



## A book club reading guide for

# FLIGHT AND FREEDOM

## Stories of Escape to Canada

Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner

The global number of people currently displaced from their home country—around 60 million—is higher than at any time since the Second World War.

In *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada*, Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner present a collection of thirty astonishing interviews with refugees or their descendants to document their extraordinary, and sometimes harrowing, journeys of flight. The stories span two centuries of Canadian and world history seen through the eyes of refugees to Canada: from the War of 1812—where an escaped slave and her infant daughter flee the United States to start a new life in Halifax—to the War in Afghanistan—where asylum seekers collide with state scrutiny and face the challenges of resettlement.

### Questions for discussion

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1. What part of the refugee journey described in these stories was most moving? Disturbing? Shocking? Why?
2. Did you identify with one story in particular? Why?
3. Was there a method to the curation and chronology of the stories? Why did the authors choose these stories? Were there refugee experiences you expected to see, and did not?
4. Many of the stories include elements of immigrant and refugee experiences that are familiar to us. Did the book make you consider the difference between our firm (or blurry) definitions of an immigrant versus a refugee?
5. Choice is a recurring theme in the book, like the choice of going to Canada. What choices do refugees make? How does the idea of choice change how you think about refugee circumstances?
6. Did the book influence your thinking about the current global refugee crisis? In what ways? What are the responsibilities of a country of plenty, like Canada, to the world's refugees?
7. If you had to suddenly pick up and leave everything, what are the three things that would be hardest to leave behind? What would you take with you?
8. If you had to suddenly pick up and leave everything, what would be your greatest worry today? Next year? In five years?

9. A criticism of story collections is they don't distinguish between fiction and fact. Can stories present an accurate, fair picture? Did these? Would 30 different stories change the whole narrative?
10. What is the role of the journalist in portraying an emotional truth versus a literal truth? What is truer: Historical fiction or a history textbook?
11. Have the authors successfully retold these stories? Are the voices of the authors present, and in what ways?
12. Would you want your own immigration or refugee experience, or that of a family member or friend, documented in this way?
13. No society is immune to aggression, discrimination, and ordinary acts of hatefulness and persecution. Are there groups in Canada today that deserve a more 'humanitarian' response?
14. This book uses storytelling to help readers think about immigration and refugee policy. Is literature an effective way to call attention to real events? Can great writers or a great story influence the way you vote?
15. Who in the book would you most want to take out for coffee? What would you ask them?

## Good idea

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We love book clubs. They're full of thoughtful, interesting people who are usually also good friends. Imagine what a powerful point of contact a group of engaging people like book club members would be for a newcomer to Canada. Would your book club invite a newcomer (immigrant or refugee) to become a member?

## Links

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- Buy the book: <https://btlbooks.com/book/flight-and-freedom>
- Borrow the book: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDM3362336&R=3362336> (Toronto)
- Learn more: <http://flightandfreedom.ca/>
- Get involved: <http://lifelinesyria.ca/>

## Related reading

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- *Refugee Sandwich*, by Peter Showler
- *Ru*, by Kim Thúy
- *In the Shadow of the Banyan*, by Vaddey Ratner
- *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, by Philip Gourevitch