

CHEAT SHEET

Refugee Boy



SUMMARY

Refugee Boy tells the story of Alem Kelo, a 14-year-old boy whose mother is Ethiopian and whose father is Eritrean. Because Ethiopia and Eritrea are at war, his parents' mixed marriage becomes increasingly difficult. During a trip to London, Alem's father abandons him and leaves a letter explaining that he cannot safely return to either country. Alem is suddenly left alone and must seek asylum in the UK. The novel follows Alem's struggles as he navigates the British asylum system, faces uncertainty about his future, and tries to build a new life. Despite many challenges, he finds friendship, support, and hope. The story explores what it means to belong and highlights the difficulties faced by refugees.

CHARACTERS

Character	Brief Overview
Alem Kelo	Alem is the 14-year-old protagonist who is forced to seek asylum in Britain after being abandoned in London by his father.
Mr Kelo (Alem's Father)	Mr Kelo is Eritrean and leaves Alem in Britain because he believes it is the safest option for his son's future.
Mrs Kelo (Alem's Mother)	Mrs Kelo is Ethiopian and is separated from Alem because of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea.
Ruth	Ruth is a member of the Fitzgerald family who becomes one of Alem's closest friends and supports him through his grief and uncertainty.
Mariam	Mariam is Alem's social worker who supports him throughout the asylum process and helps him adjust to life in Britain.
Sheila	Sheila is one of the adults who supports Alem and helps him feel welcomed and valued.
Buck	Buck is one of Alem's school friends who helps him feel accepted and less isolated.
Robert	Robert is a loyal friend who offers Alem friendship, humour, and encouragement during difficult times.
Asylum Officials	Various immigration and asylum officials represent the challenges and uncertainty of the British asylum system.
The Fitzgerald Family	The Fitzgerald family support Alem and demonstrate the kindness and compassion that refugees can receive from others.

VOCABULARY

Persecution	Unfair or cruel treatment over a long period of time because of race, religion, or political beliefs
Migrant	A migrant is a person who moves from one place to another, often to find work or a better home.
Refugee	Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.

T H E M E S

CONFLICT, MIGRATION, IDENTITY, BELONGING, PREJUDICE, RESILLIENCE, LAW, FAMILY, FRIENDSHIP

KEY MOMENTS

Moment	Discussion
Pre-reading	Please share resources on slides 5-13 (it doesn't have to be all of them but certainly the definitions of refugee, migrant and the clip on slide 11 and 13.
Alem and his father arrive at the airport (pg. 6)	There are lots of 'everyday' images and scenarios in this novel (airport, school) and it would be good for students to consider their perception of these places and then how this would be different for Alem and his father. Please refer to PP.
Alem's father leaves a letter explaining his decision (pg. 25)	Alem's father explains why he left Alem in the UK. Students should debate whether they think he is doing the right thing. Refer to PP.
Mr Kelo explains that he would fight for peace (pg. 34)	Alem's family are confronted by police and they ask them whether they would fight for Ethiopia or Eritrea. Mr Kelo explains that he would fight for peace. Students should debate whether this is possible. Refer to PP.
Alem describes life at home in Africa (pg. 35-6)	Alem describes the challenges of being from Ethiopian and Eritrean heritage as he isn't accepted from either side. Refer to PP.

Moment	Discussion
Alem's Screening (pg. 77)	As part of the Home Office's process, Alem is 'screened' which he finds humiliating. Sheila explains to him how unfair the system is. Refer to PP.
Alem receives information about refugees in the UK (pg. 123)	Mariam and Sheila hand Alem newspaper articles and information about the perception of refugees in the UK. Please refer to PP.
Alem and Robert discuss their cultural heritage (pg. 171)	Robert reveals that he is Chilean. Robert and Alem discuss whether the former would ever visit Chile again. Refer to PP.
Alem's friends organise a protest against the judge's decision (pg. 232)	Alem's friends organise a protest against the judge's decision and hand a petition that 6000 people have signed to appeal the judge's decision. Refer to PP.

TRIGGER MOMENTS

Moment	SUMMARY
The novel opens in conflict (pg 1)	The novel opens in conflict and describes how Alem's home is broken into and his family are threatened by soldiers.
Alem's family home is attacked (pg. 33-34)	Police invade and destroy Alem's home. They question Alem's parents and physically assault his father. The family are forced to move and Alem is attacked at his new school.
Alem is housed into a care home (pg. 45)	Alem is taken into a children's care home which is shared with many other boys.
Alem's roommate experiences trauma (pg. 55)	The reader is told that Stanley's dad is dead and his mother is mentally unwell. Stanley discusses how he wants to die a hero, like his dad, who was killed in the Gulf war. We also learn how his mother abused him after his father's death and would lock him in a dark room for hours at a time. Stanley is traumatised by this.
Alem and Sweeney fight (pg. 64)	Sweeney intimidates Alem; Alem confronts this and the boys physically fight. At first, Sweeney overpowers Alem but, eventually, he fights back.

Moment	SUMMARY
Headteacher explains an instance of knife crime in school (pg. 92)	The headteacher at Alem's new school explains two pupils have been excluded because they bought knives into school. He explains how a teacher was stabbed recently and this will not be tolerated.
Robert offers Alem a cigarette (pg. 100)	Robert offers a cigarette to Alem
Alem receives a letter from his Father (pg. 106)	Alem's father describes life at home and there is a grotesque description of war where people's body parts are scattered on the street.
Alem learns his mother is dead (pg. 149)	Alem receives a letter from his father that explains his mother has been killed. Later on in the novel, we learn she suffered a violent death.
Alem's grief (pg. 153-157)	The narrator describes Alem's reaction to his mother's death.
Alem's bike is stolen (pg. 186)	After enjoying his day with Robert, Alem is confronted by people a little older than him and they force Alem to give them his bikes.
Reference to Alem Mother's death (pg. 223)	In court, Nicholas gives a horrible description of Alem mother's death, explaining she was 'hacked to death'. This is the first time Alem learns how his mother died.
Reference to Palestine (pg. 243)	Abass mentions he is from Palestine. When Alem questions where this is, Abass responds 'Palestine has been taken off the map'. Given our current context, it might be worth mentioning how whilst this book was written a while ago, this conflict and tension is longstanding.
Alem and his father are verbally abused during the protest (pg. 257)	Alem and his father are verbally abused during the protest. They are called P***. Clearly this is a racist slur as it's an inaccurate comment made based on the colour of their skin. Please explain to students that this word is a racial slur and students should simply say P when reading it.
Alem's father has been killed (pg. 275)	Alem learns from Sheila and Mariam that his father has been shot. We never know who did this but we understand it was politically motivated.