sabotaged equipment, escaped or rose up against their owners. Benjamin Zephaniah's description of the campaign organised to help Alem and his father in *Refugee Boy* is an example of the kind of movement that can develop when people want to make a change.

You can find out more about slavery and its abolition in The Transatlantic Slave Trade section of the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com).

Use local history books and the internet to discover what connections your own part of the world might have had to slavery and its abolition. There may also be information about this in your local museum. Write a short report on what you have found out or give a presentation to your class or group.

► **Discussion Point**

The Church of England has issued an apology for its role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Some people think that more should be done to acknowledge the terrible things that have taken place in the past.

Do you think we should apologise for what people have done in the past, like being involved in the slave trade?

Why?

If there should be an apology, what form should it take? – making a speech, building a statue, setting up a charity to help others, paying money to survivors?

And who should make that apology if no one is alive today who was personally involved in the event? And who should the apology be made to?

What other events in the past might people today be asked to apologise for?

# The Slave Ship

This picture shows how enslaved people were packed on board a typical slave ship, the Brookes. The picture was used by abolitionists to show the terrible conditions in which Africans were transported to the colonies. The Brookes operated from Liverpool.

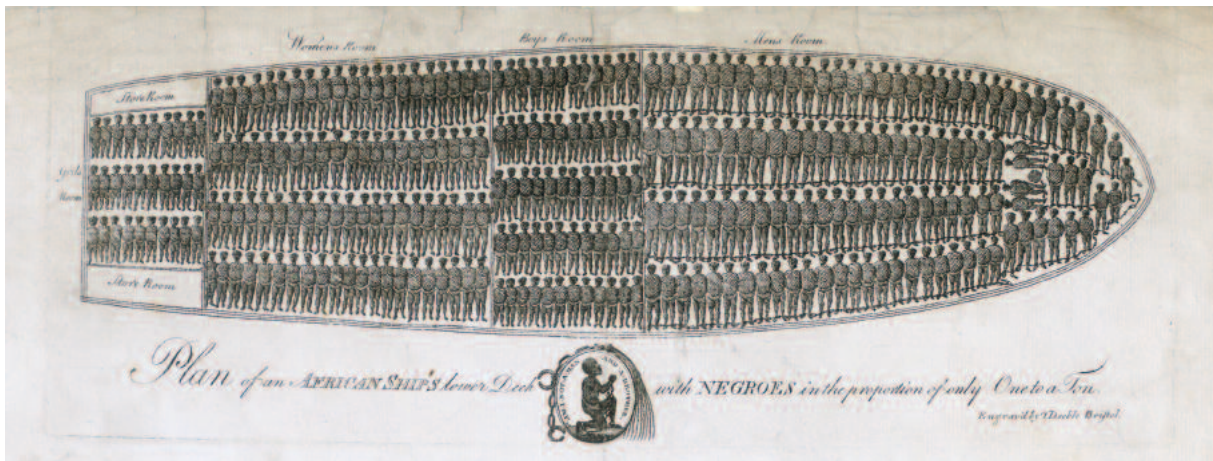
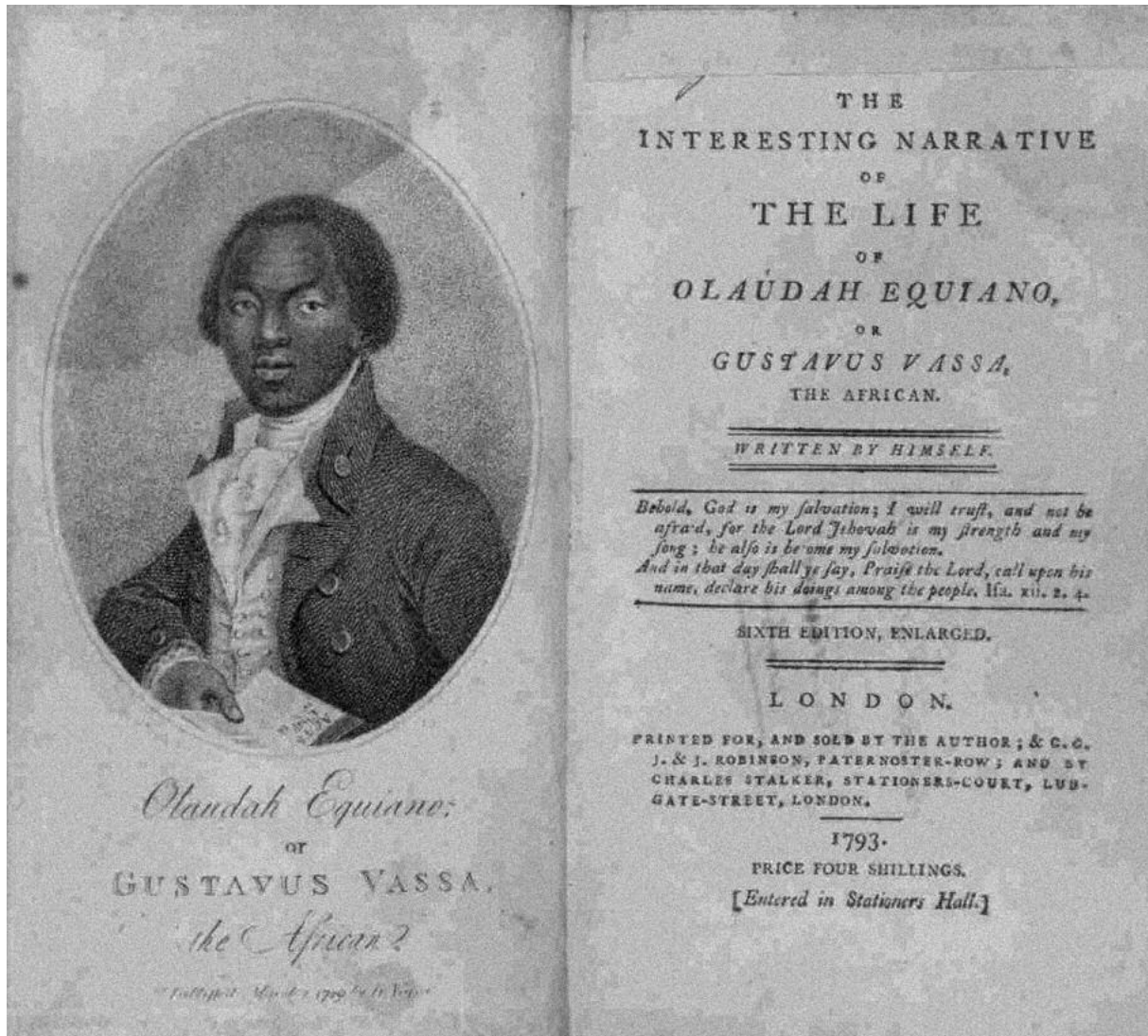


