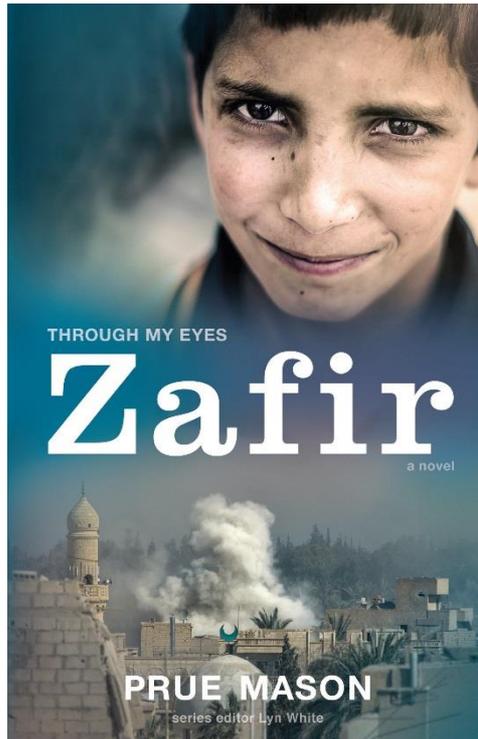


Teaching and Learning Guide

Through My Eyes

Book Six



Zafir

Prue Mason

ISBN 9781743312544

Recommended for ages 11–14 years

The style and structure of these Teaching and Learning Guides was created by Lyn White, Series Editor for Through My Eyes.

Lyn White also wrote the specific content of this *Zafir* Guide

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The Guide contains numerous links to online resources so we recommend wherever possible you view it on screen. A digital copy is available on the Through My Eyes website www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au

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Advisory note

There are students in our Australian schools for whom the themes and events depicted in *Zafir* will be very familiar and all too real. Such students may well have fled similar conflicts and experienced displacement and trauma. It is important that teachers read the text before sharing it with their class, monitor student reactions and respond appropriately. **This is a particularly relevant caution for the 9.4.4 Refugees section of this guide.**

1. Guide overview

This teaching and learning guide presents a range of learning experiences for units of work that promote the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours designed to extend students' understanding of themselves and the human experience, empowering them to become active global citizens.

This comprehensive guide is designed for teachers to use selectively according to their schools' curriculum and student needs. Given the guide's numerous links to online resources, the guide is best used as a digital document. (Web links provided in this guide were current at the time of publication of *Zafir*.)

2. Introduction to *Zafir*

In 2015, a series about contemporary conflict zones would certainly not be complete without a story set in Syria. Through the eyes of 13-year-old Zafir, readers witness the beginnings of a brutal and devastating civil war that has particularly affected young Syrians.

This text is a moving, dramatic and vivid narrative. Readers are transported to the city of Homs to share the everyday life of Zafir and his family, whose decision to relocate from Dubai all too quickly assumes life and death significance. As the Syrian people begin to challenge a secretive regime, the stage is set for a revolution that endangers Zafir's friends, family and ultimately himself. Readers will appreciate and connect with the vulnerability and bewilderment of young Zafir as he struggles to comprehend why his world is literally crumbling around him. Zafir is an endearing protagonist whose courage and resilience are compelling. The cast of characters is diverse and the drama intense in this sensitively crafted text. True to life, there isn't a 'happily-ever-

after' ending but sufficient glimpses of hope to suggest Zafir and his family may one day be reunited.

Zafir is an excellent novel for exploring relevant contemporary themes such as children and war, human rights, refugees and migration, culture, family, the cost of freedom, loyalty, friendship, trust and hope. Like all books in the Through My Eyes series, *Zafir* is an inspiring story that does not overwhelm, but showcases the incredible resilience of the human spirit and the courage that we can find in the most difficult of life's journeys. This story is a tribute to the thousands of Syrians whose cries for freedom led to a war that has become one of the worst humanitarian disasters of our time.

2.1 Synopsis

It is 2011, and Zafir has been living with his parents in Homs for the past six months. The family left Dubai so that Boulos (Pops), Zafir's father, could take up the head-doctor position in a local hospital. Nadia, Zafir's mother, wanted to escape the memories of the car accident that killed both her parents and also be closer to Ghazi, her brother, who lives in Damascus.

The story opens with taxi-driver Abu Moussa driving Zafir to the international school. Zafir is feeling homesick for his friends in Dubai when suddenly a red Lada races past them. When a dead body in a bag is flung from the Lada onto the road, Zafir insists they stop to help. Abu Moussa explains it is the *shabiha*, armed militia supporting the Ba'aath party, and it is best for Zafir to forget what he has seen. Zafir begins to wonder if Syria really is a 'Kingdom of Silence'.

Zafir seeks answers from Rami, his only school friend and a technology whiz, but Rami has his own secrets. Rami uses code to explain the *shabiha* and Bashar al-Assad's strict regime. Zafir is confused, as surely the president would not want to hurt his own people.

On returning home to his apartment in the modern suburb of Al-Waer, Zafir tells Nadia about the body. She is outraged and when Boulos hears the account, the parents begin one of their many arguments – Boulos supporting a strong united government, Nadia wanting her son to experience freedom and justice.

Zafir's birthday arrives and he receives a skateboard and a helmet from Uncle Ghazi. The family share a birthday meal with his beloved, extremely religious grandmother, Tetah, at her home in al-Hamidiyah, the Christian Quarter in Homs. Ustaaz Farook joins them for supper. He is a professor at the university and student Ammar is his tenant. Tetah is full of the news of the arrival from

Australia of the Reverend Father Papadopolous with his wife and three children. Plans are made for the families to meet.

Back at school, Rami gives Zafir a solar cap that can charge his phone. Rami is bullied by Murshid and Mustafa, the cool football players at his school.

When Nadia sneaks into Zafir's room to check her Facebook page, Boulos discovers Nadia on the Syria Revolution 2011 page that announces the first Friday protest. Nadia challenges Boulos – she believes the protests are ‘the winds of change [that] will come and blow away this injustice and shame.’

Zafir meets the Papadopolous family and befriends Eleni, a fellow skateboard enthusiast. Zafir is approached by Murshid to join the football team. Murshid also tells Zafir that Rami's father is an exiled traitor. Rami shares the secret about his activist father with Zafir.

Mum takes Zafir to Damascus to surprise Pops who is working there. They meet Uncle Ghazi but Zafir feels something is not quite right. Uncle Ghazi tells them that today is a Day of Rage in the square – the beginning of the Syrian revolution. Crowds begin their freedom chant and as the *shurta* (police) arrive, Zafir watches in horror as Uncle Ghazi is arrested.

Protests spark across the country as people gather after Friday prayers in defiance of the regime. Uncle Ghazi is eventually released but he refuses to leave Syria as violence escalates across the country. Zafir's family move into Tetah's house. Nadia is keen to practise Easter egg-painting and Zafir is pleased to spend more time skateboarding with Eleni. He sees Ammar and overhears him saying he is going to the Tahrir Square sit-in. Zafir is to be an altar boy at the Easter Parade as a surprise for Tetah.

One evening, when the power is cut, protestors are told to leave the square as gunfire cracks the air and ambulances speed to aid the injured. Zafir learns that Ammar's name has been added to the list of martyrs on the wall of the Khalid Ibn Walid mosque.

The family's supper is disturbed when Abu Moussa staggers inside their gate begging Boulos to save his son who has been shot at the sit-in. Zafir bravely tries to stem the blood from the young man's gunshot wound as they travel to the hospital.

Abu Moussa's son survives surgery but the *Mukhabarat* (military intelligence service of the government) storm the hospital room, drag Abu Moussa's son from his bed and arrest Boulos at

gunpoint. Mum and Zafir move into Tetah's house permanently. Mum goes to Damascus to find Pops who has been imprisoned.

The siege of Homs begins and Zafir is woken by sounds of shelling that seem too close. Although he is buried alive when Tetah's house is bombed, Zafir survives and is finally rescued by Uncle Ghazi who has become a citizen journalist. Uncle Ghazi remains secretive about Nadia's whereabouts. Zafir's solar cap and red egg survive the bombing.

