

THE REFUGEE

PEARL S. BUCK



The Refugee follows the stories of three refugee children fleeing conflicts in their home countries. The first protagonist, **Josef**, is a 12-year-old Jewish boy living in Germany in 1938, during the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party. On **Kristallnacht**, Josef's home is ransacked by Nazi soldiers and his father **Aaron** is taken to a concentration camp. Six months later, Aaron is allowed to leave the camp on the condition that he immediately leaves the country, and so he; Josef; Josef's mother, **Rachel**; and Josef's sister, **Ruthie**, all plan to board the MS *Saint Louis*, which is bringing Jewish refugees to Cuba.

When Josef, Rachel, and Ruthie meet up with Aaron at the **ship**, Josef notices that his father is paranoid and terrified following his experience at the concentration camp. Aaron is so terrified that he refuses to go to the synagogue on board the ship to attend Josef's **bar mitzvah**, fearing that the synagogue is a trap that the Nazis have set for the Jewish passengers

Two weeks after leaving Germany, the ship approaches Cuba and the passengers must undergo a medical inspection. Aaron is reminded of the roll calls at the concentration camp, and he starts to

whimper while standing in line for the inspection. Josef worries that the doctor will declare Aaron mentally unstable and won't let him in, and so Josef slaps his father to get him to snap out of it and lies that the Nazis will get Aaron if he doesn't stay quiet. Josef realizes upon doing this that he has traded places with his father and has become the adult in the family. After the medical inspection, the passengers ask when they'll be allowed into Cuba. The Cuban officers say, "*mañana*," meaning "tomorrow."

A few days later, a Nazi official named **Schiendick** and two other officers raid Josef's family's cabin, destroying all of their possessions and frightening Aaron once more. Later that day, Aaron attempts to commit suicide by jumping off the ship, but he is rescued and taken to the mainland by a Cuban police officer named **Mariano Padron**. A week passes, and each day the Cuban police continue to tell the passengers that they will be able to disembark "tomorrow." At the end of the week, two young girls, **Renata** and **Evelyne**, are allowed to leave with their father, who already lives in Cuba. But the rest of the passengers are not allowed to disembark. Josef finds Officer Padron to ask if they can join Aaron in Cuba, but Padron informs him that Aaron is not fit enough to board the ship, nor can the rest of the family disembark. Padron tells Josef that he is simply "doing his job."

The *St. Louis* then sails north to make a plea to the U.S. to let them in. On the way, Josef and a group of men try to overtake the ship by taking the crew hostage, but **Captain Schroeder** talks them down. Once they reach the U.S., the American government refuses the ship, they are forced to go back to Europe. Josef, Rachel, and Ruthie are assigned to be resettled in France, but eight months later Germany invades France and they are forced to go on the run once more. Nazis catch them in a small French town, and though Rachel offers them all of the money and jewelry they have, the Nazis tell her that she can choose one child to set free, and one child to go to the concentration camps.

The second main character, **Isabel**, is an 11-year-old girl living in Havana, Cuba, in 1994, during **Fidel Castro**'s tenure. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been giving aid to Cuba, Cuba experiences a severe food shortage and many people are starving and

unemployed. Some try to escape Cuba, but Castro has a policy wherein people who try to leave are imprisoned. Isabel's father, **Geraldo**, tried to escape and was thrown in jail for a year. Now, when riots break out in Havana and a policeman threatens to jail Geraldo again, Geraldo resolves to escape the country the next day. That evening, Castro lifts his policy, allowing people to leave the country. Isabel rallies the rest of her family—her mother, **Teresa**, who is pregnant and due in a week, and her grandfather Lito—to go with Geraldo to the United States. She enlists the help of her neighbors, the Castillos, who are building a boat and planning to leave as well. Isabel trades her most prized possession, her **trumpet**, for gasoline so that they can leave that night.

Isabel, Teresa, Geraldo, Lito, **Señor Castillo**, **Señora Castillo**, and their son **Iván** (who is Isabel's best friend) all load into the boat. Policemen are on the shore watching them leave, but don't do anything to stop them. Then the Castillos' other son, **Luis**, and his girlfriend **Amara**, who are police officers, desert the force and jump into the boat as they are leaving for Miami. Because they are deserting, the other police officers start to shoot, and a bullet pierces the side of the boat. **Water** starts to fill the boat, and they attempt to plug the hole as they navigate towards Miami. They continue to navigate until the motor stops working, and the water starts to flow in more rapidly. They bail as much as they can; meanwhile, Isabel starts to worry about how she will no longer be connected to her Cuban heritage in the U.S. She had never been able to count a Cuban rhythm called *clave* and wonders how she will learn how to do this in Miami.

