

# Refugee Boy

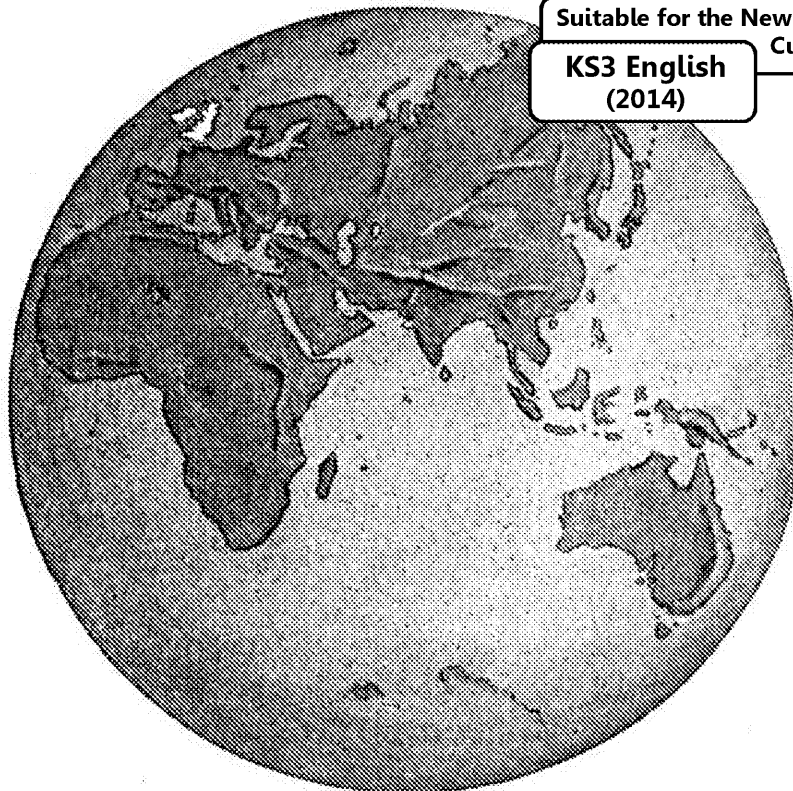
## Study Guide

UPDATE V1.1, SEPTEMBER 2014



Suitable for the New National Curriculum

KS3 English  
(2014)



POD 979

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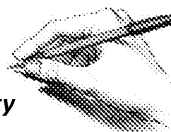
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## Teacher's Introduction

The *Refugee Boy* study guide is a useful resource to be used in conjunction with Benjamin Zephaniah's highly acclaimed novel. The guide will be most beneficial to Key Stage 3 students of all abilities, although it will also be useful to Key Stage 4 students. The study guide helps pupils and teachers explore the novel in depth, and has chapter summaries and comprehension questions that aid pupils' understanding of the text. It also contains a chapter on the cultural and historical context of the novel. There are useful writing frames, as well as suggestions for essays.

There is also a list of useful websites for pupils who would like to do extension activities based on the novel. Many of the resources can be used by teachers to backup pupils' own research, or to help teachers to develop their own schemes of work.

It is suggested that you photocopy the template pages in A3 if your students will be writing onto the worksheets, or alternatively provide them with blank A3 paper.

**The edition of *Refugee Boy* referred to in this study guide was published by Bloomsbury in 2001.**

**Update v1.1, September 2014**

Front pages and formatting updated

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## 1 - Benjamin Zephaniah: A Short Biography

Benjamin Zephaniah was born in 1958 in Handsworth, Birmingham. He has been writing since he was young, although his first book of poetry, *Pen Rhythm*, was published in 1982. Zephaniah focuses on oral, or performance poetry. He likes performing his poems aloud to an audience. Many of his poems are available on CD. Zephaniah has written two novels, both of which are for a teenage audience. *Face* is a novel which looks at a young man whose face is disfigured in a car crash. *Refugee Boy* looks at the plight of a young man who has to escape persecution in his home country.

Zephaniah is regarded by many as a black political figure. His poems are often about the music and poetry of Jamaica in what he calls 'street politics'. More information about his work and his ideas can be found on his website: [www.benjaminzephaniah.co.uk](http://www.benjaminzephaniah.co.uk)

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## 2 - The Historical and Cultural Context

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### What is a Refugee?

According to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to Refugees, a person is a refugee if they have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The person is outside the country that they belong to and is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.

