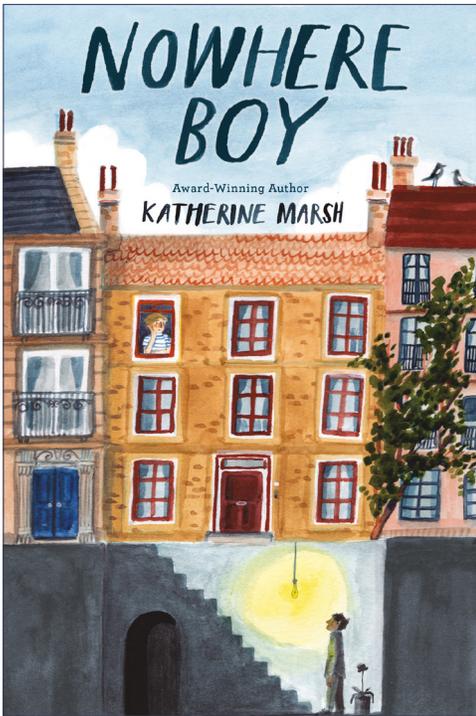


A Teacher's Guide for **NOWHERE BOY**

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Fourteen-year-old Ahmed is stranded in a city that wants nothing to do with him. Newly arrived in Brussels, Belgium, Ahmed had fled a life of uncertainty and suffering in Syria, only to lose his father on the perilous journey to the shores of Europe. Now Ahmed's struggling to get by on his own, and with no one left to trust and nowhere to go, he's starting to lose hope.

Then he meets Max, a thirteen-year-old American boy. Lonely and homesick, Max is struggling at his new school and just can't seem to do anything right. But with one startling discovery, Max's and Ahmed's lives collide and a friendship begins to grow. Together, Max and Ahmed will defy the odds, learning from each other what it means to be brave and how hope can change your destiny.

Award-winning author Katherine Marsh delivers a tale for our times: a gripping story of resilience, friendship, and everyday heroes set against the backdrop of the refugee crisis.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHERINE MARSH is the author of books for children and young adults, including *The Night Tourist*, winner of the Edgar Award for Best Juvenile Mystery, and *Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, a *New York Times* Notable Children's Book. Katherine grew up in New York and now lives in Brussels, Belgium, with her husband, two children, two cats, and a flock of chickens.

This guide is aligned with Common Core State Standards for grade six but can be applied to grades four through eight. To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for your classroom and students, you are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to your classes' needs. You know your students best!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS:

1. Max, one of the main characters in the novel, comes to understand that “no one could be a hero alone” (p. 349). Talk about what it means to be a hero. Who do you consider a hero, whether or not the person is famous? Does Max’s statement apply to that individual? Why or why not?
2. Imagine that you have lost your home in a war and have to flee your country, taking very little with you. What would you want to take? What would you miss the most that you had to leave behind? Discuss what it would be like to start over in a new country where you knew no one, you didn’t speak the language, and your family had very little money.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Talk about how Max changes in the novel. What is he like at the beginning? What does he consider to be the problems in his life then? How does knowing and helping Ahmed change Max?
2. Ahmed also changes. What are some of the factors that change him? Who helps him and who makes his life more difficult? When Ahmed calls Max a “boy hero,” Max replies, “No, just a sidekick to one” (p. 274). Why does Ahmed call Max a hero? What makes Ahmed a hero in Max’s eyes?
3. Max worries about the fact that he’s lying to his parents in order to help Ahmed. He views his actions as betraying his parents but also as “wrong and right at the same time” (p. 222). What does he mean? What are some of the lies? Explain whether you think they are justified, and why or why not. Discuss whether it’s possible to do something you consider wrong for the right reasons.
4. The chapters alternate between Max and Ahmed. What’s the effect of alternating between the two? Why do you think the author chose to use third-person points of view instead of first person? How would the story have been different if only one of the boys narrated it?
5. After he learns about Ahmed’s situation, Max sees the following about himself: “He had always taken school for granted. Now he realized that even being able to hate it was a luxury” (p. 152). How does knowing Ahmed change Max’s viewpoint? What is Ahmed’s attitude toward school before he goes and after he starts? What would your life be like now and in the future if you no longer had access to school?
6. How are the orchids and the backyard garden important to Ahmed? What role do they play in the plot? How are they used symbolically in the story?
7. Recount the story of Albert Jonnart and Ralph Mayer. How does the story influence Max? How does it help Ahmed, especially at the end of the novel? Discuss similarities and differences between Jonnart’s actions and Max’s.
8. Discuss how Max’s family members interact with each other, giving positive and negative examples. Why does Max feel like Claire betrays him and Ahmed? Do you agree that it’s betrayal? What explains her actions? How do Max’s parents react to his trip to Hungary? How do you think the dynamics of this family might change in the future?
9. What are some words that describe Oscar when Max first meets him? Why is he so unfriendly to Max? How does he start acting differently toward Max? Why does he change? Describe ways that Oscar helps Max and Ahmed.
10. How does Farah treat Max when he’s new at school? Why does she decide to help Max and Ahmed? What does she do for them, and what are the risks for her? Talk about some of the problems that Farah has to cope with in her life. What does Max learn from her?
11. Find comments from Madame Pauline and Inspector Fontaine that show how they view the refugees in Belgium. Why is their attitude so hostile? Discuss Ahmed’s observations that many of the refugees are escaping terrorist wars and that, although perhaps one in a million refugees is a terrorist, some people consider them all dangerous.
12. Find an image of the Magritte painting with the birdcage. What are the boys’ responses to the painting? What is your response? Locate images of other Magritte paintings and talk about his artwork, including any way you think it relates to the story.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.



COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

1. In Hungary, Ahmed meets refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Kosovo, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia. Have each student choose a country and research contemporary refugees from that country. What prompted the refugees to leave? How did they get out of the country? Where did they go? Could they ever safely return home? How were they received by other countries? Have students give short multimedia presentations that include facts, quotes, photographs, and maps.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

2. If your school has access to YouTube, as a class, watch one or all of these three short UNICEF videos about young Syrian refugees. Discuss the content and relate it to Ahmed's situation in the novel. Compare the different strengths of novels and videos, and discuss how they can complement each other.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=__btyYMCzIw
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDy8_8L3s0A
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcrvKtmQ1Zs

CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

3. Max and Ahmed read a book together about boy heroes, and they prove to be very brave themselves. Have students each find a biography or other source of information about a brave young person in the past or present, such as an activist in the civil rights movement or a teenager in the Resistance during World War II. The students should write a short profile of the person and note what they admire about the individual. Bind the profiles into a class book about young people who have made a difference in others' lives.

CCSS.W.6.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

4. Max brings an Aquaman comic to Ahmed as one of his first acts of friendship. Have students choose a scene from the novel that has both action and dialogue, and create a comic strip or short comic book based on it. The comic should consist of panels that combine illustrations; narrative captions; and speech balloons for dialogue, thoughts, and sound effects. Display the final products in the classroom.

CCSS.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

5. No novel tells you everything about a character. Have students come up with one distinct question to ask each of the main characters: Max, Ahmed, Farah, and Oscar. The questions could be about the past, the time during the novel, or the future. Have each student exchange their four questions with another student, who will write answers based on the character's development in the story.

CCSS.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for seventeen years and now gives workshops for educators on new young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Selection Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott committees.