Later that evening, a tanker surges toward their boat. They are able to avoid it, but the water rushing into their boat carries away their medicine, bandages, and matches into the sea. Additionally, Señor Castillo is thrown from the boat, and Isabel dives into the water to save him. The next day, a storm forms, and they are hit with a driving rain. During the storm, Isabel remembers her grandmother **Lita**, who died two years earlier after she was swept out to sea during a cyclone. The day after the storm, the sun breaks through with a blazing heat, and Teresa starts to get a fever. Suddenly, they spot the shore, and grow excited that they have reached Miami. But they are directed to a dock, where an officer tells them that they are in the Bahamas and are not allowed to dock. Before they turn back, some tourists give them food, water, and aspirin to take on their journey, for which Isabel is immensely grateful.

As they continue on their journey, more and more cracks appear in the boat. They decide to take turns floating alongside the boat, to lessen the weight inside. But then, when Iván is in the water, he is attacked by sharks. His leg is bitten and mangled, and he dies when they aren't able to stop the bleeding. Isabel grieves for her friend, particularly when, the next day, they are able to see Miami in the distance. As they start to row toward the shore, a Coast Guard boat starts to steer toward them. Lito then confesses that he had been the Cuban police officer who turned Josef and the other Jewish people away in Havana in 1939. Due to his guilt, he decides to sacrifice himself to allow the others to continue on to Miami. He jumps off of their boat a

THE REFUGEE

-PEARL S BUCK



nd distracts the Coast Guard so that the others can reach the shore. Meanwhile, Teresa goes into labor and has the baby as they approach the shore. Isabel carries her new baby brother, and the Fernandezes and Castillos are able to arrive in Miami.

Isabel and her family stay with her uncle **Guillermo** (Lito's brother) until they can get on their feet. Guillermo gifts Isabel a new trumpet, and when she tries out for band by playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" in a salsa style, she realizes that she is finally able to count *clave*.

Mahmoud, the third main character, is a 13-year-old boy living in Aleppo, Syria, in 2015. Syria has been experiencing a civil war since the Arab Spring of 2011, and Aleppo is constantly being

bombed. Mahmoud has learned to blend in and be invisible in order to survive, and to protect his 10-year-old brother **Waleed**. One day, their apartment is hit with bombs. After this, Mahmoud; Waleed; their mother, **Fatima**; their father, **Youssef**; and their infant sister, **Hana**, all set off to try and seek refuge in Germany.

As Mahmoud's family drives to Turkey, Syrian soldiers get into their car but are quickly attacked, forcing Mahmoud and his family to evacuate their car and walk eight hours over two days to the Turkish border. Following this, they wait in Turkey for a boat that will take them to Greece. People constantly try to take advantage of them: a boy makes them pay to be escorted to a place where they can sleep, then sells them fake life vests. Each day, Mahmoud and his family are told that the boat to Greece will be ready for them "tomorrow," but this continues for seven days, leaving them exhausted and dejected. Finally, they are able to take a dinghy to Greece, but when a storm hits, they are thrown into the water. Mahmoud, Fatima, and Hana become separated from Youssef and Waleed, and they tread water for hours. Another dinghy passes them, but there is no room on the boat for Mahmoud or Fatima. Mahmoud asks them to take Hana, worried that she won't be able to survive if they had to remain in the water. They agree and take his baby sister, a loss that utterly traumatizes Fatima.

Hours later, Mahmoud and Fatima are finally rescued by the Greek Coast Guard, and they reunite with Waleed and Youssef. They continue on to Athens, Greece, but are unable to find Hana. The family travels without stopping through Macedonia, then take a taxi to Serbia. But the taxi driver holds them at gunpoint, demanding their money. They then walk the rest of the way to Serbia before continuing on to Hungary. At the Hungarian border, soldiers throw tear gas at them and take them to a detention center, where soldiers beat Youssef and call the Syrian refugees "parasites" and "filth." They are then relocated to a refugee camp. Mahmoud tries to be invisible to avoid more trouble, but then recognizes that only by being visible can he receive help. He decides simply to walk out of the refugee camp, and the other refugees follow suit. They walk 12 hours to Austria, gaining the attention of the news. When they reach the border, they are greeted by many Austrians and are given food, clothes, and medical attention. Still, they are unable to find Hana.



Refugee

Author Name : Pearl S Buck



 We Shine Academy™
guiding you to get through

Mahmoud and his

many and receive asylum there. After a month, they are placed with a host family while they start to build their new lives. The host family turns out to be Ruthie, now and old woman, and her husband, **Saul**. When she hears Mahmoud's story, and how they had to give up Hana, she assures him they will find her. Ruthie tells him her own story: how, when the Nazis had caught her, Josef, and Rachel in France, Josef made the choice to go to the concentration camps so that Ruthie could go free. Rachel and Josef then died in the camps. Ruthie comforts Mahmoud, telling him that they died so that she could live. Mahmoud is sad, but he is grateful that Ruthie lived, so that then she could help Mahmoud and his family. He is glad to have found a home in Germany.