Zafir stays in Azzam Azzad's apartment where he and Uncle Ghazi prepare news reports for foreign media. Zafir is in pain, confused and angry and demands answers from Uncle Ghazi but the truth he seeks is devastating – his father is in Adra prison and his mother is in a Beirut hospital recovering from the amputation of her arm following a sniper attack.

As Homs is regained by government troops and Azzam's apartment hit by *shilkas* (anti-aircraft tanks), Uncle Ghazi decides Zafir must leave with the Al Hamra family who are fleeing to Wadi Khaled in Lebanon. Zafir feels so alone but with renewed courage and determination he makes the journey that leads to the reunion with his mother and the setting up of a makeshift home as United Nations (UN) registered refugees.

Zafir and Nadia carry the grief of losing Tetah and Uncle Ghazi, but as they prepare a special meal and read a letter from Pops they feel united as a family. Symbolically, the red Easter egg remains unbroken and sits on the 'shelf in the corner of the room, glowing in the summer sunlight that was streaming through the dirty window.'

4. Author Information and Motivation

Biographical information

Prue Mason was born in South Australia and wanted to be a writer from a very young age. She spent many years of her adult life gathering experiences as she travelled the world as a flight attendant and co-pilot with her pilot husband.

Prue lived in Canada for three years and the Gulf region of the Middle East for twelve years, travelling extensively through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen. In Dubai, Prue wrote for the *Young Times*, a children's newspaper. Prue comments on this time:

My time in Dubai taught me more than how to write, though. I learnt that when people from different cultures meet they often don't trust or respect each other, and there can be

many misunderstandings that can even lead to war. But after having lived and made friends with people from other nationalities, I know that no culture is better than another, we just do things differently. [<http://www.penguin.com.au/contributors/3418/prue-mason>]

Prue has taught English to Arabic speakers and revisited the Middle East several times.

She has drawn upon these experiences and her love of flying and aviation history to create engaging works of fiction for young readers. Her published works include:

- *Camel Rider*, Winner of the 2005 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Young Adults.
- *Destination Abudai*
- *Birdie in the Sky*

See <http://www.pruemason.com/> for more information about Prue Mason.

Motivation for writing *Zafir*

Prue is passionate about the need for an understanding between east and west, particularly in reference to the concept of 'salaam' – peace. In the 'Author's Note' at the end of *Zafir*, she describes her feelings about the Syrian uprising:

The protestors seemed so brave and heroic, especially the citizen journalists who wrote blogs and posted YouTube clips...I read and watched it all and felt goosebumps when I saw people wave their flags and call for 'Allah, Sourya, Azadi' – 'God, Syria and Freedom.'

Prue felt compelled to set *Zafir's* story at the very beginning of the conflict so that young readers could understand how this brutal war started and its effect on ordinary people. It is Prue's hope that:

by telling this story my voice will be added to the voices of those who can no longer speak as we all call out for a world where children can grow up knowing what the word 'salaam' really means.

To book Prue Mason for a school visit:

<http://bookedout.com.au/find-a-speaker/author/prue-mason/>

or contact Lyn White: <mailto:lynwhite10@gmail.com>

5. UNICEF

A portion of the proceeds (up to \$5000) from sales of this series will be donated to UNICEF.

UNICEF works in over 190 countries to promote and protect the rights of children. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition,

clean water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and HIV.

All of UNICEF's work is guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The most internationally recognised treaty on the planet, the CRC sets out the basic rights of children and the obligations of governments to fulfil those rights.

UNICEF's mission is to make sure that the rights of children all over the world are protected and that people under the age of 18 are given special care and protection. UNICEF draws attention to the duties of governments, families, communities and individuals to respect those rights and support them in doing so.

UNICEF's approach is to use low-cost, highly effective solutions that work dramatically to improve children's lives. UNICEF is funded by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

UNICEF is non-political and provides aid to children on a non-discriminatory basis based on need and has no religious, racial or political affiliations.

UNICEF is active in all of the countries represented in the series and links have been provided in this guide to some of their excellent resources that support the suggested teaching and learning activities.

To learn more about UNICEF's work and school programs go to <http://www.unicef.org.au> .

6. Curriculum Use

6.1 Australian Curriculum

This guide is designed for use with upper primary and lower secondary students in years 5 - 8 of the Australian Curriculum. *Zafir* is a unique literary text that has:

...personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value...and...potential for enriching the lives of students, expanding the scope of their experience. (Content structure, literature, Australian Curriculum: English)

Zafir can be studied as a class text or used as a literary focus for integrated studies units. It is also extremely suitable for use in Literature circles. The Primary English Teaching Association of Australia (PETAA) provides a useful introduction to this reading strategy at http://issuu.com/petaa/docs/pen_140

Some excellent practical suggestions on strategy implementation are available at:

<http://www.abcteach.com/search.php?q=literature+circle> and

<http://www.litcircles.org/Overview/overview.html>

The primary focus of these teaching and learning activities is engagement with the English learning area with its three interrelated strands:

Language: knowing about the English language

Literature: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature

Literacy: expanding the repertoire of English usage

The selection of teaching and learning activities has been guided by Year level Content descriptions for the following Strands and sub-strands:

Language	Literature	Literacy
Language for interaction	Literature and context	Texts in context
Text structure and organisation	Responding to literature	Interacting with others
Expressing and developing ideas	Examining literature	Interpreting, analysing and evaluating
	Creating literature	Creating texts

This guide highlights both receptive and productive modes of English language learning. Students are involved in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating oral, print, visual and digital texts.

The unique cultural setting and multiplicity of contemporary global themes presented in *Zafir* have strong relevance for the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the following General Capabilities, particularly through the use of Inquiry Learning:

- Intercultural understanding
- Personal and social capability
- Ethical understanding
- Critical and creative thinking
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability

The opportunity to explore country and place, people, identity and culture ensures the relevance of this text for inclusion in the Geography learning area of the Australian Curriculum:

Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts (ACELT1807)

The concept of place develops students' curiosity and wonder about the diversity of the world's places, peoples, cultures and environments (Australian Curriculum: Geography, Rationale)

The Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography aims to ensure that students develop:

- ***a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect about places, people, cultures and environments throughout the world***
 - ***as informed, responsible and active citizens who can contribute to the development of an environmentally and economically sustainable, and socially just world.***
- (Australian Curriculum: Geography, Aims)***

The study of *Zafir* is a highly suitable context and tuning-in resource for the development of the following geographical concepts:

- Place
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Change and Interconnection.

The text is perfect for addressing the key inquiry questions and focus statements of AusVELS Geography Levels 5 & 6:

- Year 5: Factors that shape the human and environmental characteristics of places.

- Year 6: A diverse and connected world: How do people and cultures differ across the world?

AusVELS

Teachers of AusVELS will appreciate the compatibility of this guide with the **Physical, Personal and Social Learning** and the Interdisciplinary Learning strands and in particular, its relevance to the following Domains:

Civics and Citizenship

They (the students) consider human rights and social justice issues at local, national and global levels. (Overview, Civics and Citizenship, Physical, Personal and Social Learning, AusVELS)

Interpersonal development

They (the students) participate in activities which enable them to identify the differing values and beliefs held by individuals in local, national and global contexts and reflect on the impact these may have on relationships. (Interpersonal development, Learning focus, Level 7, AusVELS)

Information and Communications Technology

As students work towards the achievement of Level 8 standards in Information and Communications Technology, they learn to use a variety of ICT tools and techniques to assist with filtering, classifying, representing, describing and organising ideas, concepts and issues. (Information and Communications Technology, Learning focus, Level 8 AusVELS)

Thinking Processes

At Level 6, students use a broad range of thinking processes and tools, and reflect on and evaluate their effectiveness. They articulate their thinking processes. They document changes in their ideas and beliefs over time. (Thinking Processes, Standards, Level 6 AusVELS)

<http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

6.2 Global Education

Teaching and learning activities support exploration of key themes in global education including:

- Identity and cultural diversity
- Social justice and human rights
- Peace building and conflict resolution
- Civics and citizenship
- Values education

6.3 International Baccalaureate

Schools adopting the International Baccalaureate will find *Zafir* a valuable literary resource for the exploration of the six trans-disciplinary themes of global significance, having particular relevance to Human Rights and Peace and Conflict units of study.