### What is an Asylum Seeker?

A refugee who seeks permission to stay in another country is an asylum seeker. If a refugee in Britain, an asylum seeker must satisfy certain Home Office criteria in a lengthy process. If these criteria are not satisfied but the person is considered to have a good reason to leave their country of origin, they may be granted exceptional leave to remain.

### Where do Refugees come from?

Refugees come from all over the world. Refugees have existed since the beginning of time. Contrary to popular belief, refugees don't all flee to Western countries. In 2001, 554,000 refugees came to the UK, mostly from Afghanistan and went mainly to Pakistan and Iran. 554,000 refugees came to the UK from Africa and went to Tanzania. 333,100 refugees left Eritrea and fled mainly to the UK. 44.6% of refugees came from Asia, 24.5% from Europe, and 21.1% came from Africa.

### How do you become a refugee?

In *Refugee Boy*, Alem becomes a Refugee because he is mixed-race. The UK is not welcoming to Ethiopians and Eritreans and Alem is not welcome anywhere. If you are in a country where there is political or civil war or unrest, it is natural that you will want to escape to a safer place elsewhere.

### Stereotypes about Asylum Seekers

Many people think that asylum seekers are stupid. This is simply not true. A study found that more than a third of asylum seekers who had been granted asylum in the UK had either a degree or post-graduate or professional qualification. Many had been employed in their home countries - with more than half working in professional or business people. 65% spoke at least two other languages besides their own.

This country is not being 'swamped' by asylum seekers, as the newspapers often claim. They make up only a small proportion of immigrants. The largest group of immigrants are citizens returning to this country after a period of time spent abroad. Asylum seekers are not the same as immigrants. Many people who come to this country from Commonwealth countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Australia, who are allowed to stay for up to two years.

Britain does not give asylum seekers big cash handouts. If you are on income support, you are £15 a week better off than if you are an asylum seeker.

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### 3 - Research Tasks

Before reading the novel, think about the following:

- 1) What do these words mean to you: asylum seeker, refugee, and illegal?
- 2) What **connotations** do these words have?
- 3) Bring in two newspaper reports about asylum seekers. Are asylum seekers portrayed in a positive or negative way in the newspapers?
- 4) Brainstorm all the stereotypes that exist in this country about refugees.
- 5) Go to the following website: [www.unhcr.org.uk](http://www.unhcr.org.uk)  
On a map of the world, shade all the different areas that refugees come from. What do you notice?
- 6) Find out what immigration and migration mean.
- 7) What stereotypes exist about Africa?
- 8) Where are Ethiopia and Eritrea? Can you find them on a map?
- 9) See what you can find out about the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

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## 4 - A Summary of the Novel

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Alem and his father arrive in London. Alem and Mr Kelo take a taxi to a hotel. The next day, Alem wakes up in the hotel. His father is not there. Mr Hardwick tells Alem that his father has left the country. He gives Alem a letter from his father. Later on, Mr Hardwick introduces Alem to Mariam and Pam. They tell Alem that he must apply for political asylum. Mariam fills in their offices and fill in a form so that Alem can get political asylum. They return to the children's home.

Alem is introduced to the staff at the children's home, including Sarah and Dave. Alem also meets some of the children. Alem shares his room with Mustafa. Mustafa seems traumatised by abuse suffered at the hands of his mother. Mustafa Sweeney, a bad boy who threatens Alem. Mustafa also tells Alem about Stanley's father died in the Gulf War and his mother went mad. Sweeney takes his chips. Alem refuses to give him them, so Sweeney punches him back. Alem attempts to run away from the home. Unfortunately, he gets caught. Alem tells Mariam that he hates life in the home. Mariam and Sheila take Alem to a screening in Croydon for a 'screening'. Alem feels humiliated by this process.

Alem arrives in Manor Park, East London. He meets his foster family: Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald and their seventeen-year-old daughter, Ruth. Alem feels comfortable with them. Alem is admitted to the local comprehensive school. After a while, Later, Mariam visits Alem at home and gives him a letter. The letter is from his father. Mr Kelo says that Alem's mother is missing. Alem fears the worst. We find out that Alem's parents are involved with EAST – the East African Solidarity Trust. Sheila and Mrs Fitzgerald that Alem is bottling up his feelings. Mariam meets Alem at the Home Office in Croydon. The Home Office have refused Alem's appeal. Mariam tells Alem that they will appeal against the ruling. Alem's appeal is refused.

