

Teaching Notes & Resources

Key Stage 2

Themes: Journeys | Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Conflict and War | Migration | Family | Home | Friendship

The discussion prompts and activities included in this pack are suitable for the classroom or library sessions and can be easily adapted for different age groups at the teacher's discretion.

[Purchase To The Other Side](#)

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About

To The Other Side by Erika Meza

A powerful and timely story, exploring the journey of two young refugee children in search of safety. Perfect for opening up conversations about conflict and war, encouraging empathy and understanding.

A young boy and his older sister have left home to play a game. To win, she tells him, they must travel across endless lands together and make it to the finish line.

Children they meet along the way imagine what might be waiting for them across the border: A spotted dog? Ice cream! Or maybe a new school. But the journey is difficult, and the monsters are more real than they imagined.

And when it no longer feels like a game, the two children must still find a way to forge ahead, and reach the other side.

Beautifully brought to life by author-illustrator Erika Meza, this is a symbolic and emotionally rich picture book about the spirit and strength it takes to leave your home behind.

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Scan the following code to watch three videos of Erika Meza talking about *To The Other Side*, in these videos she introduces the book, discusses the key themes and shares what inspired the book.



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Objectives

Reading:

- Participate in discussion about books taking turns and listening to what others say.
- Discuss the significance of a book's title and events.
- Ask questions to improve understanding of a text.
- Draw inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions; justify inferences with evidence.
- Predict what might happen from details stated and implied.
- Identify how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.

PSHE:

- Talk about emotions accurately and sensitively, using appropriate vocabulary.

Art and design:

- Use drawing, painting and sculpture to develop and share ideas, experiences and imagination.
- Develop art and design techniques in using colour and pattern.

Geography:

- Locate countries using a world map.



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Key Themes and Ideas

Explore Themes of

- Journeys
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Conflict and war
- Migration
- Family
- Home
- Friendship

To the Other Side provides an excellent opportunity for young readers to learn about the experiences of refugees and develop empathy for those who have been forced to leave their homes to find safety.

For some students, this could be a sensitive topic, whether they themselves have experience of seeking refuge, or whether they have been forced to leave their homes for any reason. It is advised that teachers read this book before sharing with students, perhaps also giving parents or students a chance to pre-read the text at home before any discussion begins in the classroom.

Depending on the experiences of students, it may also be a good idea to keep discussions focused on the characters in the book and avoid asking the class to relate the story to events in their own lives.

Depending on the age and maturity of students, it might also be useful to read the author's note and the words of the three girls on pages 33 and 34.

The following definitions may be helpful in group discussions:

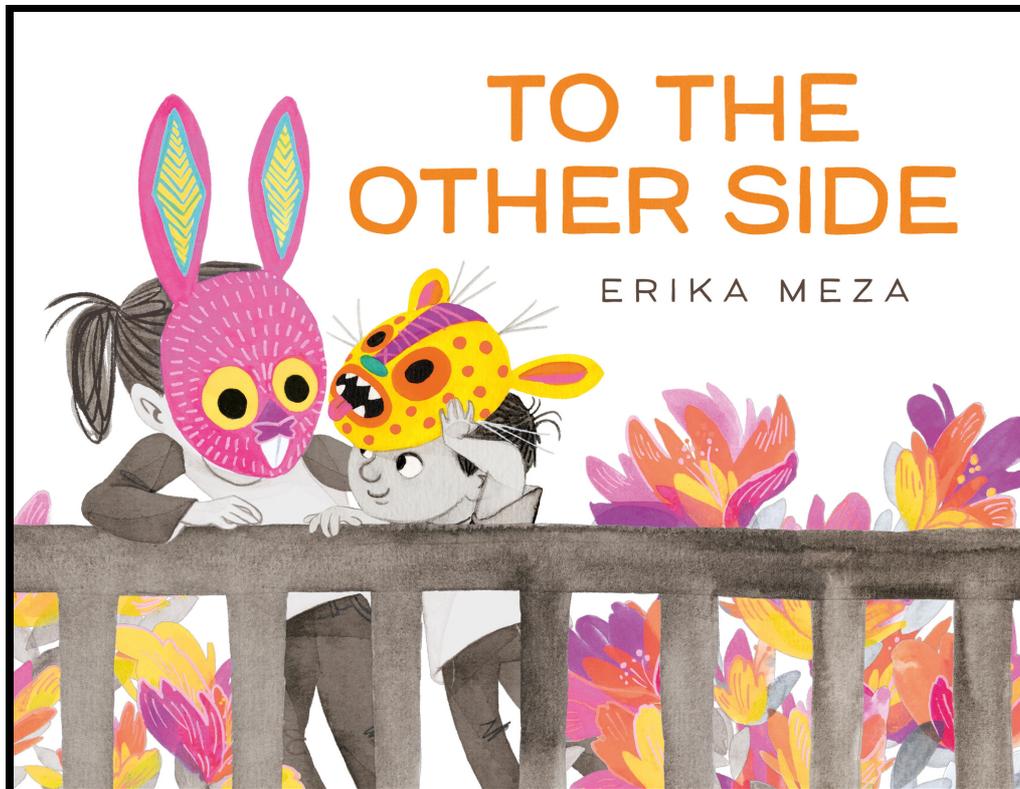
Refugee - somebody who has been forced to leave their home country to find safety. A refugee might have been forced to leave their home country because of war or conflict, natural disaster or persecution. (To be persecuted means to be treated cruelly or unfairly because of race or political or religious beliefs.) If somebody is a refugee it means they have been granted 'refugee status' in the country they have travelled to.