7. Background Information for Teachers

7.1 Syria and Homs

The Syrian Arab Republic is located on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea in south-west Asia in the heart of the Middle East. The country is smaller than the state of Victoria and is bordered by Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine.

Syria has a population of over 19 million with most people living along the coastal plain between the mountains and desert region. Sunni Muslims make up 74% of the population with the Alawite minority (16%) dominating the country's politics. About 10 per cent of the population are Christian and there is a small number of Jewish communities. Arabic is the official language. The second largest ethnic group is the Kurds who live in the north-eastern corner of Syria and speak Kurdish.

Syria's economy depends on its agricultural and oil sectors. Oil has historically provided about 40% of its export earnings but this has been severely affected by the civil war. Syria has a rich cultural tradition in literature, music, poetry and cuisine.

The capital city, Damascus, is located in the south-east. Other important cities include the largest city, Aleppo; the second major city, Homs; and Latakia, the main city on the Syrian Mediterranean coast.

Homs is an ancient city, known in Roman times as Emesa. The city dates back to 2300 BC and was an important location on the 'Silk Road'. In 636 BC the city was renamed Homs by the conquering Muslims. Homs' central location makes it an important transport hub with major roads and railway systems linking the interior cities with the Mediterranean coast.

Homs lies in a fertile agricultural region on the banks of the Orontes River. Oil and sugar refineries built on the west side have caused significant pollution issues for the city. An agricultural research station and university provide employment for the city's population of upwards of 400,000 people. Homs has several significant historical buildings including Khalid Ibn Al-Walid Mosque and the world heritage sites of Crac Des Chivaliers, the most important Crusader castle of the middle ages, and the Citadel of Salah Ed-Din.

General information and photos of Syria and pre-civil war Homs can be viewed at:

<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/countries/syria-facts/>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/syria> Select: 'View gallery'

<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Syria.html>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/syria.html>

<http://www.homsonline.com/>

<http://www.homsonline.com/EN/Citeis/HomsPhotoGallery.htm> This is an excellent image gallery of Homs from ancient to modern pre-war times.

Sullivan, Anne Marie. *Syria*, Mason Crest, Pennsylvania, 2010

7.1.1 Early history

Syria is one of the oldest inhabited regions in the world – human habitation is believed to date back to 700,000 years ago. Originally known as 'Eber Nari' by the Mesopotamians, Syria once included Jordan, Israel and Lebanon. It was the Greeks who named it Syria. Syria was an important trade and cultural hub of the Assyrian Empire until it fell to Babylonia in 612 BC. Cuneiform tablet collections found in ancient Syrian cities provide an almost complete picture of Mesopotamian life in the third millennium BC. The ancient Syrian cities of Ebla and Mari are credited with the invention of writing. Major civilisations including Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Phoenicians and Arameans inhabited this region until the Greek Macedonian Empire, under the rule of Alexander the Great, ended Persian rule in 300 BC. The Romans, Byzantines and Arabs made Syria an important trade centre and it became part of the Islamic empire in 632 AD. The Ottomans finally defeated the French and English Crusaders in 1516 establishing Syria as a Turkish province until World War 1. After 400 years of Ottoman rule, the modern Syrian state was established as a French

mandate that remained until independence was achieved in 1946 when Syria became an independent republican nation.

The new nation was politically unstable and in 1958, after a series of military coups, Syria united with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic. The rise of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party led to its president Hafiz al-Assad installing an autocratic military regime that lasted for the next thirty years until his succession by his son Bashar al-Assad in 2000. The relative stability of Hafiz al-Assad's presidency began to unravel as his son failed to deliver promised political and economic reforms, release political prisoners or repeal the restrictive Emergency Law.

Further information can be viewed at:

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/syria/qt/110607Syria.htm>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/578856/Syria/29902/Early-history>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Syria

KEY FACTS

Syrian Arab Republic

Land: 184,050 sq. km. The terrain is semi-arid and desert plateau; narrow coastal plain and mountains in west. Climate is dry hot summers and mild rainy winters; colder inland.

Capital: Damascus

People: Population 19,747,586

Religion: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (including Alawite) 16%, Christian 10% and small Jewish communities

Ethnic groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%

Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French, English

Government: Republic under an authoritarian military-dominated regime

Economy: Industry: petroleum, textiles, food processing and agriculture

Exports: crude oil, petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, cotton fibre, clothing

Currency: Syrian pound

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>



Source: <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/syria.pdf>

7.1.2 Syrian civil war

On the back of the Arab Spring demonstrations that commenced in 2010, Syrians began to give voice to their anger over the Assad government’s failure to implement economic and political reforms. Initial protests in Damascus, Aleppo and Daraa were sparked by an incident in March 2011 when a group of Daraa teenagers were arrested for creating anti-regime graffiti. A series of Friday Days of Rage ensued as protestors took to the streets demanding the overthrow of the regime; the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad; the repeal of the 48-year-old Emergency law that banned public gatherings; and the addressing of human rights abuses. By the end of December 2011, there had been major confrontations between the newly formed Free Syrian Army and government security forces. Over three thousand people were killed as violence escalated across the country. Thousands of protestors took to the street as many political activists and human rights campaigners were arrested and imprisoned.

In April 2011, thousands gathered in Homs’ City Square for a sit-in. Homs became one of the most restive cities and earned the media title the ‘Capital of the Revolution’. Syrian Army tanks entered

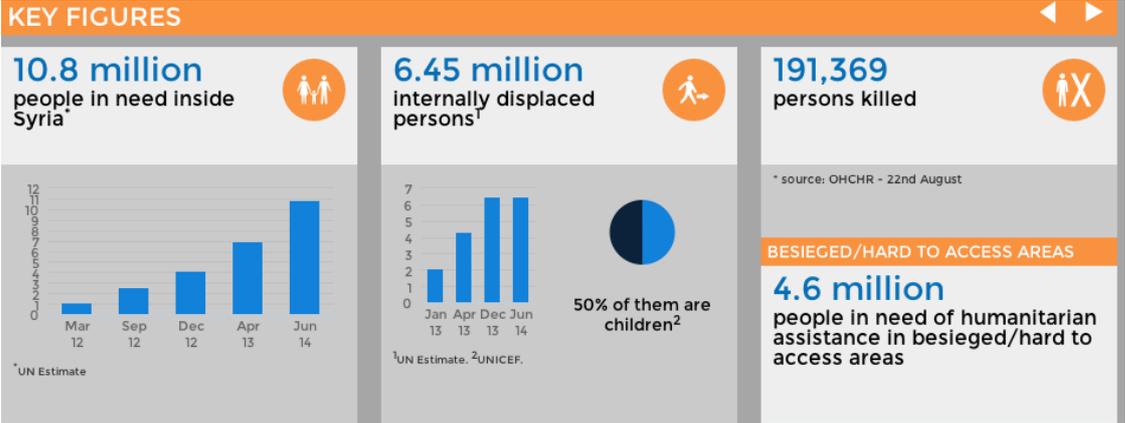
the city and shelled homes and businesses. Daily confrontations between protestors and security forces continued even after the lifting of the Emergency law. Government forces launched the artillery bombardment of Homs in February 2012. The UN estimated that more than 7,500 people had been killed since the government began its attempt to crush the anti-regime protests.

International pressure intensified, calling for the Assad family to resign. In December 2012, the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution together with more than 130 countries recognized the Opposition Forces as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

By 2013 government troops, now backed by Hezbollah, recaptured a number of rebel strongholds. On the protestors' side, secular moderates were outnumbered by Islamists and jihadists linked to al-Qaeda, whose brutal tactics caused widespread concern and triggered rebel infighting. The UN estimated that by June 2013 90,000 people had been killed in the conflict.

In May 2014, hundreds of rebels were evacuated from the Old City of Homs. The United States and Britain led demands for investigation into reports of government use of chemical weapons. The investigation confirmed that chemical weapons were used in Damascus.