Alem celebrates Christmas with the Fitzgeralds. The Fitzgeralds give Alem a bike with the money. Alem explores East London on his bike. Alem goes to school. The court has adjourned so that reports can be prepared. Alem wishes everyone in the country a Merry Christmas as it is Christmas in Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is snowing in London. Mariam gives Alem a letter from his father. Alem's mother has been murdered. Mr Kelo tries to comfort Alem. Sheila and Nicholas ask Alem if he wants to see a counsellor. Alem feels that he is not wanted in Britain, and wants to be with his father. Alem goes for a bike ride together. A pair of aggressive boys steal Alem's bike. Alem's father goes missing again and visits Alem. Alem and Mr Kelo go out for an Ethiopian meal. Alem is taken to Campsfield, a detention centre for asylum seekers. Mr Kelo goes to a shabby hotel where his father is staying. Mr Kelo takes Alem to the office.

Mr Kelo and Alem go to court again. Nicholas, the lawyer, tells the judge that Alem faces persecution if they go home again. Alem faints when he hears that his father has died. The judge turns down their application for asylum. Nicholas says that Alem's father has died. Nicholas tells his friends what has happened. Asher, Buck and Robert decide to take a decision and begin a campaign. There are many students who wish to stay in the hotel with his father. Alem attends the first campaign meeting. The next day, Alem's father attend a demonstration on their behalf. Alem learns that six thousand people have signed a petition so they can stay in the country.

Alem and Mr Kelo visit the supermarket. They are both humiliated because there is a special queue for asylum seekers. Alem receives a Positive Pupil Certificate. Mariam and Mr Kelo arrive at Alem's hotel. They tell Alem that his father has been seen in the offices of EAST. Alem moves back in with the Fitzgeralds. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, Alem's father is heard. Alem is granted exceptional appeal to remain in Britain. On Tuesday, Alem's father and Ethiopians and Eritreans sign a peace treaty.

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## 5 - Chapter Summaries

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### Prologues

In the two, almost identical, prologues Alem's home is invaded by soldiers from Eritrea, who order his family to leave each country. We discover that Alem's father is Ethiopian.

### Chapter 1

Alem and his father arrive in London. At the airport, Alem observes the world around him. Alem and Mr Kelo take a taxi to a hotel in Berkshire. After this, they explore London.

### Chapter 2

Alem wakes up in the hotel. His father is not there. Mr Hardwick, the hotel manager, tells Alem that his father has left the country. He gives Alem a letter from Mr Kelo. Later on, Mr Hardwick introduces Alem to Mariam and Pamela from the hotel. Alem is told that he must apply for political asylum.

### Chapter 3

Alem tells the women about his life back in Africa and how difficult and dangerous it was for his family.

### Chapter 4

Mariam and Pamela take Alem for an Italian meal. After this, they go to the Home Office to fill in a form so that Alem can get political asylum. They then take Alem to a children's home.

### Chapter 5

Alem is introduced to the staff at the children's home, including Sarah and Mr Dave. Alem also meets some of the children, including Mustafa, who is described as a 'loner' (p55). A gang of boys threaten Alem because he refuses to get the chips. Alem shares his room with Stanley Burton, who seems traumatised by abuse from his mother.

### Chapter 6

Mustafa warns Alem about Sweeney, the boy who threatened Alem the previous chapter. Mustafa tells Alem about Stanley's past, and how Stanley's father died in the Gulf War. Sweeney bullies Alem and tries to take his chips. Alem refuses to give them. Sweeney punches him. Alem eventually fights back.

### Chapter 7

Alem attempts to run away from the home. Unfortunately, he gets lost and is found. He tells Mariam that he hates life in the home. Mariam and Sheila take Alem to the hospital in Croydon for a 'screening'. Alem feels humiliated by this process.

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**Chapter 8**

Alem arrives in Manor Park, East London. He meets his foster family: Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald and their seventeen-year-old daughter, Ruth. Alem feels comfortable with them and agrees to stay with them. However, he senses that Ruth is not very happy. Alem starts at a new comprehensive school.

**Chapter 9**

Alem starts his new school. A boy, Robert, accidentally slams a door into Alem's head and the floor. Robert befriends Alem. Alem is shocked that many of the children are from refugee backgrounds. Later, Mariam visits Alem at home and gives him a letter. The letter is from his mother. Mr Kelo says that Alem's mother is missing. Alem fears the worst.