Image from the Bristol Record Office.

Olaudah Equiano was captured by slave traders when he was a young boy and transported to Barbados. He later wrote his autobiography. This extract, adapted from his book, describes his first days on board the ship.

When I was carried on board I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were healthy by some of the crew. I was now certain that I was in a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, confirmed this belief. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if I had owned ten thousand worlds, I would have gladly given them all up to change my place with that of the poorest slave in my own country.

I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a smell in my nostrils, as I had never experienced in my life. With the loathsomeness of the stench and my crying, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least wish to taste any thing. I now longed for Death to relieve me. However, soon two of the white men offered me food. When I refused to eat, one of them held me tightly by the hands, and laid me across the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me severely.



Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, first published 1789.

Imagine you are a young child taken away from your home and family, and carried off upon a slave ship to a strange land thousands of miles across the sea. You and the other enslaved people on board the ship are forced into cramped and dirty holds, given awful food to eat and are badly beaten if you disobey orders. If you could only get one of the crewmen to sit down and listen to you, what words would you use to describe your longing to be free again and back in Africa? How could you make him understand that you are both human beings and therefore equals?

- ▶ Write down or recite the speech you would make. To be effective would you use the type of legal language that Alem's solicitor uses in the appeal court? Or would your speech be more personal?
- ▶ What would you need to draw upon in this situation to retain your sense of pride?

You can find out more about Olaudah Equiano on the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com).

# The Empire Windrush

In *Refugee Boy* Alem meets Asher whose parents came from Jamaica.

Jamaica was one of the British colonies where enslaved Africans were transported to work on the sugar plantations. It is an island in the Caribbean Sea. Slavery officially ended in all the British colonies in 1834 but was followed by four years of an apprenticeship system which meant that the former slaves had to continue working for their masters for 45 hours a week for no pay.

Asher's parents were probably descended from enslaved Africans. They may also have had family links to other people brought to Jamaica to work on the plantations in the nineteenth century including Indian and Chinese labourers, as well as to the white British people living there.

In June 1948 a ship called the *Empire Windrush* arrived in Britain carrying 492 Jamaicans who had left their home in the hope of finding work here. Most thought they would go back to Jamaica in a few years once they had made some money, but many stayed on and settled in Britain, and were later joined by their families. Some had previously come to this country during World War Two when they had volunteered for the armed forces.

After the war Britain needed people to work in what are called essential services – like hospitals and transport – and to rebuild bombed cities, so people from the Caribbean region and elsewhere in the British Commonwealth were encouraged to come here. Benjamin Zephaniah's own mother came to Britain from Jamaica to work as a nurse.

However, although they were needed and had a right to come because they were citizens of the British Commonwealth, these migrants were not always wanted. In Liverpool in August 1948, for example, white mobs attacked hostels where Caribbean people were staying. When newly arrived people looked for rooms to rent they often found notices in the windows saying 'No Blacks, No Dogs Allowed'. Black immigrants were accused of stealing jobs from white people, but also of being lazy scroungers taking advantage of the benefit system.

This was not new. Nearly all of those who have come to Britain were first treated with suspicion and fear. For example, when 50,000 Huguenots escaped to Britain from France in the seventeenth century, textile workers in the East End of London rioted because they thought these refugees would take their jobs. In *Refugee Boy* Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald talk about the hostility they had faced because they were from Ireland. Today asylum seekers and migrants from Eastern Europe receive the same treatment.

But there have also always been those who have welcomed newcomers and made them feel at home, like some of the people who help Alem and his father in *Refugee Boy*. They do not recognise boundaries or borders, but can see that immigrants and refugees are first and foremost human beings.

You can read more about the people who came to Britain on the *Empire Windrush* and other people who emigrated and settled here on the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com).

Look at the photo below of a Caribbean boy at Victoria station in London. When this was first published in June 1962 the caption read: 'Luggage collected, this young fellow is ready to start a new life in Britain.'

Imagine what he is thinking as he walks down those steps, which seem to go on forever, carrying all he owns in his suitcase. He might be excited about what lies ahead, but also curious about this new country, afraid about the unknown, sad to have left people behind. Write a poem describing his thoughts while he is walking. You could try to make the rhythm of the poem match the rhythm of his feet upon the steps and perhaps set the words to music.



Image courtesy of Science and Society Picture Library/NMPFT Daily Herald.



# Who are We?

Look at Benjamin Zephaniah's poem 'The British' in this pack. It lists just some of the different groups who make up the British people, from the long-established settlers to the new arrivals of today. It could include many more groups including the Scottish.

Some people joining in *Small Island Read 2007* will not have been born in Britain. Some will have parents who were born abroad. Some may think they and their family have lived in Britain forever, but if they could look far enough back in history they would find their first ancestor to arrive here. Remember, for millions of years no one lived in Britain at all.

Britain is made up of many different groups of people who come from different backgrounds, races, religions and countries, eat different food, speak different languages or dialects, listen to different music, have different histories and traditions. This is why Britain is sometimes described as being multicultural.

There's a big debate at the moment on how a multicultural society should work.

- We could isolate each of the differences that exist between us and keep people separate from one another.
- We could celebrate the differences together, treating them all as equal.
- We could try to smooth out the differences to make everyone the same.
- We could choose just one of the differences and tell everyone else to be like that.
- Or we can try to do a mixture of all four.

