



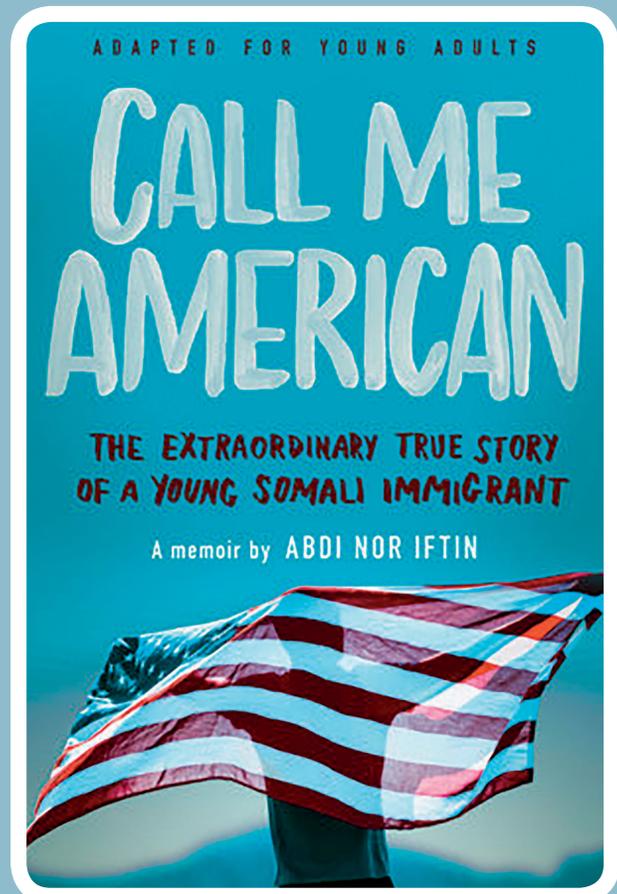
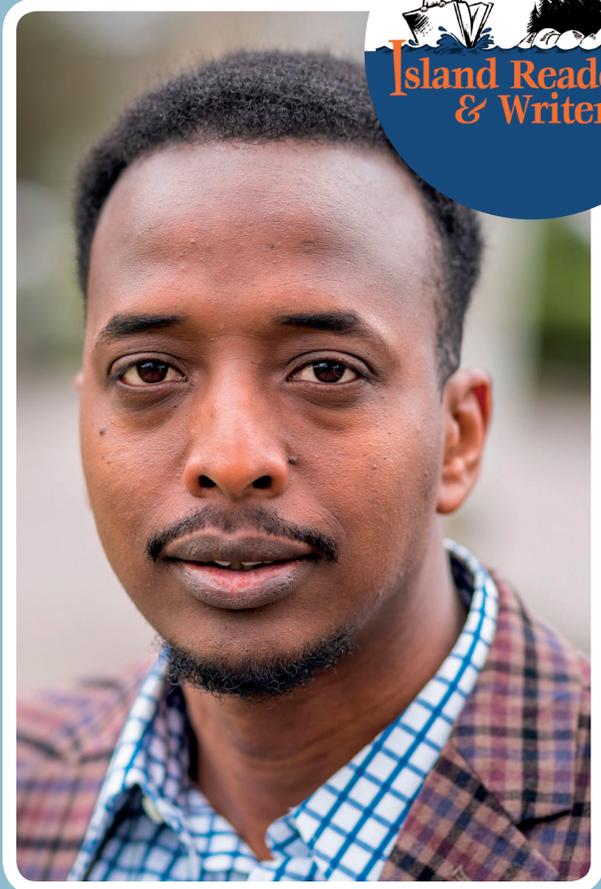
ABDI NOR IFTIN

It started at the movies...

As a child in war-torn Mogadishu, Abdi Nor Iftin learned English by watching action movies. When U.S. Marines landed to take on the warlords, Abdi cheered the arrival of these real-life American action heroes. Sporting hip-hop clothes and dance moves, he became known as “Abdi American.” But when radical Islamists took control in 2006, it became dangerous to celebrate Western culture. Instead, Abdi risked his life posting secret dispatches to NPR. As life in Somalia grew more dangerous, he fled to Kenya. In an amazing stroke of luck, he won entrance to the U.S. in the annual visa lottery, though his route to America—ending in a harrowing sequence of events that nearly stranded him in Nairobi—did not come easily. Now he is a proud resident of Maine, a Tedx Amoskeag 2019 speaker and he is working on a documentary about his story. Abdi is US citizen, his naturalization ceremony took place in Portland, Maine January 17th 2020.

