

The Boy at the Back of the Class

Overview

Author

Onjali Q Raúf

Story themes

Adventure
Diversity
Empathy
Friendship
Human rights
Immigration
Inclusion
Refugees
School

Curriculum links

Drama
Geography
History
PSHE

By the same author

The Star Outside My Window (Orion Children's Books)
The Night Bus Hero (Orion Children's Books)
The Lion Above the Door (Orion Children's Books)

Alternative books

The Boy Who Fooled The World by Lisa Thompson (Scholastic)
No Ballet Shoes in Syria by Catherine Bruton (Nosy Crow)

Plot

Ahmet is a new boy at Nelson Primary School in London. He sits silently at the back of the class looking scared and sad. Ahmet does not speak English but through welcoming winks and gifts, including an exotic pomegranate, a close-knit band of three loyal school friends win Ahmet's confidence, his first real smile and the first word spoken to them: 'home'. However, the pomegranate also causes a fight with Brendan-the-Bully and reveals Ahmet's fearlessness. Ahmet shows courage again when, having acquired sufficient English, he uses speech and drawings to tell the story of his family's escape from Syria and the perilous journey which resulted in the death of his sister and separation from his parents. The friends determine to reunite Ahmet's family before migrants are refused entry into Britain. They make bold plans, revisions and emergency replacements. They have daring adventures, independent trips around London, involvement with the emergency services and even a letter from the Queen. Do the plans work? It is not until the final chapter that the reader learns the name of the storyteller and finds out whether the adventure brings success.

About the children's book

The Boy at the Back of the Class is a children's novel for our times. Written in 2018, this exciting, London adventure story is set against a sombre background: the contemporary issue of asylum seekers from the Syrian war. Informative and thought-provoking, the book is ideal for the maturing tastes of Key Stage 2 readers.

About the teacher's guide

As well as detailed Guided and Shared reading, *Read & Respond: The Boy at the Back of the Class* provides the following activities to cover the English curriculum.

Word reading and spelling

- writing synonyms and antonyms for adjectives found in the book
- using modal verbs to indicate degrees of possibility
- pronouncing words containing the letter string 'ough'

Comprehension

- predicting what might happen in the rest of the book after reading Chapter 1
- identifying how time is emphasised in Chapter 8 and how atmosphere and excitement are created
- matching facts about the Syrian civil war to references within the story

Composition

- writing a review of the book using a star rating system

Speaking and listening

- using cue cards to describe the day in London in the role of Tom or the storyteller