**Chapter 10**

We find out that both of Alem's parents are involved with EAST – the East African Support Trust. Sheila, the social worker, tells Mrs Fitzgerald that Alem is bottling up his feelings. Alem is friends with Ray Buckley. Mariam meets Alem again. She has a letter from her mother in Croydon. The Home Office have refused Alem's request for asylum. Mariam says she will appeal against the ruling.

**Chapter 11**

Alem's appeal is on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January. At school, Alem finds himself the target of jokes. Alem celebrates Christmas with the Fitzgeralds. The Fitzgeralds give Alem money and he buys a bike with the money.

**Chapter 12**

Alem explores East London on his bike. Alem goes to court. Alem's case papers and reports can be prepared. Alem wishes everyone in the court a happy Christmas. Alem's father is in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

**Chapter 13**

It is snowing in London. Mariam visits. She has another letter for Alem from his mother. His mother has been murdered. Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald try to comfort Alem.

**Chapter 14**

Sheila and Nicholas ask Alem if he wants to see a counsellor, but he refuses. Alem is not wanted in Britain, and wants to be with his father. Ruth scans a photo of Alem on the computer for Alem to look at. Robert visits Alem's foster home. Robert's parents are refugees from Chile.

**Chapter 15**

Alem and Robert listen to Buck's band. They then visit Asher, who is Jamaican.

**Chapter 16**

Alem and Robert go on a bike ride together. A pair of aggressive boys stop them. Alem's father arrives in England again and visits Alem. Alem and Mr Kelo go out for a walk.

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**Chapter 17**

Alem's father is arrested and taken to Campsfield, a detention centre for boys. Alem buys CDs with Ethiopian and Eritrean music on them.

**Chapter 18**

Mr Kelo is freed. Alem visits the shabby hotel where his father is staying. Alem visits the offices of EAST.

**Chapter 19**

Mr Kelo and Alem go to court again. Nicholas tells the judge that father persecution if they go home again. Alem faints when he hears that his father is dead. The judge turns down their application for asylum. Nicholas says

**Chapter 20**

Alem tells his friends what has happened. Asher, Buck and Robert decide to appeal the judge's decision and begin a campaign. There are many students who

**Chapter 21**

Alem moves into the hotel with his father. He meets Abbas Noor, a Palestinian. Alem attends a first campaign meeting. On Saturday, Alem and his father attend a music

**Chapter 22**

The next Saturday, Alem and his father attend a demonstration on their father's death. Six thousand people have signed a petition so they can stay in the country.

**Chapter 23**

Alem and Mr Kelo visit the supermarket. They are both humiliated because of a special queue for asylum seekers. Alem receives a Positive Pupil Certificate. Alem goes home and realises his father is not there. Abbas helps Alem to break into the house. Mariam arrive. They tell Alem that his father has been shot dead, outside the house. Alem moves back in with the Fitzgeralds.

**Chapter 24**

There is a newspaper article about Mr Kelo's death.

**Chapter 25**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> March, Alem's appeal is heard. Alem is granted an exception to enter Britain.

**Chapter 26**

On Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> December, the Ethiopians and Eritreans sign a peace agreement.

**Chapter 27**

Alem reflects on events and how he, as a refugee, has been treated.

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## 6 - Comprehension Questions by Chapter

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### Prologues

- 1) What is the effect of two almost identical prologues at the beginning?
- 2) What point do you think that Zephaniah is trying to make?

### Chapter 1

- 1) Use adjectives to describe some of Alem's feelings when he is at Home.
- 2) What are the differences between African and English roads (p17)?
- 3) How much does the taxi driver charge Alem's father? Why?
- 4) Why does Alem find understanding people difficult (p21)?

Task: Write Alem's diary entry after his day in London. The entry should be written in the first person. Remember to use the first person when writing your diary.

### Chapter 2

- 1) Read page 30. What has Alem's father done?
- 2) What does Alem do without his father (p32)?
- 3) What is political asylum?

Homework: Find out about the Refugee Council. What is their purpose?

### Chapter 3

- 1) Why is this chapter written in the first person rather than the third person?
- 2) Rewrite page 38, changing it to 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative. Read it to the class. What is the effect of this change?
- 3) What do we learn about Alem's parents in this chapter?

### Chapter 4

- 1) Why do you think that Alem's father has left him?
- 2) Is Alem's father's action justified? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3) What do you think will happen to Alem now?

### Chapter 5

- 1) What impressions do you gain of the children's home from the outside?
- 2) Look at page 53. How can you tell that Alem is unhappy?
- 3) Pretend that you are Sarah Cohen, who is the director of the home. Write a letter to Alem and Stanley. Why are they in the home? How do they behave in the home? Use the writing frame in Section 7 of this guide to help you.