For more about Abdi, visit:

[HTTPS://WWW.CALLMEAMERICAN.COM](https://www.callmeamerican.com)



ABDI NOR IFTIN

GET THINKING & TALKING

***Before students read the book, ask them to write a paragraph in response to this question:
“What does it mean to be an American?”

We will ask this question again after they have read the book and had time to reflect to see if and how their attitudes change.

Questions:

1. Abdi learned about America from watching American made movies. Thinking about the movies that he was able to view, do you think they were good examples of what it means to be an American? What movies do you wish he could have watched that would represent your idea of what it means to be an American.
2. Abdi’s parents’ childhoods were so different from his own, do you think this difference helped them survive as refugees? How do you think it influenced Abdi and his brother?
3. The American Dream is an idea often referenced in this country. How would you define the American Dream today? Ask your parents how they would describe it. Ask you grandparents. How do the answers compare?
4. Abdi continually relays through his book and through public interviews how grateful he is to have made it to the US. For him things like having toys, a freshly made bed, a refrigerator full of food, clean clothes and a roof were not part of daily life. Try keeping a list of at least one thing for which you are grateful every day for a week. Compare with a classmate to see if you have many items in common.

Q & A WITH ABDI

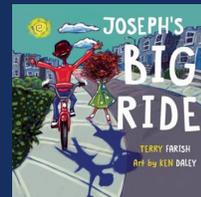
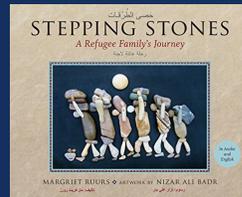
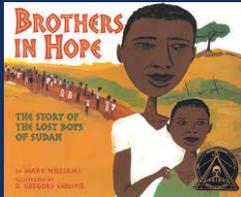
<http://knopfdoubleday.com/2019/06/11/the-betrayal-of-the-american-dream-an-exclusive-qa-with-abdi-nor-iftin/>

ABDI NOR IFTIN

CREATE

Read the following picture books and look closely at the artwork. What does the art add to the story? Try creating your own artwork to express your experience and feelings while listening to the interview with Abdi on “This American Life”.

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/560/abdi-and-the-golden-ticket>



Somali Architecture is a research project collecting images from pre-war Somalia and recreating buildings in 3D. Read about the project and watch a video. Can you recreate a building using an art medium of your choice? (draw, paint, collage, papercut, folding, modeling clay, etc.)

<https://somalichitecture.com>



FURTHER READINGS

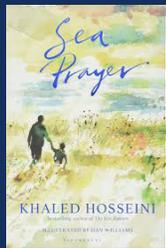
“When Stars Are Scattered” by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed
Graphic novel about two young brothers living in a refugee camp in Kenya.

A trailer for the book:

<https://penguinclassroom.com/books/when-stars-are-scattered/>

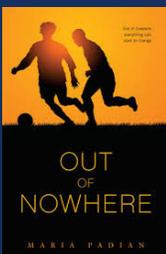
The audio book on Amazon :

<https://www.penguinrandomhouseaudio.com/book/599538/when-stars-are-scattered/>



“Sea Prayer” by Khaled Hosseini and illustrated by Dan Williams

“Sea Prayer” was inspired by the story of Alan Kurdi, the young three-year-old Syrian refugee who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach safety in Europe in 2015. It is poetic and moving.



“Out of Nowhere” by Maria Padian

Called “rich and multidimensional” by School Library Journal in a starred review, *Out of Nowhere* follows Tom Bouchard: captain and star of the Enniston High School soccer team; boyfriend to one of the prettiest, most popular girls; and third in his class, likely to have his pick of any college (if he ever bothers filling out his applications). But life in his idyllic small Maine town quickly gets turned upside down after the events of 9/11.

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DIG DEEPER

Art in Somalia

Art is often seen as a way to communicate. The video below is the story of one man's quest to save the art of Somalia. After watching the video discuss why art is important to maintaining a history of a culture. If you are interested in having Alison Johnson facilitate a Visual Thinking Strategy discussion around a piece of art, contact her at: ajohnson@islandreadersandwriters.org (*This can be done via Zoom*)

One man's quest to save the art of Somalia:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPnQgLbzI0k>

Information on the Somali refugee resettlement Lewiston:

<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/institutes/black-life/document/akiwumi-ibl-conference-feb-5-2019b.pdf>

Learning Somali:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KglhL9OzQyU>

Check out the photos from this Somali museum in Minnesota <http://www.somalimuseum.org>

ENGAGE & EXPLORE

The simulation activity below was adapted from *Passages: An awareness game confronting the plight of refugees* put together by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) <https://www.unhcr.org/473dc1772.pdf>

What does it feel like to be a refugee? A simulation of sorts.

