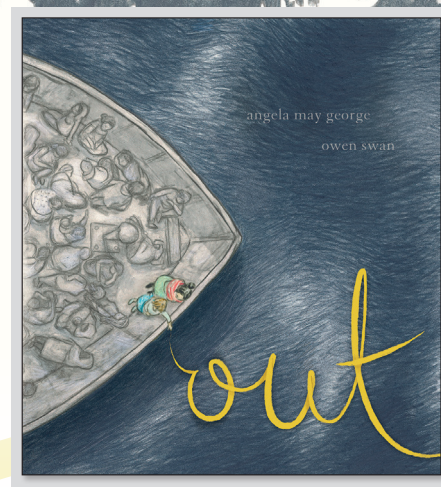


# Out

By Angela May George  
Illustrated by Owen Swan



## TEACHER NOTES for Grades 4–6

**Note:** Teachers are advised to be mindful of students' individual circumstances when commencing this unit of study. Students could also encounter distressing information and images in their research—teachers should closely supervise any research and possibly curate image and video collections for students.

- 1 Before reading **Out**, consider the cover design as a class. What do you think this book is going to be about? What gives you this idea? What does the title imply to you? What does the blurb on the back cover suggest? Have you seen imagery like the cover illustration before? Where?
- 2 Note that “asylum seeker” is a phrase used to refer to people who have sought protection as refugees. When they get this protection, they become refugees. Refugees are people who flee to other countries to be safe from war and other disasters. The world is currently in the middle of the worst refugee crisis since WWII. With high global levels of poverty and conflict, unprecedented numbers of people are fleeing from their homelands and seeking refuge elsewhere.  
  
Begin the unit with a look at refugee statistics. A good place to start is the **United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)** website: <http://www.unhcr.org/>
  - From which areas are most refugees coming from?
  - What is happening in these regions that is driving people to abandon their homes?
  - Where are the biggest refugee populations?
- 3 What drives people to become refugees? The girl in the story does not explicitly tell the reader what she and her mother are running from, but it is nevertheless suggested in the illustrations and the text. Carefully reread the second, third, and eighth spreads of **Out**, paying specific attention to the illustrations, then write a short paragraph speculating on the girl's history.

*“I’m called an asylum seeker, but that’s not my name.”*

A little girl and her mother have fled their homeland, making the long and treacherous journey by boat to seek asylum. Timely, powerful and moving, *Out* celebrates the triumph of the human spirit in the darkest times, and the many paths people take to build a new life.

- 4 When they are camping in the forest (third spread), the girl listens to the river “for the river knew the way out of the forest”. Why would this be a comfort in an otherwise frightening situation? Have you ever been afraid but taken comfort in a certain noise or item (e.g., a soft toy)? What did you find comforting about it?
- 5 Turn to the fourth spread of the book. How has the illustrator, Owen Swan, dwarfed the vessel in the illustration? Why do you think the boat is on such a small scale in this image? How do the encroaching storm clouds add to the overall effect of the image?
- 6 Look at the three spreads that show the people on the boat. Although we can see the girl and her mother in full colour, everybody else on the boat is shown in silhouette and shades of grey. Why do you think this is? Look for some images of refugees in boats online. How do the sheer numbers of people render them almost faceless? Why is it so important to tell their individual stories?
- 7 In what ways does the eleventh spread of **Out** mirror the seventh spread? Besides the fact that the girl has grown up in the later spread, how does this spread show the passage of time? Think about the composition of both spreads and the use of the yellow ribbon in both.
- 8 Owen has used the same patterns and technique to illustrate Sahraya's car as he did to illustrate the boat earlier in the book. Why do you think this is?

9 Look at the composition of the second-last spread. How does Owen use light in this illustration to draw the eye towards the doorway? Do you suspect who is on the other side of the doorway before you turn the page? How does the spread suggest what is about to happen even though there is no text?

10 Describe the relationship between the girl and her mother. How do the text and illustrations work together to show their bond?