Syria is now the world's biggest internal displacement crisis, with an estimated 6.5 million people forced from their homes; half of them are children. Three million Syrians have taken refuge in surrounding countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. The conflict has drawn in surrounding countries and evolved with the rise of jihadist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS). The UN declared ISIS militants have committed 'mass atrocities' in Syria. As many as 1,000 rebel groups with an estimated 100,000 fighters now outnumber the secular moderates. The UN identified more than 190,000 deaths in 2014 and has characterised the Syrian crisis as the worst since the Rwandan genocide in 1994. UN-led peace talks in Geneva failed and UNICEF estimates up to one million Syrian children are living under siege in the most dangerous place in the world to be a child.



Source: <http://syria.unocha.org/>

Lesson ideas and activities for students on the Syrian civil war are available at:

<http://teachunicef.org/global-citizenship-brief-syria>

http://teachunicef.org/sites/default/files/documents/gcb_syria_backgrounder_1.pdf

Syria:

<http://www.sharemylesson.com/article.aspx?storycode=50013076> An American teachers' site with lesson plans on Syria. Join to receive the excellent TeachSyria kit.

Further information about the Syrian conflict including before and after pictures of Syria is available at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18891150>

<http://middleeast.about.com/od/syria/tp/Syrian-Civil-War-Explained.htm>

<https://prezi.com/oopubqldmd6i/syria-the-basics/>

A map of the conflict zones is available at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22798391>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/27/world/meast/syria-civil-war-fast-facts/>

Note: Some of these images are not suitable for student viewing

<http://www.news.com.au/world/simple-points-to-help-you-understand-the-syria-conflict/story-fndir2ev-1226705155146>

Excellent 2013-2014 news reports prepared for students are available at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3525259.htm>

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/26/syria-heritage-in-ruins-before-and-after-pictures>

<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/syria/130816/syrian-culture-heritage-civil-war>

Current situation:

<http://www.unicef.org/emergencies/syria/>

7.1.3 Children and the Syrian Crisis

More than half of those caught up in the Syrian conflict are children. **UNICEF** estimates there are 5,090,000 children living in dire situations inside Syria and 1,654,544 children living as refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt and other countries in North Africa. Children face an unsafe future without family, homes, education and health services – their lives dominated by violence,

fear and exploitation. UNICEF reports that one in every five schools in Syria has been destroyed; over 50,000 children have been born in exile as families have fled the violence.

“Millions of children inside Syria and across the region are witnessing their past and their futures disappear amidst the rubble and destruction of this prolonged conflict,” said Anthony Lack, UNICEF’s executive director. “We must rescue them from the brink, for their sake and for the sake of Syria in future generations.” <http://namepeoples.imb.org/stories/view/the-sounds-of-war>
For individual children’s stories view: <http://childrenofsyria.info/>

The No Lost Generation initiative was launched in October 2013 and is supported by the UN, international agencies such as UNICEF, donors, governments and NGOs. There is a real fear that a whole generation of children will be lost or severely disadvantaged because of the Syrian conflict: <http://nolostgeneration.org/>

Excellent site for showing the experiences of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyscRA5CY68>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoAuP-YEGZc> Not suitable for student viewing

8. Pre-reading Activities

8.1 Examining the Cover and Extra Text Features

Kress & van Leeuwen refer to visual grammar as ‘describing how the elements of a picture combine in different design to construct visual meaning’. See *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

- Invite students to examine and discuss the composition of the cover image: the Ideal (top half) and the Real (lower half).
 - Consider the Ideal and describe Zafir’s physical appearance and facial expression. How do you think he is feeling? Why?
 - The top images for each book in the series use a *Demand gaze* – a close-up shot that denotes personal relationship. What effect does this have on the reader in terms of connection to the boy?
 - Consider the Real: Where do you think the story is set? What does the filmic image suggest? What kind of shot is used here? Describe the effect of the

focus across the scene – the sharper image in the foreground and less focussed background.

- Blue colours tend to suggest a coolness, calmness, even sadness. Describe the emotions the cover creates and compare to other covers in the Through My Eyes series.
- Once students have studied the cover, they can be guided to make predictions about the text:
 - What kind of text is *Zafir*? Narrative, expository, autobiographical?
 - Who are the intended audience?
- Students may like to find out about the series editor's inspiration for the Through My Eyes series available at: www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au
- *Zafir* is an example of the contemporary realistic fiction genre. Invite students to locate the words on the cover that highlight the narrative nature of the text:
fiction, story, a novel
- Discuss:
 - What is realistic fiction?
 - What other books of this genre have you read?
 - What is their specific appeal?
 - Draw student's attention to the extra text features: Map, Timeline, Author's note and Find out more about... pages and, in particular, the Glossary. The text contains Arabic words that are explained within the text.

8.2 Finding Out About Syria and Homs

- Using Google maps (or Google Earth on a tablet device) students can:
 - Locate Syria, Homs, Damascus, Aleppo and Daraa
 - View Syria in relation to Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq and Turkey
 - Look at the terrain and satellite views to gain a sense of the semi-arid desert mountains and narrow coastal plain
- Use references listed in **7.1 Background for Teachers: Homs and Syria** for a further sense of the bustling, historic Homs

A fantastic topographical map is available at:

<http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/syria-topographic-map.htm>

8.2.1 Classroom/Library Display

- Mount a large map of Syria or create a class Pinterest board where pictures of main cities and landmarks can be displayed. Students can progressively add places of interest and importance as they read *Zafir*. Information about Pinterest is available at:
<http://www.bbcactive.com/BBCActiveIdeasandResources/UsingPinterestforEducation.aspx>
- Students can create travel brochures or postcards using sites including:
http://webdoc.france24.com/photographs_memories_syria_war/ - a wonderful photographic tribute by Alain Homsy to the architectural and archaeological heritage of Syria.

8.3 Inquiry Learning

The students are both problem posers and problem solvers within inquiry learning. Inquiry Learning encourages learners to examine the complexity of the world and form concepts and generalizations instead of being told simple answers to complex problems. (Jeni Wilson and Kath Murdoch):

http://resourcebank.sitc.co.uk/Resources/Priority2/2Noumea/NoPr_T006inquiryLearning.pdf

The Digital Information Fluency Model provides key guiding questions to enhance student Internet research. Information about the model can be found at: <http://21cif.com/>.

Use prior knowledge and text processing strategies to interpret a range of types of texts (ACELT1628)

Students can conduct group research into various aspects of Syria prior to reading the text. The suggested areas of focus and inquiry questions can be adapted to suit the age and ability of students:

- **Early history of Syria.** Syria is one of the oldest civilisations in the world with the ancient city of Homs dating back to 2300 BC. Many cultures claimed Syria and modern Syria reflects this complex multi-ethnic heritage.
 - Why is Syria sometimes referred to as the 'Cradle of Civilisations'? What civilisations began in Syria?
 - Research one conquering empire or ethnic group such as the Babylonians or Ottomans and describe their contribution to Syrian culture.

- Students could refer to sites including:
<http://www.homsonline.com/EN/Syria/Syria.htm>
- Crac des Chevaliers, located 65 kms west of Homs, is the finest of the crusader castles and was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006. On p 33 of the text, Zafir and his family are standing above the city on the remains of the Citadel of Homs:
Zafir tried to imagine it. There would have been horses and pennants flying and large pavilion tents and men wearing suits of armour. (p. 33)
- Who were the crusaders?
- Why was Crac des Chevaliers an important castle?
- Who were the Knights Hospitaller?
- Students could refer to the following sites:
<http://www.everycastle.com/Crac-des-Chevaliers.html>
<http://www.homsonline.com/EN/Citeis/CracDesChevaliers.htm>
<http://scribol.com/art-and-design/the-majestic-medieval-castle-of-Crac-des-chevaliers>
- **Conflict in Syria.**
Connecting to prior knowledge. Many students will be very aware of the Syrian conflict due to the significant media coverage over the past three years. Allow time for students to share their understandings and perceptions about what has happened in Syria. The sharemylesson <http://www.sharemylesson.com/article.aspx?storycode=50013076> and TeachUnicef websites provide structures for classroom discussion and exploration of key events and issues. Questions to consider:
 - Who is Bashar al- Assad and why did many Syrians demand his resignation? Find out what motivated the protests across the country.
 - Who are the shabiha, the Mukhabarat and Hezbollah?
 - Using the following timeline generators create a timeline of the Syrian conflict that shows key players and how the war has changed, particularly as Hezbollah's involvement has increased. Useful sites for this are:
 - <http://www.news.com.au/world/simple-points-to-help-you-understand-the-syria-conflict/story-fndir2ev-1226705155146>
 - <http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/jul/31/battle-homs-syria-pictures>
 - <http://slav.global2.vic.edu.au/2011/11/08timeline-generators/#.UuNipmR9lcY>