Asylum seeker - someone who has left their home country to seek safety and has applied for 'refugee status' in another country.

Migrant - someone who has chosen to leave their home country. There are many reasons people might choose to leave their home countries including work, education and to join family members.



Introducing the Book



To introduce the book, it might be a good idea to show children the front cover but use a piece of card to cover it and reveal it gradually from the top down.

First reveal the title and think about what it might suggest about the story. Then reveal the character's faces with their masks. How old might they be? Why might they be wearing masks? Finally, reveal the bottom third of the page and the black fence. What might be on each side of the fence? What might the characters be looking at?

It might be helpful to bring in an old, worn pair of children's trainers and an old child's rucksack. Explain to the children that these items belong to the narrator of the story. Can the children make any predictions about what might happen in the story?



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Discussion Prompts and Activities

Pages 1–2 ‘The rules of the game are simple.’

- How do you think the characters are related to each other?
- What might ‘the game’ be?
- How many colours can you see on the page?

Pages 3–4 ‘Avoid the monsters.’

- What are the rules of the game?
- What do you notice in this illustration?
- How many different masks can you see?
- Which mask would you choose? Why?

Activity Suggestion:

Give the children a selection of different animal masks. Can they put a mask on and move around the room like that animal? Encourage them to try different masks and compare how it feels to be each animal. How do they think the narrator feels when he is wearing his tiger mask?

Pages 5–6 ‘She promised the masks would hide us.’

- Why are the characters wearing masks?
- What are the characters hiding from?
- Where are they trying to get to?
- What has Erika Meza drawn in colour and what has she drawn in black and white?

Activity Suggestion:

The narrator’s sister tells him that the animal masks ‘Make us fast. Make us brave.’ What does it mean to be brave? Can the children describe a time when they have been brave?

The author, Erika Meza, was born in Mexico. Can the children locate Mexico on a map? Have a look online at images of traditional Mexican masks. Using card or papier-mâché, make animal masks and decorate them in traditional Mexican folk-art style using bright colours and patterns.



Discussion Prompts and Activities

Pages 7–8 ‘On and on we went.’

- Can you think of three words to describe the river?
- Choose one of the characters on the page. Can you describe what they are doing?
- What are the children waiting for?

Activity Suggestion:

The narrator draws a picture of home in the sand. Discuss what ‘home’ means. Children could draw a picture of their own home or write a short poem about home based on the five senses e.g. ‘Home is the smell of...’, ‘Home is the taste of ...’.

Pages 9–10 ‘We thought hard of what we might win.’

- What do we learn about the characters’ hopes and dreams on this page?

Pages 11 – 12 ‘My sister made me strong.’

- What are the women by the side of the train track in the top left-hand corner doing?
- How long do you think the characters have been travelling? What makes you think this?
- Can you spot any monsters? How do the monsters make you feel?
- How does the girl look after her little brother?

