

Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad

James Rumford

This beautifully illustrated children's book is a great way to start a conversation with students of all ages about what it might be like to be a young person living in a war zone. The main character Ali loves loud music, dancing, soccer, and calligraphy. Ali tries to escape the realities of war by writing calligraphy and playing soccer. The book can be used as a hook prior to an art lesson about calligraphy, a history/social studies lesson about the Middle East, a language arts lesson about language acquisition/writing, or a health and career lesson about how Ali uses calligraphy to help him cope with his fears during a difficult time in his life. The ideas below are just a few ways that the book can be integrated into a cross-curricular approach to the new BC education curriculum.

If you are about to welcome a refugee student in your classroom, please read the Surrey Teachers' Association backgrounder written by Julia Macrae, June James, Phyllis Minsky, Joanna Shniad, Poonam Kainth, and Helen Kelsey-Etmanski.

Grade Level

- Primary to Intermediate. Adapt according to the needs of your students.

Time

- Allow at least 30 minutes to read and discuss the book. Depending on how many extensions you use, this book can be used to launch a mini unit consisting of several 45-minute lessons.

Subject Areas

- art
- social studies
- language arts
- health and career education

Before Beginning

- Ask students to begin with a **prediction**. Based on the title and picture, what might this story be about? Who is the young person? Why is the young person carrying a soccer ball? What are the long sticks (fountain pens) in their hand? What language is the writing in the background? What might "silent music" mean? Encourage students to **connect** to the character. Who else likes soccer? Drawing? Music? Dancing?
- James Rumford introduces and shares some of the backstory for creating *Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad*. Grade level: intermediate–secondary. This 3-minute audio clip is a great way to help intermediate–secondary students brainstorm meaningful topics prior to writing their own children's books. www.teachingbooks.net/book_reading.cgi?id=4918&a=1

- Link to grades 9–12 children’s book writing project: www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/activities-projects/children-book-project-30314.html
- Bring in a book bin of award winning children’s books. Ensure you include some books about refugees so that you can build up their background knowledge on the subject.

Ontario Elementary Teacher’s Federation book list:

www.etfo.ca/Resources/ForParents/IncludingEveryChild/Documents/Helping_Children_Stay_Safe.pdf

Anti-racism book list (compiled by the BCTF’s CASJ Anti-Racism action group:

bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=21344&printPage=true

Art connection

- What is calligraphy?
- Why does Ali find it easier to write the word *harb* (pronounced *hah-rib*) meaning war, than it is to pronounce the word *salaam*, meaning peace?
- Option: write *peace* in your own language using calligraphy, or write *salaam* in Arabic. Post this art up in your classroom prior to the arrival of a newcomer.
- Explain how difficult it can be for a newcomer learning English to communicate how they are feeling because some words do not translate directly into English. Create pictures to accompany a list of “untranslatable words.” These can be in poster form or cards. You can create a class deck of cards and test one another to see if people can guess what the word means by looking at the picture. Example: *Gurfa* (Arabic) means the amount of water one can hold in one hand.



Retrieved from: www.culturelifestyle.com/post/127656565752/lost-in-translation-an-illustrated-collection-of

Other word lists

- www.collinsdictionary.com/word-lovers-blog/new/14-untranslatable-emotions-that-english-cant-convey,155,HCB.html

- www.thoughtcatalog.com/katie-mather/2015/07/45-beautiful-untranslatable-words-that-describe-exactly-how-youre-feeling/

*Note: Some of these words are **not** appropriate for students. Look over the list carefully before presenting it to your students.

Full book available here: <http://www.amazon.com.au/Lost-Translation-Illustrated-Compendium-Untranslatable-ebook/dp/B00GIV5FF0>

Language arts connection

- See ELL writing exercise below.
- Explain that in English you write from left to right, but in Arabic, you write from right to left.
- Similar to cursive writing, Arabic letters change their shape when they join other letters. What other languages do this? Make a list of all of the languages in the classroom.
- See untranslatable words activity above. Do the students have any connections? Allow them to share. Have students create their own class untranslatable word and image. For example, *Shush-argh*: The deep frustration that occurs when one is told to be quiet when all one really wants to do is laugh. You can extend this by challenging the students to guess whether or not the words are nouns, verbs, or adjectives.
- Create pictorial representations of the most commonly used words or rules in the class. Example: desk, chair, table, silent reading, etc. Explain that these pictures will help English language learners better understand English.

Social studies connection

- Project a map of Iraq. Help students understand where Iraq is relative to Canada. You can integrate this into a broader unit about geography. www.kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/iraq/#iraq-children.jpg.
- Write a biography of Yaqut al-Musta'simi's life and contributions to calligraphy.
- Introduce this book during a unit about immigration.

Health and career

- How does Ali escape from the violent reality of war? What skills does he use to help regulate his emotions?
- What can you do when you need to calm down?
- What can you do to help a classmate cope with a strong emotion?

