



No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land – literature and refugees

The fleeing from one's country to an area of safety has been an integral part of the human story since the beginning of society. Being forced to leave home and the familiarity of one's nation whether it be from war, persecution or natural disaster has continued to be an important part of our history. The SDG 2030 goals have included some specific objectives to help to deal with refugees and displaced people by providing housing, jobs and the foundations to build a new life. However the SDG goals in themselves have the overarching function to alleviate, where possible, the need to flee in the

first place. By reducing Poverty (SDG 1), Hunger (SDG2), Prejudice in all forms (SDGs 5 and 10) promoting peace (SDG16), almost all the 2030 goals work to reduce the “push” factors that create the situations where the only choice for people is to become a refugee or displacement person. As usual, literature considers the problem from both perspectives, refugees’ point of view and .

WARSAN SHIRE



Warsan Shire is a Somali-British poet, writer, and activist, known for her powerful and evocative works that explore themes of identity, migration and displacement. She was born in Kenya to Somali parents in 1988 and moved to the United Kingdom as a young child. She was awarded the inaugural **Brunel International African Poetry Prize** and served as the first **Young Poet Laureate** of London. Moreover she is the youngest member of the **Royal Society of Literature**. She wrote two chapbooks, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* and *Her Blue Body* and also the script of a short film titled *Girl Rising*. Filmed in one of the largest refugee camps in the world, *Brave Girl Rising* tells how a courageous girl named Nasro, inspired by the magical dreams of her mother and the sisterhood of her friends, succeeds in getting the education she deserves. Shire’s poetry often draws from her own experiences as an immigrant and reflects the emotional and psychological toll of war and exile. She now lives in the US, in Los Angeles with her husband and children.



[Vai al video](#)

A POEM

In 2009 Warsan Shire visited the abandoned Somali embassy in Rome which had been turned into a shelter by some young refugees. This experience, she said, opened her eyes on the conditions of refugees in Europe. “I wrote the poem for them, for my family and for anyone who has experienced or lived around grief and trauma in that way.”

[HOME](#)

News

No one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbours running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want

News

to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here.

“Home” is a poem that vividly describes the experiences of the refugees who are forced to leave their houses, their homelands. Home is not synonym of beautiful memories in this poem, but instead it's an open cut on refugees' skin that can't be healed. Home is “the mouth of a shark”, home “won't let you stay” and the speaker says that when the situation at home is unbearable, everybody runs away. And the only way to be safe is running faster than the others.

There's no other possibility for them. Home is personified and is pushing them away. Through the repetition of no one, Shire wants to highlight the fact that there's no other choice for refugees.

“no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied
no one chooses refugee camps”

Throughout the poem, the speaker explains the tragic experiences refugees have to go through on their journey out of the country.

People who have never experienced something like this, must understand that people don't risk their own children's lives by trying to enter foreign countries unless that dangerous journey is still safer than the violence left behind.

A LESSON PLAN

WARM UP – 5min

Consider the pictures. What comes into your mind? What is the issue presented?



LEARNING STATIONS – 40min

STATION 1

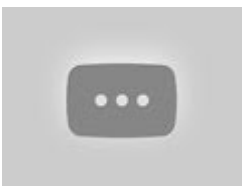
The Beekeeper of Aleppo: https://www.rizzolieducation.it/content/uploads/2025/03/Great_Inspiration-pg7-8.pdf

STATION 2



[Vai al video](#)

STATION 3



[Vai al video](#)

STATION 4



Vai al video

What is Benjamin Zephaniah's perspective?

Do you agree with him?

Don't you know how to organize LEARNING STATIONS? Check this [link](#).

FOLLOW UP – 10 min

CLASS DISCUSSION – 15 min

How does literature address the issue of migration?

Have the conditions of migrants changed throughout time? What are the difficulties they used to face? What are the difficulties they face now?

FOOD FOR THOUGHT – AN INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY – 20 min

If you were fleeing Syria for Europe, what choices would you make for you and your family? Take our journey to understand the real dilemmas the refugees face.

Choose your own escape route: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601>