Activity Suggestion:

The narrator says his sister ‘made [him] strong’ and ‘kept [him] safe’. As a class, collect as many words as you can to describe the narrator’s sister, perhaps using a thesaurus to help you. For example, you might include the words ‘kind’, ‘caring’, ‘responsible’ and ‘protective’. Now, ask the children to put themselves in the narrator’s shoes. Can they describe their sister? The following sentence starters might be helpful: My sister is ... / When I’m with my sister, I feel... / I like the way she ... / My favourite thing about her is ... / She helps me by...

Pages 13–14 ‘But this game was too long.’

- How would you describe the atmosphere of this page?
- How does the narrator feel?
- What do you think ‘cuánto falta’ means? Do you know what language it is?
- Why does the narrator’s sister tell him not to look back?



Discussion Prompts and Activities

Pages 15–16 ‘This isn’t a game... is it?’

- Why do you think the characters left their old home?
- Why has the sister has been telling the narrator it’s a game?
- Can you think of three words to describe the narrator’s sister?

Activity Suggestion:

Contrast the image of the two characters on page 3 with the images of them on page 15. What does the characters’ body language tell us about how their feelings have changed? Ask children to write the sister’s thoughts and feelings in a thought bubble.

Pages 17–18 ‘Soon there were only a few of us left.’

- What is a ‘border’?
- How do you think the narrator and his sister feel as they look at the border?
- Why does the author use repetition, italics and exclamation marks in the text?

Activity Suggestion:

In pairs, children could role-play the conversation between the narrator and his sister as they climb onto the rock to look at the border in the distance.

Pages 19–20 ‘But the game wasn’t over yet.’

- How do you think the characters feel as they look at the wall after so long travelling?
- What does the line of children remind you of? (Notice how the line looks similar to the line of ants on page 8. Why do you think the Erika Meza has made this connection?)

Activity Suggestion:

Ask the children to imagine they are one of the characters in the line and describe or draw five things that are in their rucksack. Now, get them to stand in a long line like the characters in the illustration. Can they improvise conversations between themselves? How do they feel as they look at the wall in the distance? Move slowly along the line getting the children to say their feelings out loud as you walk past them.

Pages 21–22 ‘We waited in rooms.’

- What is happening in this illustration?
- How do you think the characters feel? What clues can you spot in the pictures and text?
- What do you think they will find on the other side?
- How do you think they will they feel when they get to the other side?



Discussion Prompts and Activities

Pages 23–24 ‘But once we did... it didn’t feel like we had won.’

- Where is each character looking?
- How do you think the sister feels? Look at her body language for clues. What might she be thinking? (Notice how the sister’s body language mirrors the mother’s body language on the first page. What might this tell us?)
- What do you think the narrator has seen?

Pages 25–28

- What do they find?

Pages 29–32 ‘Now I have a new friend.’

- What do you think the narrator and his new friend are saying to each other on page 30?
- How does the narrator’s new friend help him to feel welcome?
- What do you hope for the narrator and his sister as they settle into their new home?
- How has the Erika Meza used colour on the final page?

Activity Suggestion:

Hot seat the narrator and his sister and ask them about their journey. Older children could re-write the story from the sister’s point of view.

Imagine the narrator is starting school in his new hometown. What might his new classmates do to help him feel welcome? Collect a list of ideas. In small groups, role-play a scene from the narrator’s first day at his new school.

Discuss what a new arrival to your local area would need to know. Children could create a leaflet or poster to help new arrivals settle in.

Activity Suggestion:

Children might be interested to find out about famous child refugees such as Mo Farah, Rita Ora, Dua Lipa, Luol Deng and Judith Kerr and to learn about their contributions to the UK and to the world.

Share the quote by the author. Is there anything in this quote that is relevant for the famous child refugees that children have been researching? How does the quote relate to themes and ideas in the story?



Discussion Prompts and Activities

Migrants and refugees are often portrayed as either heroes or villains: and yet, the children I was lucky to meet when working on this book were simply that: children. They liked pandas, dreamed of seeing a snowfall, wondered whom to gift a special doll to, and tried to help their parents with their younger siblings. Whatever their parths, whatever the monsters chasing them from their homes, they deserve to have the same choice I had: to cross an invisible line and, quite simply, be allowed to grow roots again, in a place of their choosing, where they finally feel safe.

- Erika Meza



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