- Zafir lives in Homs. Why was Homs such an important city in the civil war? Compare the Syrian revolution with uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen.
- **Citizen journalists and cyber activism in the Syrian war.** President Bashar al-Assad banned international media reports of the civil war and foreign journalists were often arrested. With the regime's ban on social media, amateur photographers began using their iPhones to show the world what was happening. Zafir's uncle becomes a citizen journalist.
- Describe a day in the life of a citizen journalist in Homs. Excellent insight into the dangerous work of citizen journalists is available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/syria-war-reported-by-citizen-journalists-social-media/24630841.html>
Two Syrian activists speak about how they became citizen journalists at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17222163>
- **Religion in Syria.** Prue Mason provides readers with sensitive and highly informative insights into both the Islamic and Christian traditions of Syria. The conflict in Syria is not religious in nature. Zafir's tolerance and acceptance of the Muslim and Christian faiths is a fascinating feature of the narrative.
- Research the Alawite and Sunni Muslims in Syria. Students could view: <http://middleeast.about.com/od/syria/tp/The-Difference-Between-Alawites-And-Sunnis-In-Syria.htm>
- **International schools.** Zafir attends an International School in Homs.
- In what ways would Zafir's school experience differ from your own? Refer to: <http://www.ischoms-sabis.net/pages/syria-schools/homs/campus-facilities.aspx>
- **Food of Syria.** Zafir's favourite dish was his grandmother's *kibbeh*, fried minced lamb, and rice. Syrian foods have long traditions. Select a few different foods and explain their origins. Syrians enjoy sweet delights such as baklava. How do traditional Syrian dishes differ from the Syrian foods available in Australia? <http://www.sbs.com.au/food/cuisine/syrian>

8.3.1 Presenting research findings

Use a range of software, including word processing programs to confidently create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts (ACELY1728)

- PowerPoint, Keynote or Prezi (<http://prezi.com>) can be used to create visual texts to share research with a group or class.
- Padlet lets students create walls collating links, text and pictures:
<http://slav.global2.vic.edu.au/2013/03/26/a-favourite-gets-even-better-padlet/#.UuOcp2R9Jjd>
- Scoop.it! is a fun content curation platform that helps students both collect information on their research topic and create an online magazine. <http://www.scoop.it/t/what-is-scoop-it>
- Glogster poster: <http://edu.glogster.com/what-is-glogster-edu>
- Create group pictorial galleries using Popplet or Montage
<http://montage.cloudapp.net/gallery>

9. Literature

Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts. (ACELT1613)

Activities to enhance reading of the text include:

- Creating written or digital journals, reader's notebooks, video diaries or a class blog that record student reflections and comments.
- Creating cumulative story maps: Younger students can combine text and visual features
- 'Stop and Think Aloud' and 'Responding to Questions':
http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/Year_5_English_Portfolio_Satisfactory.pdf. Students read a text extract, write down personal thoughts and questions to answer and then respond to their questions using text evidence
- Making connections: Give students frequent opportunities to make connections between Zafir and their own lives (text-to-self), a comparison text (text-to-text) and current world events and issues (text-to-world)

9.1 Literature and Context

Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts. (ACELT1608)

9.1.2 Getting started: Reading the first chapter

Readers are immediately drawn into Zafir’s world. Early insight is given into the Syrian culture and Zafir’s new life in Homs. The opening chapter does contain an unexpected introduction to life under the Assad regime.

- What are your initial feelings about the story? Discuss how you are invited to think about Syria and Zafir’s life.
- Discuss: What images suggest location and culture? Create a Y-chart graphic organiser: Looks like, feels like, sounds like. A BLM template is available at: <http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/resources-gallery/resource-gallery-templates.html>
- Invite students to list words and phrases in Chapter One that indicate setting
- Students can write down their plot predictions after reading the first chapter. Students put their predictions in a sealed envelope and open when text is read.

Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619)

9.2 Responding to the text

Students learn to identify personal ideas, experiences and opinions about literary texts and discuss them with others. They learn how to recognise areas of agreement and difference, and how to develop and refine their interpretations through discussion and argument.

(Content Structure, The Australian Curriculum: English, ACARA)

Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)

9.2.1 Suggested Discussion Points

The six books in the Through My Eyes series are highly suitable for literature circles and wide reading groups. The following chapter breakdown and list of questions could be used to initiate teacher/student-led discussions:

Chapters One and Two

These chapters introduce the secretive nature of the Syrian regime, highlight Zafir's homesickness for Dubai and his best friend Rami's explanations about the dumped body.

'Erase it from your memory. Then he [Rami] repeated Abu Moussa's words: Ahsan lak, it is better for you.' (p. 14)

- Discussion point: What do you think the reference on p. 6 to Syria being 'the Kingdom of Silence' means?

Chapters Three to Six

'This is exactly why things must change in this country,' she [Mum] said'. (p. 17)

Zafir's parents argue about Syrian politics. They are also from different religious backgrounds, even though Pops has converted to Christianity.

- Discussion point: Pops maintains the country needs a *'...a strong government and a strong man in charge.'* (p. 21) Do you have any concerns about this position? Why?

Chapters Seven to Ten

Rami is bullied at school and Zafir doesn't know why. Nadia secretly views Syrian Revolution Facebook pages. There are more heated exchanges between Nadia and Boulos. Zafir's life is unexpectedly buoyed when he meets skateboard enthusiast, Eleni.

- Discussion point: Religion has never been a significant part of Zafir's life. How does he react to the Reverend Father and his family? Comment on the author's portrayal of the striking religious differences that exist between key characters.

Chapters Ten to Thirteen

Rami tells Zafir about his father. Zafir is caught between loyalty to Rami and a chance to join the football team. A seemingly harmless trip with Mum to Damascus results in Zafir witnessing the first protests and the arrest of his beloved Uncle Ghazi who has become a citizen journalist.

- Discussion point: *'The Syrian revolution, said Uncle Ghazi. 'In years to come you'll be able to say that you were here on this day.' He grinned at Zafir like everything was fun again.'* (p. 77)
- *Yes,' the man spoke in a calmer voice. 'I can see you are no part of this. Go home, Madaam, and take your son with you. Forget all this. Ahsan lak, it is better for you'.* (p. 78). Describe Zafir's reactions to the scenes that were unfolding before his eyes. Do you think the early protestors realized the danger they were in? Explain.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

Zafir and his school friends march in support of the president. Uncle Ghazi is released and continues his activism.

- Discussion points: What effect did the march have on Zafir? Are you surprised by his reaction?
'There is all this talk of freedom and democracy. They are beautiful ideas, but will it never happen here in Syria?'(p.87) Why do you think Pops makes this dire comment?

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen

'It is not so safe in the city,' said Abu Moussa.' (p. 88) *'Nothing feels right', said Mum ...'* (p.99)

- Discussion Point: Homs begins to show signs of increasing unrest. List some of the signs in these chapters.

Chapter Eighteen to Twenty

The conflict begins to directly impact Zafir and his family as Abu Moussa seeks Boulos's help for his wounded son and Boulos is arrested and imprisoned in Damascus.

- Discussion Point: These chapters are climactic and high in emotion. Describe Zafir's emotional reactions to the key events.

Chapter Twenty to Twenty-Two

Zafir begins to feel increasingly alone with Rami in Dubai, Eleni leaving Homs and his mother going to Damascus for news of Pops. As the siege of Homs begins, and Zafir hears the sounds of violent protests from Tetah's rooftop, his fears escalate and begin to overwhelm him:

'But out of a calm blue sea, a tsunami of events had reared up and was about to crash down on everyone and change their lives forever. Would anyone – even the president – be able to stop it now?' (p. 133)

- Discussion Points: Which event do you think has been the most devastating for Zafir so far? Why? How do you think Zafir will be able to rise above his situation and find courage?