- ▶ **Which do you think is the best option? Why? Are there other options you can think of?**
- ▶ **What do you think it means to be British? Would you ever describe yourself as British? Why?**
- ▶ **Make a list of all the things that make up your own identity and make you who you are. Put the list into order of importance, the most important things at the top.**
- ▶ **How did you decide what order to put them in?**
- ▶ **Does the order change, depending where you are and who you are talking to? Why?**
- ▶ **Compare your list with those of your family, friends and neighbours. What do you learn from this?**

# Resources

The following websites and publications provide further information about the topics raised by *Refugee Boy*. More resources are listed on the *Small Island Read 2007* website at [www.smallislandread.com](http://www.smallislandread.com).

## Non fiction

- Hakim Adi (1995) *The History of the African and Caribbean Communities in Britain* Hodder Wayland
- Floella Benjamin (1997) *Coming to England* Puffin
- David Bygott (1992) *Black and British* Oxford University Press
- Katrina Dunbar (2000) *What's at Issue?... Citizenship and You* Heineman Library
- Clive Gifford (2002) *World Issues: Refugees* Belitha Press Ltd
- Rosemary Rees (1995) *Britain and the Slave Trade* Heineman Ed
- Tom Monaghan (2002) *Events and Outcomes: The Slave Trade* Evans Brothers Ltd
- Carole Seymour-Jones (1992) *Past and Present: Refugees* Heineman Ed
- Rachel Warner (1996) *Refugees* Wayland
- Paul Wignall (2000) *What's at Issue?... Prejudice and Difference* Heineman Library
- Paul Wignall (2001) *What's at Issue?... Multicultural Britain* Heineman Library

## Fiction

- Nina Bawden (1995) *The Real Plato Jones* Puffin
- Marjorie Darke (new edition 2007) *The First of Midnight* Barn Owl Books/Frances Lincoln
- Kate Elizabeth Ernest (1994) *Hope Leaves Jamaica* Mammoth
- Gaye Hicyilmaz (2000) *Girl in Red* Orion
- Mary Hoffman (2003) *The Colour of Home* Frances Lincoln
- Joan Lingard (1999) *Dark Shadows* Puffin
- Pratima Mitchell (2004) *Petar's Song* Frances Lincoln
- Beverley Naidoo (2000) *The Other Side of Truth* Puffin
- James Riordan (2007) *Rebel Cargo* Frances Lincoln
- Robert Swindells (1998) *Smash!* Puffin

See also the bibliography of books about refugees on the Institute of Race Relations website at [http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/refugee\\_bibliography.pdf](http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf/refugee_bibliography.pdf).

## Websites

Anti Slavery International: [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)

Asylum Support: [www.asylumsupport.info](http://www.asylumsupport.info)

Black History Month: links and resources page: [www.black-history-month.co.uk/links.html](http://www.black-history-month.co.uk/links.html)

Moving Here: 200 years of migration to England: [www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)

Refugee Council: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

A fact pack on refugees was produced for Refugee Week 2006. This can be downloaded from the website of the Clifton Diocese in Bristol at [www.cliftondiocese.com/dynamic\\_images/790\\_2dip.pdf](http://www.cliftondiocese.com/dynamic_images/790_2dip.pdf)

Free teachers' notes and classroom sheets for *Refugee Boy* can be downloaded from the Caribbean Schools website. Follow the link to New Windmills from the Help for Teachers page at [www.caribbeanschools.co.uk/Help/Teachers](http://www.caribbeanschools.co.uk/Help/Teachers)

# Feedback Form

Please encourage all your pupils to give us their feedback by helping them each fill in this form once they have read the book and done some or all of the activities. Please return completed forms to Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Bristol BS8 3RA.

**Would you recommend *Refugee Boy* to other readers?**

Yes       No

Why?

**Did you enjoy doing the activities in this pack?**

Yes       No

Why?

**Do you think you have learnt something about slavery and migration by joining in this project?**

Yes       No

Why?

Thank you for your help.