**Extension Activity:** Rewrite *Out* from the perspective of the girl's mother. What would worry her, give her hope, and occupy her mind as time passes? The girl knows her mother is being strong in order to protect her, first as they flee danger, then as they make the transition into their new life. In your new version of the story, try to capture this strength and resilience of the mother.

11 Although the girl and her mother finally settle in their new home, they both still feel like something is missing because the girl's father is not with them. Why is it important for the family to be complete before they can feel safe and at home?

12 What is the effect of the yellow ribbon motif that runs throughout the book and is incorporated into the title text? What does the colour yellow signify? How does this add an extra dimension to the story?

13 Follow the flying bird motif throughout the story. It appears on three spreads. Can you find all three appearances? What does this motif signify?

14 The author *Out* has deliberately not given the girl a name or otherwise indicated where she is from. Why do you think this is?

15 According to the UNHCR, almost half of the displaced peoples around the world are children. Consider that the girl and her mother are separated from her father before the story even begins. This is a very common situation for refugees, as well as children who are orphaned by conflict or poverty. How are children at a greater risk of danger when they are in situations of homelessness, conflict, or without their families?

16 The UNCHR also states that children are more resilient in times of trauma than adults often are. How can children in these situations be rehabilitated? How are things like education, community support, and playtime integral to helping refugee children overcome their traumatic histories? Using the girl in *Out* as your case study, talk as a class about the transformative and rehabilitative power of schooling, playtime, and social support.

17 Why is it so important for displaced peoples such as refugees to feel welcome in a new homeland?

18 What is a refugee camp? What are some of the challenges of living in a refugee camp for weeks or even years? Why is this not considered a sustainable solution for refugees?

**Extension Activity:** Many organizations such as Engineers without Borders and the Ikea Foundation work hard to bring sustainable resources to refugees who live in these camps, such as suitable housing (<http://www.bettershelter.org/product/>) and sanitation (<http://www.ewb.org.au/whatwedo/education-research>).

Imagine you are on the design team of one of these organizations. First, identify one of the needs of refugees living in camps, such as a cooking stove that is safe to use in the cramped camp conditions. In teams of four or five, design a prototype to address this need. Present your design to the rest of the class, outlining the features that make it suitable for use in refugee camps.

19 Consider the power of language, which works on two levels in *Out*.

- First of all, the girl says "I'm called an asylum seeker, but that's not my name." What is the difference between the word "refugee" and the terms "asylum seeker," "boat people," and "illegal immigrant"? How does each term make you feel towards the subject? How are some of these words particularly loaded, especially when used in a political context?
- What other terms can you think of that are used to describe certain groups of people but have different emotions attached to them? Some examples include "victim" versus "complainant," "civilian casualty" versus "collateral damage," and "freedom fighter" versus "guerilla."
- One of the biggest challenges that faces new immigrants is learning the language of a new country. How is language tied to the feeling of home? How do you see the girl's verbal expression changing as the story progresses (e.g., consider her use of "my mother" versus "Mum")? What does this suggest about her adoption of her new homeland?

20 What organizations in Canada help refugees, e.g., the Canadian Council for Refugees and the UNHCR in Canada? What is being done in your community to help refugees settle there? What groups/organizations in your community help refugees, e.g., the Canadian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, etc.? What kind of help do they provide?

21 As a class, discuss Canada's response to the needs of refugees around the world. What is the government's refugee policy? Why do you think our government has adopted this policy? What do you think the impact of this policy will be in years to come?

What do you think refugees settling in your community would need to live and to feel welcome? In pairs, put together a welcome pack for refugee children who have just come to your city or town. What sorts of things do you think they will need to help them move past their bad experiences? What typically Canadian items would you give them? What can you include that will help them transition into their new environment (e.g., something to bridge the language barrier)? Include in your pack a letter introducing yourselves and welcoming them to your community. Use the space below for your letter.