### Chapter 6

- 1) Do a survey of the different accents spoken by the members of your class. What is the difference between accent and dialect? Does any of your class speak like Mustafa? What is Mustafa's dialect?
- 2) What does Alem learn about life in a children's home in this chapter?
- 3) Before reading the next chapter, complete the worksheet on verbs.

### Chapter 7

- 1) Re-read page 83. Why is Alem humiliated by the screening process?

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**Chapter 8**

- 1) Look at a map of Manor Park, London E12. This is easily available on the internet.
  - a) Which part of London is it in?
  - b) Where is Meanley Road?
  - c) Where is Romford Road?
  - d) Where is the nearest train station?
  - e) What do you think life is like there, based on what you know about London in general?
- 2) Alem is a boy who loves to learn (p94). Why do you think he is determined to learn?

**Chapter 9**

- 1) Write Alem's diary after his first day at school.

**Chapter 10**

- 1) Why are some people in the country against asylum seekers?

**Chapter 11**

In pairs, write a list of words or phrases that you use that other people might not understand. Next to each word or phrase, write a definition of what it means. Example: *Mingling – not very desirable, repulsive*

- 1) With your partner, create a dictionary of these colloquial words or phrases.

**Chapter 12**

- 1) Re-read page 140. Why does Alem create a better impression by writing to his mother than by writing to his father?

Homework: Find out which other cultures don't celebrate Christmas and how they do they celebrate it?

**Chapter 13**

- 1) Re-read the letter that Alem's father sent him (p156) and write Alem's response.

**Chapter 14**

- 1) Robert is from Chile. Do some research to see if you can find out about the culture of Chile (p176).

**Chapter 15**

- 1) Bring in a CD/tape of your favourite music and share it with the rest of the class. Explain to everyone else why you like your music.

**Chapter 16**

- 1) Write Alem's diary entry after he meets his father again.

**Chapter 17**

- 1) Why has Alem's father been arrested?

Homework: Find out about Ethiopian music and what it sounds like.

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**Chapter 18**

- 1) Why does Alem's father have to live in the bed and breakfast?
- 2) What was Mrs Kelo's dream (p217)?
- 3) If there was a cause that you could represent, what would it be and speech outlining your chosen cause and reasons why people ought speech with the class.

**Chapter 19**

- 1) What adjectives could you use to describe the atmosphere in the court?
- 2) Find out what the following legal terms mean:
  - Barrister
  - Interpreter
  - Adjudicator
  - Adjournment
  - Representatives
  - Appellants
  - Mediator
  - Usher
  - Proceedings
  - Juvenile
  - Appeal
- 3) Why is Alem's application turned down?

**Chapter 20**

- 1) What does Robert suggest Alem to do (p234)?
- 2) Plan an imaginary campaign to persuade the government to let Alem do all the activities that you could organise and all the reasons why Alem should.
- 3) Why can't the Fitzgeralds foster Alem (p242)?

**Chapter 21**

- 1) Design a poster for Alem's campaign.
- 2) Write a newspaper article for a local newspaper called the *Newham News* about Alem's plight. Use the writing frame in section 7 of this guide for help, if you need it.

**Chapter 22**

- 1) Re-read page 263. Why do you think that the people in the van were angry?

**Chapter 23**

- 1) How do you think Alem feels about using the food vouchers?
- 2) Why does Alem have to stand in a separate queue when he uses the vouchers?
- 3) Why do you think that Alem's father was killed?

**Chapter 24**

- 1) Why is this chapter written like a newspaper article?

**Chapter 25**

- 1) Why is Alem allowed to stay in Britain?

**Chapter 26**

- 1) Find out about the Peace Treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

**Chapter 27**

- 1) This chapter is written in the first person. Why?

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## 7 - Resources for Comprehension Q

### Chapter 5

Report on \_\_\_\_\_

**(HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL)**

Full name:

Date of birth:

Mother's name:

Father's name:

Reasons for being in the home:

Likely duration of stay:

Behaviour:

Other notes:

Sign

Sara

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## Chapter 6

Fill in the blank spaces below with a verb from the list at the bottom of the bottom of page 75 of the novel to find out which verbs were actually used.

