

# EXPLORE MORE BOOK GUIDE

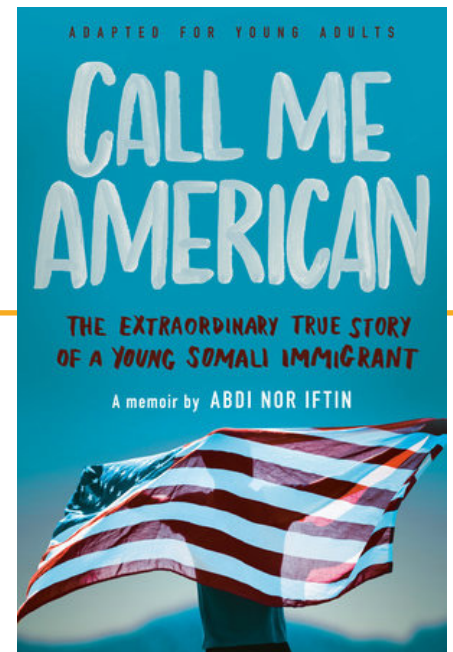
Activities, tools & resources for learning with this book!



## MEET ABDI

Born in Mogadishu to Nomadic parents, Abdi Iftin survived famine, war, and child soldiering. Thanks to the movies available to him, he taught himself English by watching American action films. By repeating and imitating the carefree actors, he earned himself the nickname “Abdi American.” After surviving a bombing at his house one evening in 2009, Abdi finally said goodbye to his home country and moved to Kenya where he and his brother lived as refugees. In an amazing stroke of luck, he won entrance to the U.S. through the visa lottery system. Now a bestselling and award-winning author based in Maine, Abdi is an advocate for refugee and immigrant rights. He is a regular columnist for the Portland Press Herald, a Somali news presenter with Maine Public Radio, and a Communication Specialist for Church World Service. Abdi is a US citizen, his naturalization ceremony took place in Portland, Maine January 17th 2020.

Learn more about Abdi and Call Me American [HERE](#).



# EXPLORE MORE BOOK GUIDE

**LET'S BEGIN! BEFORE READING THE BOOK**

Use the Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) questions below to orient readers, and to help guide a group discussion. Begin by taking a quiet moment to look closely at the book jacket, allowing time for observation and contemplation of the images.

- *What is going on in this picture?*
- *What do you see that makes you say that? (provide evidence)*
- *What more can we find?*

Watch this [VIDEO](#) for a quick VTS demo

## HAVE QUESTIONS?

Please contact Alison Johnson at Island Readers & Writers, 207-460-6828 or [ajohnson@islandreadersandwriters.org](mailto:ajohnson@islandreadersandwriters.org).

## STANDARDS Covered throughout this Explore More Book Guide:

*SL.1. Prepare for and participate in conversations across a range of topics, types, and forums, building on others' ideas and expressing their own.*

*SL.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.*

*SL.3 Present information and supporting evidence appropriate to task, purpose, and audience so listeners can follow the line of reasoning and incorporate multimedia when appropriate.*

*R.4. Read various texts closely to determine what each text explicitly says and to make logical inferences; cite specific textual evidence to support conclusions drawn from the texts.*

*R.5 Provide an accurate summary of various texts; determine the central idea(s) or theme(s) and analyze its development throughout each text.*

*R.6. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*

*R.8 Analyze the structure of various texts, including how the features and components relate to each other and the whole.*

*R.9. Assess how perspective or purpose shapes the content and style of various texts.*

*R.10 Evaluate the argument and specific claims in various texts.*

*Civics & Government*

## LET'S TALK! Discussion Questions

### TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT THE BOOK

Before students read the book, ask them to write a paragraph in response to this question:

**“What does it mean to be an American?”**

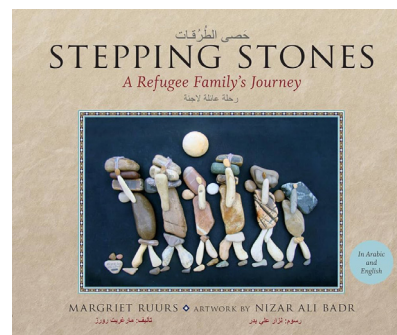
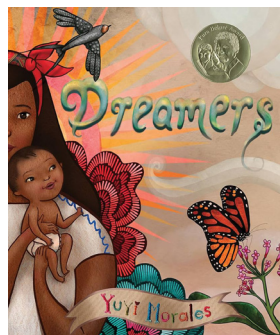
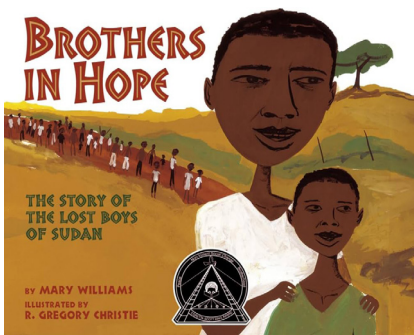
We will ask this question again after they have read the book and had time to reflect to see if and how their attitudes change.

#### 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 your 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.

## LET'S CREATE (AND DO)! Book-Inspired Art

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”](#).



**SOMALI ARCHITECTURE:** Watch this [VIDEO](#) reconstruction of buildings in Mogadishu, or view [IMAGES](#) of Somali architecture. Can you recreate a building using an art medium of your choice (draw, paint, collage, papercut, folding, modeling clay, etc.)

## LET'S CREATE (AND DO)! Book-Inspired Art (continued)

Make some Somali recipes: [RECIPES FOR CALL ME AMERICAN](#)

### WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE A REFUGEE?

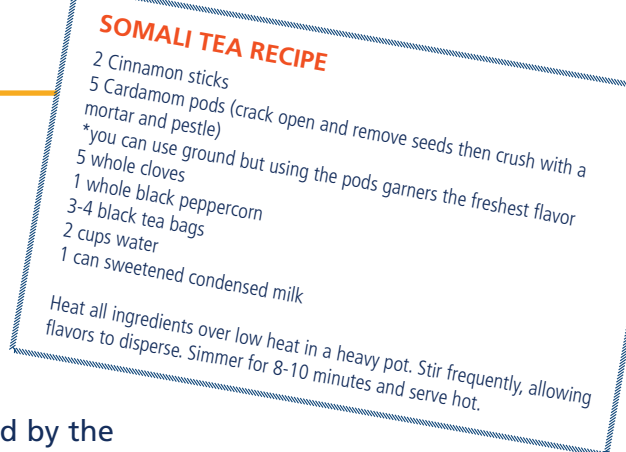
#### *A simulation of sorts*

The simulation activity below was adapted from "Passages:

An awareness game confronting the plight of refugees" developed by the

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by the [UNHCR PASSAGES](#). We've selected

and adapted activities to better suit a younger audience. An additional activity, Packing an **Emergency Supply Case**, can be found in the appendix of this guide.



#### **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.

#### **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.



## LET'S DIVE DEEPER! Explore More

1. Art in Somalia- Art is often seen as a way to communicate. [THE LOST ART OF SOMALIA](#) - 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.

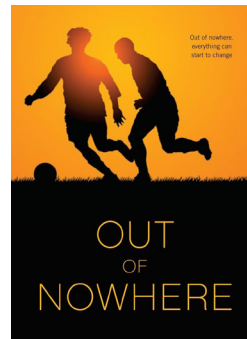
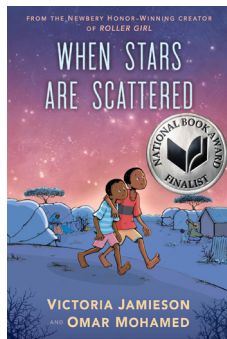
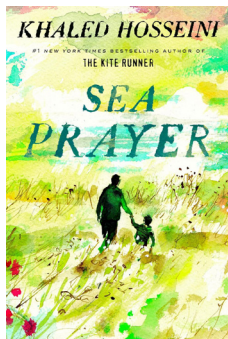
If you are interested in having Alison Johnson facilitate a Visual Thinking Strategy discussion around a piece of art, contact her at: [ajohnson@islandreadersandwriters.org](mailto:ajohnson@islandreadersandwriters.org). (This can be done via Zoom)

2. Information on the Somali Bantu Community Association of Maine - [this link is not working](#)

3. Learning [SOMALI](#)

4. Check out the photos from [THE SOMALI MUSEUM OF MINNESOTA](#).

## LET'S READ MORE! Text to Text Connections



# ABDI NOR IFTIN

## 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.