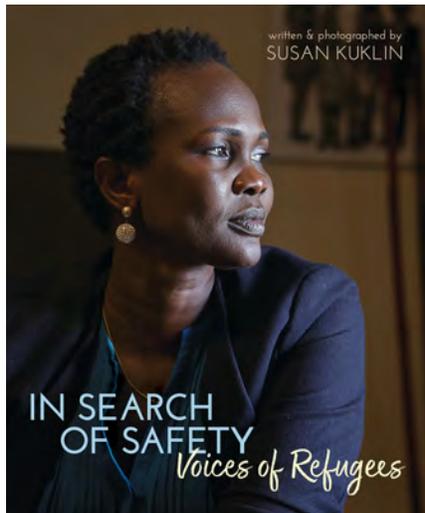


*In Search of Safety: Voices of Refugees*

Written and Photographed by Susan Kuklin  
Candlewick, 2020, 246 pp.  
ISBN: 978-0763679606



Author and photographer Susan Kuklin creates a space for five refugees to share their stories. Fraidoon from Afghanistan and member of the Tajik ethnic group worked with the U.S. military before applying for refugee status for his family and himself due to Taliban threats on his life. Nathan from Myanmar was persecuted as a member of the Karen religious group; he lived in a refugee camp in Thailand before seeking refuge in the U.S. When civil war broke out in South Sudan, Nyaront's family fled to Ethiopia where they were moved from refugee camp to refugee camp before finding refuge in the U.S. Shireen from Northern Iraq and a Yazidi who fled ISIS is the only participant in this book who resettled

in the U.S. without her family. Dieudonné from Burundi and of mixed Hutu and Tutsi origin escaped genocide for his ethnicity before applying for refugee status in the U.S.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, every minute 20 people leave everything to escape war, persecution or terror. Under U.S. law, refugees are people who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of a "well-founded fear of persecution" due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. The refugees in this book applied for refugee status before leaving their home countries or from refugee camps in other countries. The U.S. laws governing refugees differ from those for asylum seekers, who come to U.S. borders without approved refugee applications.

Kuklin refers to the refugees who contributed to this book as "participants." The relationships she develops with those who contribute their stories for her books are respectful and long-lasting. Interviewees approve of the first-person vignettes she crafts from the testimonials they give about their lived experiences. She honors and respects the language each refugee used in telling their story. These #ownvoices help young adult readers begin to comprehend the magnitude of the pain, suffering, determination, and courage of people who are uprooted by war, persecution, natural disasters, and other intolerable situations.

All five refugee participants in this book were ultimately resettled in Nebraska with the support of Lutheran Family Services, one of nine non-governmental agencies authorized for resettlement work by the U.S. government. Kuklin introduces each refugee's story with a landscape or cityscape photograph taken in Nebraska and a map from the person's homeland or refugee camp location. Color photographs of the participants add depth and richness to their lived experiences.

In addition to a rigorous interview process, Kuklin conducts extensive research. She documents her process in the back matter for the book. A section called "The Refugee

Process” will help readers understand the arduous resettlement process and the path to U.S. citizenship taken by refugees. Additional resources are an Author’s Note, Acknowledgments, About Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, About the Yazda Cultural Center, Chapter Notes, Time Lines (for the ethnic groups represented in the book), and Resources for Further Reading.

An author study could include other young adult books written and photographed by Susan Kuklin, which were created through a similar process: *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2015) and *We Are Here to Stay: Voices of Undocumented Young Adults* (2019). For a younger readership, she similarly created *Families* (2006) and *How My Family Lives in America* (1998). There is an Author’s Corner interview (<https://wowlit.org/blog/2019/01/01/authors-corner-susan-kuklin/>) with Susan Kuklin on the WOW website that can support students’ study.

*In Search of Safety* can be paired with *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* by Malala Yousafzai (2019), which includes Malala’s autobiographical account as well as those of nine other girls. Kuklin’s book can also be paired with fictional accounts of refugee experiences. *Refugee* by Alan Gratz (2017) provides an especially strong pairing because it includes the stories of three child refugees escaping from different situations over a longer historical time period. Other middle grade and YA novels about refugees such as *The Red Pencil* by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2014) and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* by Atia Abawi (2018) could also be paired with *In Search of Safety*.

Susan Kuklin grew up hearing her grandparents’ stories of how they fled Russia and Ukraine during the Holocaust. She notes that this book is her way of saying thank you to her ancestors (p. 218). The United Nations observes World Refugee Day (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/refugee-day>) every June in order to bring attention to the plight of refugees from around the globe. The 2020 theme was “Every Action Counts,” which was intended “to remind the world that everyone, including refugees, can contribute to society and Every Action Counts in the effort to create a more just, inclusive, and equal world.”

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