Closing activities

Have students begin a Wonder Wall. Write questions about Baghdad, soccer, Arabic, calligraphy, etc., on Post-it notes, and arrange them on the wall. Post the attached sheet next to the questions. Depending on grade level, students can sign up for questions and present what they have learned to the class for extra credit. Post all related work on the Wonder Wall as you continue with the unit.

Extensions/adaptations for ELL students

Consult with the ELL teacher(s) at your school. Ask them to co-teach the book and help the ELL students to construct sentences and paragraphs re: how your school can welcome refugees.

Sample lesson plan structure

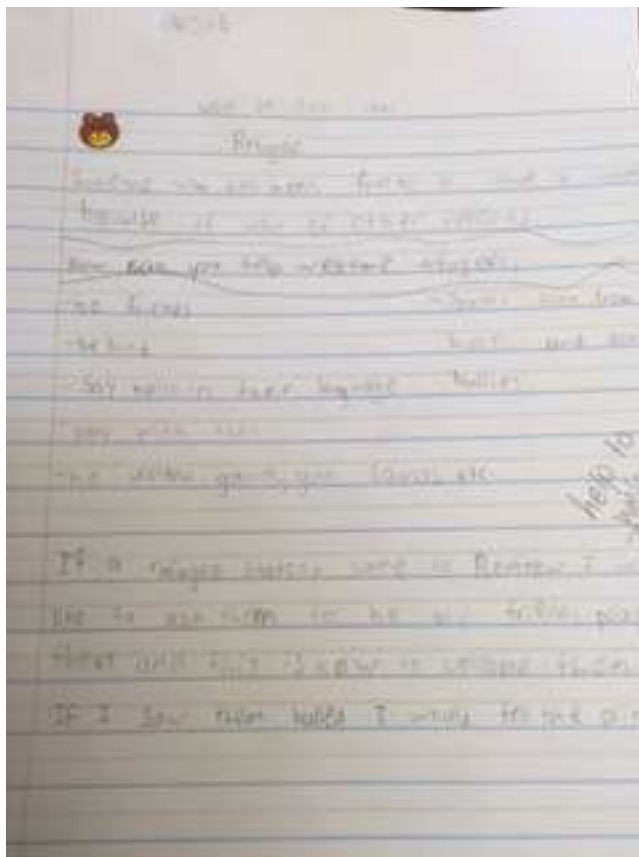
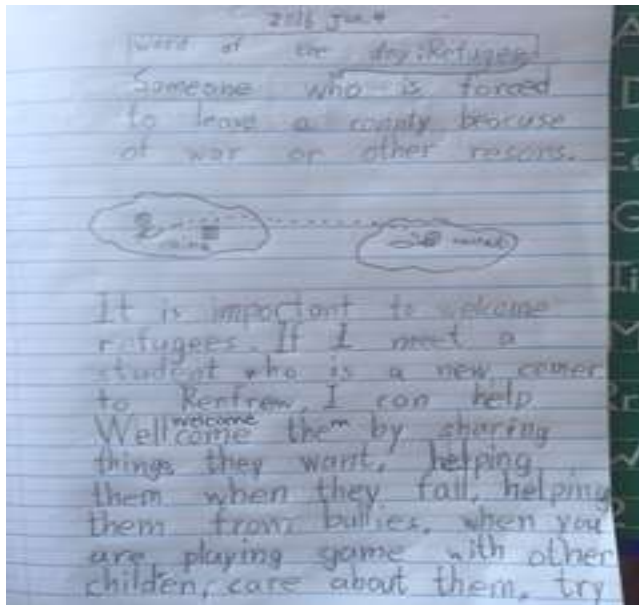
1. Vocabulary development: Help students define and identify the differences between immigrants (those that usually *choose* to leave their home country for work, love, education, family, etc.) and refugees (those that are *forced* to leave their home country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disasters).
2. Explain that if Ali and his family left, they would be considered refugees.
3. Discuss what all newcomers might have in common. How did they feel on their first day of school? How can they use their personal experiences to help welcome refugees to their school? Brainstorm as a class and then have students write at least five sentences about how they can help welcome newcomers.

Examples:

- “I will take the time to learn how to say hello in their language.”
 - “I will help explain the class rules if they don’t understand.”
 - “I will be patient if they don’t know how to speak English.”
 - “I will play non-violent games with them at recess so that they don’t get lonely.”
4. Depending on the ELL level, help students turn their splendid sentences into powerful paragraphs with the subject line “(name of your school) welcomes refugees.”
 5. Post these paragraphs up around the school. Consult with the school librarian to create a display of books about refugees, peace, newcomers, etc. The paragraphs can be posted next to the book display at the front of the school.
 6. Students can extend this activity by writing *welcome* in their own language. These welcome signs can be posted around the school community.
 7. Create pictorial representations of the most commonly used words/rules in the school. Example: desk, chair, table, silent reading etc. Explain that these pictures will help other English Language Learners understand English.

*See the next page for samples of student work.

Examples of works in progress



Wonder Wall Signup Sheet

Student name	Wonder Wall question	Date Presented/Completed