Chapters Twenty-Three to Twenty-five

Tetah's house is bombed and Zafir is buried alive for several hours before being rescued by Uncle Ghazi and the neighbours.

- Discussion Points: Why was Zafir able to survive the bomb blast? Why do you think the author chose to include the miracle egg? Why doesn't Uncle Ghazi tell Zafir about his mother?

Chapters Twenty-six to Twenty-eight

Uncle Ghazi shrugged. 'It's important work,' he said. Getting the truth out to the world is what I have to do.' (p. 157)

- Discussion point: Do you admire or question Uncle Ghazi's work as a citizen journalist as danger grips the city and Zafir's life is at risk?

'When Uncle Ghazi comes back I will find out about Mum. I'll make him tell me where she is. I have to know the truth.' With that intention in mind, Zafir started to feel stronger again.' (p. 160)

- Discussion point: What else does Zafir do that shows he is gaining courage and renewed determination to overcome his situation? What was the effect of the shilka (anti-aircraft guided missile) attack?

Chapters Twenty-nine and Thirty

Zafir agrees to travel to the safety of Beirut with the Al Hamra family but finds it difficult to leave with strangers and say goodbye to Uncle Ghazi.

- Discussion point: Zafir is alone, even though he is travelling with others. The author deliberately chose to have Zafir as a non-religious character but as Zafir relocates again we see him performing Islamic ritual prayers. What effect does this have on you as the reader? What does it suggest about Zafir at this momentous turning point in the narrative?

Chapter Thirty-one.

'So much had happened since the day he'd left Homs on the minibus.' (p. 184)

The final chapter presents a time-lapse of almost twelve months and now Zafir and his mother are in refugee accommodation in Beirut. Uncle Ghazi and Tetah have died, Dad is still in prison but corresponds regularly. Mum and Zafir feel lucky to have each other.

- Discussion point: The novel does not have a 'happy-ever-after' ending. How satisfying and realistic do you find the ending? Why do you think the author and editor chose to end the story in this way?

9.2.2 Creative Responses to *Zafir*

Book Trailer

Use a range of software, including word processing programs to create, edit and publish texts imaginatively (ACELY1810)

- Students can create a book trailer for *Zafir*. Visit the series website to view trailers for the other books in the Through My Eyes series and view <http://www.insideadog.com.au/teachers/book-trailers> for a guide to making book trailers.

Movie/Film clip

Experiment with text structures and language features and their effects in creating literary texts, for example, using rhythm, sound effects, monologue, layout, navigation and colours (ACELT1805)

- In groups students create a short film clip using iMovie or iPhone that contains their most memorable scenes from the novel. Information on movie making is available at: <https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/pages/View.aspx?pin=YX97LZ>

9.3 Analyzing and Responding - Themes

Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view (ACELT1620)

Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices and including digital elements as appropriate. (ACELT1736)

Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns are presented in texts (ACELT1807)

Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)

9.3.1 The Effects of the Syrian War on the child characters

Unlike the other five books in the Through My Eyes series, *Zafir* does not begin with the conflict, but rather with a growing sense that Syrians are unhappy with their lives and their president. When the protests commence in Homs and the city is under siege, we feel the characters' tension, fear and mounting uncertainty as the war impacts their neighbourhood, family and friends. The horrors are often only implied and always sensitively portrayed:

'Shortly afterwards a sharp ratatat cracked the air. There was yelling and screaming. Sirens began to wail...The next day Uncle Farook discovered that Ammar had never come home. Later Zafir heard him tell Tetah that Ammar's family had pasted a photo of him on the wall of the Khalid Ibn Walid mosque.' (p. 97)

'Zafir peered into the taxi before anyone could stop him. Lying along the back seat was a young man with his eyes closed. He was holding a red towel to the middle of his stomach. Then Zafir realized it wasn't a red towel. It was a blood-soaked towel.' (p.106)

Jigsaw strategy

The *MyRead* site describes this strategy at <http://www.myread.org/organisation.htm#jigsaw>.

After reading *Zafir* divide the class into groups to find instances in the text that detail the effects of the situation in Syria on the child characters and their individual responses.

A table similar to the following can be used to record findings:

Characters	Areas Affected	Details	Chapter References
Zafir	Family Friendships Safety Education Shelter Food	Father imprisoned Mother injured Grandmother killed Displaced Schools bombed	18 - 30
Rami	Family Friendships Opportunity	Father in exile Stepfather's abuse Bullying	2 - 21
Eleni	Family Friendship Education Safety	Separated from her father and friends Disrupted schooling	19-30

Presentations of group findings

Use PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi or Padlet.

- Write a persuasive text about the character you feel has been most affected by the conflict.
- Make comparisons with other texts on this theme including *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park and other titles in the *Through My Eyes* series.
- View UNICEF's work on restoring educational opportunity for the children of Syria at: <http://childrenofsyria.info/2014/10/29/syria-bombing-doesnt-deter-children-from-learning/>

Compare Your Life with that of Zafir

- Students use PowerPoint/Keynote to create an overview of their own childhood and compare it with what they know of Zafir. This can also be done in a table

format or using a Compare and Contrast Map. A BLM template is available at:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/sompare-contrast-30066.html>

9.3.2 Rights of Children

Children's rights are severely affected by war and conflict. The specific rights violated in *Zafir* include the right to a childhood, education, safety and freedom of expression. Exploring and examining the rights of children will enable students to better appreciate the text.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly is the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history. In simple terms it states that every child has:

- the right to a childhood, which includes protection from harm and exploitation
- the right to be educated, including all girls and boys completing primary school
- the right to be healthy through access to clean water, nutritious food and medical care
- the right to be treated fairly, including having laws and practices changed that are unfair on children
- the right to be heard on issues that affect them, and have these views considered by those with the power to make decisions.

UNICEF Australia has produced an excellent middle school unit on the Rights of Children and their photo essays are a wonderful way to introduce the topic of children's rights. Child friendly versions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) can be used as a starting point for exploration of this theme.

<http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/Issues-facing-children/Convention-on-the-Rights-of-the-Child/Child-Rights.aspx>

<http://www.unicef.org.au/downloads/Education/Photo-stories/What-are-rights.aspx>

<http://www.unicef.org.au/getattachment/discover/Teaching-and-Learning-Resources/Parents.-Teachers---Educators/Parents/Talk-to-your-children-about-rights-and-responsibil/What-are-rights.pdf.aspx>

Other UNICEF resources can be found at <http://www.unicef.org.au/educational-Resources>

We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures published in association with Amnesty International is another excellent resource for this topic.

Global Education’s website has a very helpful teaching and learning unit on the global issue of human rights: <http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/global-issues/gi-human-rights.html>

- Watch YouTube clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9_IvXFEyJo
- What are rights? What are the rights of children in the 21st century?
Students use sticky notes to jot down responses to these questions using just one or two words and add to class chart. Alternatively, this may be done with Interactive White Board (IWB) tools. Compare the resulting list with UNICEF’s child-friendly version of the rights of children.
- Students visually rank the rights of children using a visual ranking tool found at <http://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/education/k12/thinking-tools/visual-ranking.html>
- Read UNICEF publication: *A life like mine: How children live around the world* and discuss similarities and differences between how children’s rights are being met around the world.
- Students create persuasive posters for one of the rights from their list using forceful language and symbolism.

Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements for defined audiences and purposes, making appropriate choices for modality and emphasis. (ACELY1710)

- Using digital media software such as Comic Life and iMovie create a cartoon or short film about child rights. UNICEF’s photoessays could be used as a model www.unicef.org/photoessays/30048.html . Consider audience: young children, teaching staff, school council
- Using GarageBand or Audacity, students create a podcast using audio files, images and movies that summarise their learning about child rights and upload to a suitable podcast site. Look at podcast in education resources on FUSE <http://www.poducate.me.com>
- Respond to the question: What does it mean to be a global citizen?

Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices including digital elements as appropriate (ACELY1736)

- Select a child character from the text and suggest the CRC rights they do not have.
- Use Microsoft Word or Pages to create a digital poster using symbols and text that visually represent the character's lack of rights
- With a partner discuss ways in which the selected character's rights situation could be improved within the context of the text
- Use a Venn Diagram to show the disparity in rights between yourself and one of the characters in the text. A BLM template is available at: <http://www.fuelthebrain.com/Printable/detail.php?ID=41>
- Interviews: Have students interview each other about child rights: Which rights are the most important to the interviewee?
- Using UNICEF photostories as a model, invite students to create a photostory for one of the characters that shows the major areas of their life that are compromised by the conflict.

9.3.3 Trust and Loyalty

Students develop ethical understanding as they study the issues and dilemmas present in a range of texts and explore how ethical principles affect the behaviour and judgement of characters and those involved in issues and events (General Capabilities, Ethical understanding, Organisation, Australian Curriculum: English)

- Using IWB tools, brainstorm the concepts of trust and loyalty. What makes a person trustworthy?

Key themes in this novel are trust and loyalty. Zafir quickly realizes living in the authoritarian military-dominated Syria demands a level of secrecy and caution. Many Syrians felt they could not trust the Assad regime with its many levels of security such as the Mukhabarat and the shabiha who silenced dissenters and rebels.

'Rami swung around, eyebrows raised. 'Keep your voice down,' he hissed. 'How many times do I have to tell you? The walls have ears.' (p. 11)

'No one uses their real names on Facebook, said Rami... 'It's too dangerous.' (p. 52)

'You must realize that agents from the Mukhabarat will be monitoring these [activist] sites. (p. 52)

Zafir puts his trust in his parents, Rami and Uncle Ghazi, whom he perceives as being completely loyal to him. Narrative events conspire to change Zafir’s perspectives on these characters so that his ability to trust them is compromised to differing extents.

- Select a character Zafir initially trusts and perceives to be completely loyal. Write diary entries that reveal Zafir’s journey from complete trust to a more guarded response and explain and/or justify his shift. Entries about Uncle Ghazi would work well for this activity:
Uncle Ghazi had told him not to worry and he’d said that everything was okay – and Zafir knew Uncle Ghazi wouldn’t lie. (p. 138)
You say you tell the truth to the world but you won’t tell me. Where is Mum? Is she okay? You’ve got to tell me. I’m not a kid. (p. 163)

Ironically, Boulos, who is the most loyal to the regime, loses his freedom and remains separated from his family.

- Using text evidence record the ways in which Boulos’s trust and loyalty were misplaced and suggest reasons why Boulos failed to read the signs around him.

Zafir had to trust not only his loved ones but also complete strangers for his survival.

- Using a Sequence of Events graphic organizer, list the events that demand Zafir trust strangers such as Azzam Azzad and the Al Hamra family. A BLM template is available at:
http://www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/download/shiningstar/graphic_organizers_11_15.pdf
- In the concluding chapters Zafir learns to trust himself. Find examples in the text of this self-trust and use Scribble Press to create a booklet about Zafir’s self-reliance.

9.3.4 Courage and Resilience

Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view (ACELT1620)

The characters in *Zafir* show great courage and resilience throughout the novel as their city becomes a war zone and their loved ones are endangered, missing or killed in a violent civil war that has captured the world's attention and heart.

- In groups students can discuss the most severe threats and challenges for the characters, especially Zafir. When did Zafir show the most courage? Consider chapters 24, 27, 30 and 31.
- How would you respond in a similar situation? Have you been in any situations similar to Zafir?
- Discuss: In what ways were Nadia and Boulos courageous? Who do you admire the most and why?
- Prepare a debate around this statement: *Uncle Ghazi was not courageous but foolhardy in risking his life and others.* Alternatively complete a PMI chart about Uncle Ghazi's activism. A BLM template is available at:
- <http://www.pmi.org/learning/tools-and-templates.aspx>
- Use a Diamond ranking tool to rank the challenges and Zafir's courage and discuss your opinion with a partner, justifying your position with text evidence. A BLM template is available at: <http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/resources-gallery/resource-gallery-templates.html>
- Use iDraw or KidsPix to create a scene in which Zafir shows great courage and write a reflection on how it made you feel.
- Text-to text comparison: Compare the courage shown by Zafir and other characters in the Through My Eyes series such as *Shahana* and *Emilio*.
- Consider the following quote:

They smiled at each other and Zafir knew then that Mum was right when she constantly reminded him, 'We are the lucky ones. We still have each other.' Even though Pops was in prison, they knew that he was still alive. And now, they had this letter to share over kibbeh and rice. It was almost as if the whole family ...were together once more. (p. 188)
- Is Zafir lucky? In what ways are you lucky?

9.3.5 The price of freedom

The Syrian uprising was in part a response to the strict control of freedom of expression, assembly and association that had characterized Syrian life under the state of Emergency Law. The Ba'ath government had unlimited authority to restrict and investigate individuals suspected of national

security breaches. Foreign media were banned and hundreds of prisoners of conscience were arrested.

The reality of this oppression is evidenced in the text with events such as Rami's father's exile, the arrest and imprisonment of the Daara teenagers, the fate of Uncle Ghazi and Boulos. The list of martyrs on the walls of the mosques and Assad's apartment also bear testimony to the high price of freedom.

Zafir's mother argues for freedom:

'Can't you see how important this movement is? ... I want Zafir to grow up feeling azzady, freedom, in his own country. Don't you want that for your son?'
Pops was still shaking his head. 'I want what is best for my son – and that is a stable country.' (p. 49)

- Set up a class blog and asks students to contribute their discussions about the price of freedom for individual characters in *Zafir* or alternatively for real personalities and their political activism in Syria.
- Prepare class presentations around the question: Is freedom worth fighting for? Appoint one group of students to film the group discussions and share with the class.
- For an example of this activity see Work sample 7 at:
http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/Year_8_English_Portfolio_Satisfactory.pdf
- Compare and contrast Uncle Ghazi's work as a citizen journalist with that of Amina's father, a political artist, in *Through My Eyes: Amina* by J.L.Powers.

9.3.6 Refugees

As the series editor of *Through My Eyes*, I felt it was important to include something about the refugee experience in *Zafir* – so many Syrian children and their families have been forced to leave their war-torn land.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics for 2014 state there are 3,103,769 registered Syrian Refugees and another 145,435 awaiting registration. Like *Zafir*, many of the early Syrian refugees crossed the border into Lebanon, to camps such as Shatila and Ghawash that are referred to in the final chapter of the text.



Source: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/2/beirut-syrian-refugeesadapttomakeshiftlives.html>

This photo shows an apartment in Ghawash very similar to the one the author describes in chapter 31. These cinderbox houses were once homes to poor Lebanese and Palestinian refugees and are now bursting at the seams with the influx of Syrian refugees. Conditions are cramped, there is no running water or electricity.

Other refugee camps to note are the Za'atari and Zaraq camps in Jordan and Suruc in Turkey. A useful website for refugee stories in these areas is:

<http://childrenofsyria.info/category/stories/>



Source: <http://en.qantara.de/content/the-shatila-refugee-camp-in-beirut-overwhelmed-and-under-strain?page=5>

Just north of Ghawash is Shatila camp and in Jordan, 12,000 Syrians occupy the Azraq camp where UNICEF and Mercy Corps have set up an art program for children aged 12 to 18 years. The following video is highly suitable and relevant for student viewing:

<http://childrenofsyria.info/2014/11/20/healing-through-art-in-azraq-camp/>

<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

- What is a refugee? What do the terms 'displaced person' and 'asylum seeker' mean?
 - Use IWB tools to post student's definitions. Discuss and compare them to the definitions provided on the Roads to Refuge website – an excellent resource designed for schools, available at: <http://www.roadtorefuge.com/>
 - Invite students to read the three refugee journeys on the Road to Refuge site.
 - Introduce students to the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees' definition of a refugee available on the Refugee Council of Australia website at: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/who-conv.php>
 - Discuss with students any new understandings they have gained from viewing these sites and have students revisit their definitions.

- Zafir's camp home is very small and he has few possessions. View some scenes from camps: <http://www.caritas.org.au/learn/multimedia/multimedia-detail?Focus=&Region=&Countries=&LibraryName=Syria%20crisis>
 - What do you think Zafir missed most about his life in Homs?
 - What possessions would you take with you if you became a refugee? How would you feel and what response would you expect from others more fortunate?
 - How would you like to be treated as a refugee?