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He \_\_\_\_\_ his bag. Movement was difficult and noisy because of \_\_\_\_\_ but he made it to the window. \_\_\_\_\_ on a vacuum cleaner to \_\_\_\_\_ the garden at the back. He \_\_\_\_\_ the window and \_\_\_\_\_ realising that this was the point of no return. He just about managed to \_\_\_\_\_ the window headfirst, and \_\_\_\_\_ to the window frame he \_\_\_\_\_ around and managed to \_\_\_\_\_ down and land on his feet. As he \_\_\_\_\_ still listening for any sign of a raised alarm. When he thought it was safe \_\_\_\_\_ and began his \_\_\_\_\_.

threw  
escape  
squeeze

jump  
picked  
see

standing  
manoeuvred  
reach

cling  
open

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## Chapter 21

*Imagine that you are a reporter who has just come to the East. Alem's plight. Write a newspaper article about Alem, his parents. Use the A3 template when you write your article neatly.*

### **Name:**

Use these ideas to give a structure or shape to your article: don't forget points if you want to.

### **Introduction**

**Briefly introduce your reader to:**

- Alem
- his history

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## Main Ideas

<b>Paragraph 'prompt' point</b>	<b>Your ideas in these points [in your own words]</b>	<b>Exa</b>
1) What happened to Alem? Why did he have to come to this country?		
2) What happened to Alem's mother?		
3) Why is Alem supposed to be going back to Africa?		
4) Why shouldn't Alem go?		
5) Comments in favour of Alem from local youths.		
6) Comments in favour of Alem from his foster parents.		
7) Comments in favour of Alem from his proud father.		

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## ***Conclusion***

What does the newspaper think about Alem's predicament?

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# NEWHAM ECHO

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## Chapter 24

***Imagine that you are a reporter who has just come to the East. Write an article about Kelo's murder. Use the template when you write your article now.***

### ***Name:***

Use these ideas to give a structure or shape to your article: don't forget to include points if you want to.

### ***Introduction***

**Briefly introduce your reader to:**

- Mr. Kelo, his age, nationality and background

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## Main Ideas

Paragraph 'prompt' point	Your ideas in these points [in your own words]	
1) Where was Mr. Kelo when he was killed?		
2) Why does the newspaper think that Mr. Kelo was killed?		
3) Eyewitness reports to the murder.		
4) Comments from the police about the murder.		
5) A bit of information about Alem.		

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# DAILY BUGLE

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## 8 - Essay Question

***Refugees are portrayed in a more realistic way in the novel 'Refugee' than they are in the newspapers. Discuss.***

***Name:***

Use these ideas to give a structure or shape to your essay; don't forget to add your own points if you want to.

***Introduction***

**Briefly introduce your reader to:**

- The novel and what it is about
- The characters of Alem and Mr. Kelo

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## Main Ideas

Paragraph 'prompt' point	Your ideas in these points [in your own words]	
1) What happened to Alem and Mr. Kelo? What events in Africa led them to seek asylum in the UK?		
2) How were Alem and Mr. Kelo treated when they arrived in Britain?		
3) Why did the authorities want to send Alem back to Africa?		
4) How did things like going to court and having to use food vouchers make Alem feel?		
5) What other characters in the novel are refugees? How are they treated?		
6) Get some quotes from newspapers and discuss how they portray refugees.		

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7) Get some information from the Refugee Council about refugees.

### ***Conclusion***

What do you think about the portrayal of refugees in the novel?

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## 9 - Useful Websites

The list below is by no means exhaustive and there will be lots of other websites you wish to look at.

### **Amnesty International**

[www.amnesty.org/en/refugees-and-migrants](http://www.amnesty.org/en/refugees-and-migrants)

Amnesty International's website gives some interesting facts about refugees and some case studies.

### **The European Council on Refugees and Exiles**

[www.ecre.org](http://www.ecre.org)

The ECRE aims to promote the protection and integration of refugees in Europe. It contains useful information and statistics about refugees in Europe.

### **The Refugee Council**

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

The Refugee Council is the largest organisation in the UK helping asylum seekers. You can receive a newsletter from the Refugee Council direct to your email.

### **Refugees International**

[www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org)

Refugees International helps thousands of refugees around the world and explains why people become refugees and are forced to flee from their homes.

### **The United Nations High Commission for Refugees**

[www.unhcr.org.uk](http://www.unhcr.org.uk)

This website provides lots of useful statistics about refugees, as well as information about refugees around the world.

### **The US Committee for Refugees**

[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

This organisation 'defends the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons worldwide'. The website contains many case studies and a great deal of information on refugees.

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