1. The notion of time

- Sit down in a place where you will not be disturbed and blindfold yourself.
- Stay there for 5 minutes; do not count or use any artificial means of telling time. Use your own judgment and intuition.
- Take off the blindfold and check your watch.
- Think about how you felt with the blindfold on and write it down. How does it feel to sit in the dark, with no way to measure time and nothing to do but wait?
- The point of this exercise: A refugee may have to spend several hours hidden in darkness, afraid of being discovered and killed. Unlike you, who have undergone this experience voluntarily, he/ she is terrorized by a situation that has been forced on him/her.

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ENGAGE & EXPLORE CONTINUED

2. Taking orders

- Imagine that you are deprived of your autonomy. In other words, you are no longer allowed to make decisions for yourself. Your right to come and go, and to take care of your most basic needs, are all subject to someone else's authorization (standing up, walking, going to the toilet, drinking, eating, talking, etc.).
- Try to feel what it might be like to be restricted in this way. Imagine how you would react. Not only has your freedom been taken away but people are constantly giving you orders, making you work, pushing you around, interrupting you...and no one listens to you.
- The point of this exercise: To help you understand the stress that a refugee feels during his or her flight and to make you aware of the stress that your actions and attitudes may provoke among the players during the simulation game.

3. Shackled

- Having to obey orders all the time is like being shackled. You are forced to do things without knowing why. Walk around for 2 or 3 minutes holding your right ear with your left hand and your left ankle with your right hand.
- How does it feel to be forced to do this?
- The point of this exercise: Think about what you have just experienced for these few minutes.
- Refugees live under this kind of constraint for hours, months, even years.

4. Loss

- Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit. Equip yourself with a pen and paper.
- Try to remember a situation when you experienced a feeling of loss. Perhaps it was a cherished object, a place you loved to visit, a favorite pet or a loved one...
- Let all the memories and emotions associated with the loss come back to you. Write them down, so that later you can reread what you were feeling and evaluate the importance of these personal experiences.
- Think over your own experience of loss and consider how it must feel to be deprived of all those things or people to which or to whom you attach great importance.
- The point of these 3 exercises: Many refugees lose absolutely everything: their country, their home, their friends, their family. Try to understand the pain they must feel.

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EMERGENCY SUPPLY CASE

To put together an emergency supply case. Each family must decide which items to carry on the journey (one choice per person). Divide your class into families.

Preparation

- Make copies of the "Player Guidelines", one copy for each family;

Time Management

- The players are grouped by family. Hand out the guidelines for this module, face down. They must remain face down until you give the start signal.
- Each family will have 5 minutes to decide what to take in their emergency supply case (one object per family member). Everyone must be in agreement as to what is chosen.
- Once all families have chosen their supplies, each family must draw an "Event" card (). Make sure each family gives up the item indicated on the "Event" card.

Player Guidelines

Your entire life has been turned upside down. You must leave. You have to escape and leave everything behind except one object per person. The survival of your family might depend on the items you choose, so pick those you think will be the most useful during your escape. Each family member may now choose one object.

PIECE OF JEWELRY

A BOOK

PAIR OF SHOES

PORTABLE RADIO

FLASH LIGHT

CANTEEN

BACK PACK

DECK OF CARDS

KETTLE

BAR OF SOAP

FIRST AID KIT

10 METERS OF CLOTH

MAP OF THE REGION

KNIFE

SMALL TENT

WATCH

50 METERS OF ROPE

A MULTILINGUAL
DICTIONARY

DOLL

SLEEPING BAG

GOLD

ABDI NOR IFTIN

Emergency Supply Case continued

Make Your List

- You have 5 minutes to discuss the individual choices and finally put together a family emergency supply case. You must carry these supplies with you at all times.
- Choose your items and then draw pictures of them on a list titled Emergency Supply Case.
- Take some time to consider the items you chose and how they might be important and to whom in your group. Make a list reflecting your observations and thoughts. Each of these items has the potential to save your life. Why? How? Your final choice must be agreed upon by all.
- Next, you will draw a slip of paper from the basket to see what you might need to give up along your travels.

Cut out these strips and place folded up in a basket. Have kids draw one out (or teacher distribute) one at a time. Allow time for reflection and discussion.

Give up the object chosen by the oldest person in the family.

Give up the most cumbersome object in your emergency supply case.

Give up the object chosen by the player who picked this card.

**You have been stopped by the state police;
give up the smallest item in your emergency supply case.**

You have been stopped by the state police; decide which object to give up.

Give the object chosen by the youngest person in the family.

At a checkpoint, the police confiscate any items from your emergency supply case that might be used for communication purposes.

You must leave behind one item from your emergency supply case.

You must leave the place where you are quickly, leaving behind the heaviest item in your emergency supply case.