



CROCODILE'S CROSSING

A Search for Home

Written and illustrated by
YOERI SLEGERS

"A wide-eyed, open-hearted evocation of a refugee's experience. . . .
The text takes care to delineate Crocodile's journey such that it stirs compassion."

—Kirkus Reviews

"Exploring the struggles and concerns facing immigrant families with sensitivity
and a touch of playfulness."

—Foreword Reviews

NOTES FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

Immigration, particularly the refugee crisis, is complicated and difficult to grasp, even for adults. For parents or teachers tasked with explaining these issues to young children, it's hard to know where to begin. How can we introduce such serious problems without making children feel hopeless? *Crocodile's Crossing* carefully balances those considerations.

In this guide, you'll find discussion questions with quotations from the story as well as activities that support the conversation. If you are using this guide via www.flyawaybooks.com/resources, follow the links for further information. The guide can be tailored to any child's age and degree of interest.

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND

It's important to distinguish between refugees and immigrants who leave their homes by choice. Talking through the points below will familiarize children with the characteristics and situations specific to refugees.



1. What is a refugee?

*"Crocodile once had a home that he loved.
. . . But then the trouble started."*

People leave their homes for many reasons. Those who travel to another country by choice are called immigrants. But Crocodile loved his home! He left because he had to. Someone in this situation is called a refugee. Several factors are unique to refugees:

- They are forced to leave their homes. They don't leave by choice.

- They usually can't bring many of their possessions.
- They will likely have to leave behind some or all of their family members.
- If they are forced to return home, they will face great difficulty and danger.



2. Why do refugees leave their homes if they don't want to?

*"Home wasn't safe anymore . . .
Everything grew worse and worse."*

The reasons for Crocodile's flight are not given, making the story relevant to various causes of displacement. This approach also allows parents and teachers who read this book with children to decide how specific to be about violence and deprivation. To help you respond to a child's questions, here are simple explanations of the most common causes of displacement, along with reassurances.

- **Political instability:** Some governments are unstable, which can lead to [conflict](#) about who is in charge. Sometimes the fighting is so intense that citizens are neglected and endangered. In our country and many others, people have the right to choose leaders by voting in [elections](#).
- **Famine:** If the land isn't good for farming or if there aren't good systems for distributing food, people may not have enough to eat. Our part of the world has many farms and a variety of ways to transport food and dairy products—like [milk](#)!
- **Natural disasters:** Tornadoes, hurricanes, and [floods](#) can destroy homes throughout large areas. In regions without emergency response systems, people may be unable to find shelter. Our area has networks of [responders](#) who are trained to help in emergencies.
- **Religious persecution:** Sometimes one religion is dominant in a region or country, and other beliefs aren't allowed. Religious freedom is legally [protected](#) in many countries, including ours!

3. How will things change now that these refugees are here?

"Crocodile learned new skills. One day, he even helped with a rescue!"

It's natural to worry about new and different people affecting our way of life. But with the right kind of support, refugees and other immigrants can become great neighbors who enhance our communities. International influence can enrich a culture! For example, [fireworks](#) were developed in China, and the Christmas song "O Christmas Tree" was first written in Germany and was called "[O Tannenbaum](#)"; now fireworks and this carol are enjoyed around the world.



4. Why are refugees coming here? Can't they go somewhere else?

*"Crocodile's journey was long and hard.
He went to one place and then another."*

Refugees don't usually get to choose their new homes. They go wherever they can find safety. Because there are many refugees in the world, many countries have to help. Each country has an important role to play in the global community.

It's important to remember that many cultures wouldn't exist without immigration, including those in North America. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, millions of people migrated to the [United States](#) and [Canada](#) from other places. In fact, most families who consider themselves "American" or "Canadian" can trace their roots to other countries.

HELPING CHILDREN EMPATHIZE

Even if we have not experienced the difficulties most refugees face, we have all felt lost or excluded at times. Explain that [empathy](#) is understanding how someone else feels. Then help children empathize with refugees by asking the following questions:



1. What does it feel like to be in a strange place?

"Everywhere, houses and food and clothes and words were so different from what Crocodile knew."

Ask children to think about a time when they were in an unfamiliar place. Perhaps they spent the night with a grandparent or friend. Perhaps a move required adjusting to a new neighborhood and school. Encourage children to talk about their experiences and the problems they faced. Remind them that being in a new place, even when it's by choice, can cause confusion and nervousness.

2. What does it feel like to be separated from the people you love?

"He hugged his family and hoped he would see them again."

Many children have friends or family members who live far away and don't get to visit very often. Perhaps they've experienced an older sibling spending a week away at camp. Ask the children to reflect on separations that were difficult. Then ask them to imagine how it would feel if those separations were long term or even permanent.



3. How does it feel to be unwelcome?

"He couldn't find anyone to welcome him."

Most children are familiar with the feeling of being excluded. Perhaps they have an older brother or sister who ignores them or classmates who don't include them in activities. Whatever the situation, encourage children to talk about a time when they were left out. Then ask what it would feel like if *almost everyone* ignored or even ridiculed them.

4. What if you had to deal with all three of the above at once?

Each of those circumstances can be terribly unpleasant.

What if they all happened at the same time? That's the situation many refugees are in! We don't always know why refugees left home, and it's best not to ask. It might be hard for them to talk about their reasons for leaving. But whatever their circumstances, refugees are people who deserve to be treated with kindness and respect like everyone else.

HELPING CHILDREN TAKE ACTION

The discussion may leave children wanting to help yet feeling powerless. Remind them that there's great power in small actions. Below are a few ideas for things that children can do:

1. Raise money for a local refugee agency. Every little bit helps, and there are a variety of fundraising options. For example:
 - Set up a lemonade stand. Or sell homemade crafts, baked goods, or anything else others might enjoy.
 - Organize a community-oriented fundraiser, such as a garage sale or yard sale.
 - Donate allowance money and perhaps do some extra chores to make that allowance grow.Be creative and have fun!
2. Donate clothing, toys, and school supplies to local relief organizations.
3. Talk to others about the importance of helping refugees.
4. Be friendly to refugee children they meet. Even with a language barrier, communication is possible. Here are a few things children can do to communicate even when they don't share a common language:
 - Smile and wave to say hello.
 - Introduce themselves by pointing to their chest and saying their name.
 - Help others learn the local language by pointing to things and saying the words for those objects.
 - Learn a few words in the language of the other child.
5. Defend refugee children (and others) from bullies by asking the bully to stop or asking an adult to help.

ACTIVITIES

1. *Crocodile's Crossing* includes a picture of signs that are meant to chase Crocodile away. Make a list of words and phrases that could have welcomed him instead. Make your own welcome signs with construction paper and popsicle sticks and decorate your room or classroom. Use those words whenever you meet new immigrants or refugees.
2. Crocodile was able to carry no more than one backpack. If you had to leave with only a backpack, what would you take? Make a list of what you would pack and then make another list of the important things you would have to leave behind. How would it feel to be without the items on the second list?
3. Try some playacting with friends. You can focus on the book and even use it as your script. For example, you could act out the part of the story where Crocodile and the mice first meet and get acquainted.

Or make up a scene that could have taken place in the book but didn't. For example, what if Crocodile had migrated with his family? How would that change the first meeting with the mice? Or what if Crocodile and the mice spoke different languages? How would they get to know each other?