- Older students may like to research and share opinions on recent changes to the Australian government's refugee and asylum seeker policies:
 - <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide>

Another excellent site for student activities on this theme is:

<http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/teaching-activity/refugees-up.html#activity3>

A fantastic resource that has an extensive reading list on refugees and teaching ideas is available at:

http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012_RW_ResourceKit_Ch5.pdf

- Students may like to create a short video presentation using Videoscribe or iMovie that highlights refugee issues and encourages some form of appropriate social action.
- Schools may like to join up for UNICEF's World for Children Day and fundraise to support organizations such as the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. Information on World for Children Day is available at:
<http://www.unicef.org.au/Educational-Resources/What-can-you-do-to-help/Day-for-Children.aspx>
- Students may wish to become involved in activities during Refugee Week celebrated in June each year: <http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/>

Wider reading titles on this theme include:

Younger students:

The Littlest Refugee by Anh Do (Allen & Unwin)

Refugees David Miller (Lothian)

The Arrival by Shaun Tan (Hodder Children's)

When I was a girl in Sudan by Sarafino Enadio with Terry Whitebeach (Anzoo (Joy) Books)

When I was a boy in Sudan by Sarafino Enadio with Terry Whitebeach (Anzoo (Joy) Books)

Ships in the Field by Suzanna Gervay (Ford Street Publishing)

Older students:

Malini by Robert Hillman (Allen & Unwin)

Mahtab's Story by Libby Gleeson (Allen & Unwin)

The Inkbridge by Neil Grant (Allen & Unwin)

Parvana by Deborah Ellis (Allen & Unwin)

Boy overboard by Morris Gleitzman (Penguin)

Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories edited by Sonja Dechlan, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis (Wakefield Press)

Refuge by Jackie French (Harper Collins)

9.4 Examining Literature

Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension. (ACELT 1605)

Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses. (ACELT161)

9.4.1 Voice

Analyse strategies authors use to influence readers (ACELY1801)

Prue Mason has chosen to write *Zafir* in close third person, allowing the reader to have both the immediacy of the child protagonist and the wider viewpoint and background detail characteristic of first person narration.

- Choose a short section of text and rewrite in first person from Zafir's perspective.
- Share the rewrite with class members. How does this change affect engagement and comprehension of the text?
- Choose a text incident and write it from another character's point of view e.g. Eleni's on her first encounter with Zafir or Nadia recounting her injury and recovery.

9.4.2 Plot development

Prue Mason has created a compelling narrative with dramatic events, external and internal conflicts and suspenseful action that rises to gripping climactic moments. The resolution is heart-rending but realistic and satisfying.

- Plot Diagram: In pairs, students discuss how the author builds and maintains tension throughout the text and then decide on six of the most important narrative events, including *inciting events* (that make characters take action), *turning points* and *climactic moments*. Events such as the body on the road in chapter 1, the arrest of Boulos in chapter 18 and Zafir's burial in chapter 24 could be included.
- Create a plot diagram using the interactive template available at: <http://www.readwritething.org/files/resources/interactives/plot-diagram/>
- List some of the protagonist's goals. How do these goals change as the story progresses? In the end, which goal would you consider to be the most important?
- Cause-effect patterns in the plot: Invite students to notice the cause-effect patterns used by the author to move the action forward. Use the graphic

organiser available at:

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/causeandeffect/>

- The author has chosen not to have Pops reunited with his family. With a partner, discuss this decision. Is the ending hopeful? How is this achieved? Consider alternative endings and rate them in terms of realism and suitability for the readership.

9.4.3 Characterisation

Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts. (ACELT1621)

Students create texts for different purposes, selecting language to influence audience response. They make presentations and contribute actively to class and group discussions, using language patterns for effect. When creating and editing texts to create specific effects, they take into account intended purposes and the needs and interests of audiences. They demonstrate understanding of grammar, select vocabulary for effect and use accurate spelling and punctuation. (Year 8 Achievement Standard, Australian Curriculum: English)

Zafir has a cast of engaging, dynamic characters that show credible development throughout the narrative. The author reveals *Zafir*'s vulnerability and inner turmoil at key points in the narrative.

'I'm okay,' said Zafir, but as he stood up the pain in his side grabbed at him. He grimaced but didn't say anything. He had to be strong now.' (p. 151)

'He stopped rocking, opened his mouth and found he could speak again. 'Mum wants to live on a farm,' he said, remembering her dream. 'When she gets out of hospital she could go there too. She could even have a donkey like she's always wanted.' (p. 172)

- Using <http://www.wordle.net/> create a wordle or Wordcloud for a character.
- Write journal entries for *Zafir*'s early days at Ghawash camp.
- Work in pairs to create Kennings poetry for characters such as Tetah, Eleni and Azzam Azzad.
- Gather text descriptions for the major characters and complete interactive character maps using <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/storymap/>

- Which character is the most inspiring? Why? Prepare a reflective speech on your chosen character.
- Write or share orally your own experiences that have appeared hopeless and tested your courage. How have you found some resolution?
- Which character did you relate to the most? Why? Create an Open-Minded Portrait for your character. Explanation is provided at <http://pdspot.wordpress.com/2011/08/14/open-minded-portraits/>.
- Create a piece of artwork or music that represents your favourite character.

9.4.4 Literary Style

Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of the text (ACELY 1711)

Apply increasing knowledge of vocabulary, text structures and language features to understand the content of texts (ACELY1733)

Description and Mood

The author uses simple prose that is enhanced by vivid description. The city of Homs, the Easter parade and the siege of Homs are built with carefully chosen noun-phrases, interesting verbs and different types of adjectives.

- Use IWB to examine extracts from the text, looking closely at the vocabulary used. Students can highlight descriptive noun groups, descriptor and classifier adjectives and descriptive phrases or clauses. The following passages would be suitable for this activity:
 - Page 4: the description of the car on the ring road.
 - Page 32: the description of the city from the citadel
 - Page 152: the description of the aftermath of the bombing of Tetah's house

For information on this literary analysis see PETAA publication: *A Literature Companion for Teachers* by Lorraine McDonald.

- Write a descriptive first paragraph for a sequel to *Zafir*, then use Publisher to design the book cover and blurb giving your reasons for language choices.
- Describe and document how the author uses description to take the reader on Zafir's psychological journey and make us aware of mood changes.

Figurative language: Simile, Symbol and Personification

Understand, interpret and experiment with sound devices and imagery, including simile, metaphor and personification, in narratives...shape poetry, songs, anthems and odes. (ACELT1611)

Prue Mason uses different types of figurative language that enrich the text, creating strong visual images of setting, character and emotions. Examples include the following:

SIMILE

'Hugging Tetah was like hugging a feather pillow: as soft bits were squeezed in, other bits bulged out.' (p. 31)

'... the engine growling like an angry beast.' (p. 4)

'Zafir's thoughts flew around and around, trapped inside his head like small birds in a cage.' (p. 168)

SYMBOL

A painted Easter egg is an important symbol in the text. It survives the bombing and signals hope in the final paragraph.

- Present your interpretation of the symbolic role of the Easter egg using poetry or a multimodel text

PERSONIFICATION

'It belched into the sky and dropped a greasy film over all the trees and buildings and, it seemed, even into people's hearts.' (p. 21)

'The table he was crouched under did a dance and fell sideways.' (p. 142)

- Students can find further examples in the text and draw the images they create.
- Choose a text character or event and write their own similes or metaphors.

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11. About the writer of this guide

Lyn White has been a primary school teacher-librarian and English as an Additional Language teacher for more than twenty years and completed postgraduate studies in Editing and Communications at the University of Melbourne. She is passionate about children's literature, committed to developing life-long reading habits in children and has great expertise in engaging

students with quality texts and teachers with quality resources. Lyn is a part-time teacher at Blackburn English Language School and a pre-service supervisor with Deakin University. Lyn is the Series Creator and Editor for Through My Eyes. Lyn developed the style and structure of these Through My Eyes Teaching and Learning Guides, and prepared the content for this Guide. Lyn conducts professional development sessions for teachers on using the Through My Eyes texts in primary and secondary classrooms.