



IDEAS FOR ASSEMBLIES...

Refugee stories

Using the life stories of refugees who have become much loved and well known to children

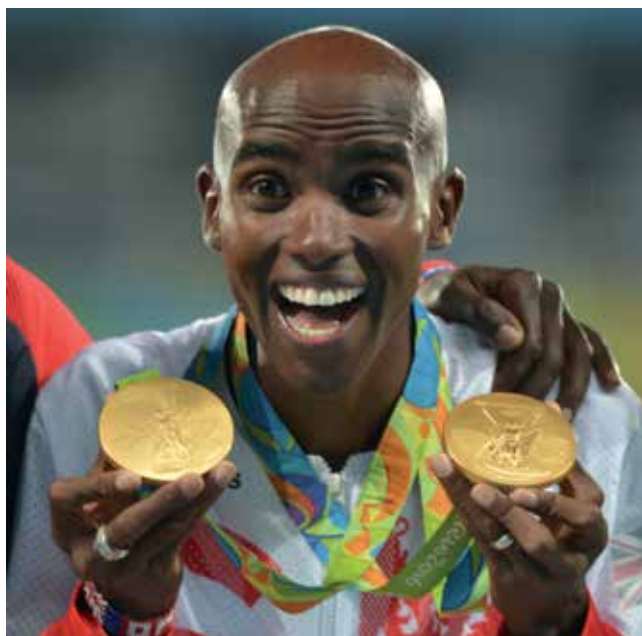
An assembly could focus on the achievements of their lives, experiences as child refugees and migrants, and how they overcame their difficulties. Their stories can be compared and contrasted with other refugees, such as children from the Kindertransport and child refugees in Europe today.

It is important that children understand the term 'refugee' so defining the word refuge as 'place of safety' is a good start. A refugee is someone who seeks that place of safety because of war or conflict, persecution of some kind or natural disaster.

Mo Farah – Olympic Champion

Mo Farah (Mohamed) came to Britain from Somalia at the age of eight, in 1991, to join his father, a UK citizen born in Britain. He was born in Somalia, but lived in neighbouring Djibouti. Though he didn't need to claim asylum, he came to escape war and conflict in the region. Somalia had a historic link with Britain as part of the British Empire from the late nineteenth century. Somalis worked as seamen (lascars) in British shipping, and small communities of seamen and merchants settled in port towns, like Cardiff, Liverpool and London in the early twentieth century. Somalis fought in the First World War and were recruited by the Royal Navy in the Second World War, settling in Britain afterwards. Some Somalis moved to Sheffield to work in the steel industry.

Mo Farah arrived here with three English phrases, – 'excuse me', and 'where is the toilet?' Not understanding what 'c'mon then' (his third phrase) meant, caused a fight in his first day at junior school in west London, which gave him a black eye, and respect. Other than football, he didn't do well at school, and was still struggling with English, when at the age of 14 his exceptional athleticism was noticed and nurtured by Alan Watkinson, his PE teacher, and the rest is well-documented history.



Children can discuss what schools and friends can do to make sure everyone is cared for and supported. In that respect there have been many school communities who have supported and campaigned for children threatened with deportation, when their family's claims for asylum have been rejected.

Tasks for children

Children can act out some of the early scenes from Mo's life:

- Playing football with his twin in Djibouti
- Arriving in London
- Playground fight
- First cross-country race when he ran in the wrong direction
- Series of wins as he becomes more successful
- London Olympics 2012 (this could be done from the point of view of the commentators watching, as you can see on YouTube)
- Receiving knighthood from the Queen

Children could look at other refugee groups from the twentieth century.

They could sequence images from the different groups, find out some of the stories of those who stayed in the country and perhaps undertake some oral history research.

1. In 1937, after the bombing of Guernica, nearly 4,000 children were evacuated from Bilbao. The children had to camp in tents before being settled round the United Kingdom. By 1939, after Franco's victory most returned to Spain. About 400 remained however. One of these was Emilio Aldecoa who became a professional footballer. He played for Wolverhampton Wanderers and Coventry City and then worked as assistant manager at Birmingham City. www.basquechildren.org/ This is the story of the *niños de la guerra* (children of the war).
2. Between 1938 and 1940 10,000 mainly Jewish children were evacuated to Britain from Germany, Austria and (what was then) Czechoslovakia. The majority arrived by train and boat in what was to be called the Kindertransport. Many remained to make their lives here. One of them, Alf Dubs, is now a member of the House of Lords where he continues to work for human rights and the needs of child refugees. www.kindertransport.org/
3. In 1972 Idi Amin decided to expel all the Asian families living in Uganda. He gave them 90 days to leave the country. They had to leave their livelihoods and home behind them taking only what they could carry. As many as 27,200 immigrated to Britain as they held British passports. They arrived by plane with very little to help them start new lives. Some of our most prominent businessmen and women and politicians were Ugandan Asians. <http://asiancentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Exiles-learning-pack-web1.pdf>
4. Between 1978 and 1979, after the end of the Vietnam War, many who lived in the south of the country fled from the victorious forces of the north. They could not fly out so they took to small boats. They became known as the 'Vietnamese boat people'. Those that were rescued waited in settlement camps before countries offered to accept them. Nineteen thousand came to Britain. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/refugee-crisis-son-of-vietnamese-boat-people-shares-story-of-how-britain-treated-asylum-seekers-in-10493316.html
www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-38928869

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Resources

Mo Farah, Kes Gray and Marta Kissi, *Ready Steady Mo!*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016. Fun picture book with poems.

Roy Apps and Chris King, *Mo Farah*, London & Sydney: Franklin Watts, 2013. No. 26 in the EDGE Dream to Win series. A lively biography for young readers.

Mo Farah, *Twin Ambitions: my autobiography*, London: Hodder, 2014. Details of his life in Somalia and first years in England.

Report from the *Independent*. www.independent.co.uk/sport/general/athletics/mo-farah-how-britains-athletics-hero-escaped-the-chaos-of-somalia-2037996.html