

BOOK CLUB WITH A PURPOSE

The best reading and writing assignments for students are those that are authentic. I always have my students participate in Book Clubs where they read the same book as three or four other students in class and then have time set aside for discussions, but last year, we took those Book Clubs and added another level.

Instead of the groups of students reading any book, we focused on **nonfiction books written about or by refugees**. I worked with our school librarian who was able to purchase some of the books with a grant we applied for, and then we were able to get the others through interlibrary loan. It was eye-opening for the students to read about people who have lived through some terrible ordeals.

These are the books we read:

The Latecomer by Kao Kalia Yang

How Dare the Sun Rise by Sandra Uwiringiyimana

Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario

City of Thorns by Ben Rawlence

I Will Always Write Back by Caitlin Aliferenka and Martin Ganda

Every Falling Star by Sungju Lee

Here's where the authenticity comes into the assignment. In addition to reading the books, I arranged for a speaker from St. Paul, Minn., to come in. He shared his experiences of being a refugee from Somalia as well as the work he currently does with refugees living in the Midwest. The students also read articles that provided both positives and negatives about allowing refugees into the United States. With their heads full, the students participated in a Socratic Seminar where they were able to synthesize the information from the books, speaker and articles. Finally, they wrote letters to an elected official where they took a stance on whether or not the United States should allow more refugees into the country. The students were pleased when they received responses back.

The benefits for the students were three-fold. First, the students were able to have choice in what they read. Second, they had the shared experience of reading a nonfiction book and discussing it with their peers. Finally, since the students live in a small, sheltered community, they were exposed to more of the world and ultimately were able to see that the same issues they hear about in the news exists right here in our community.



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