

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey

By Margriet Ruurs/Arabic translation by Falah Raheem & Illustrated by Nizar Ali Badr

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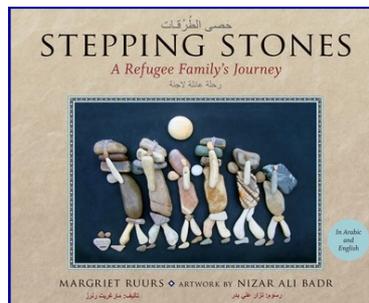
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When I was little, not so long ago, my brother, Sami, our friends and I played on sunbaked soil. We laughed, ran across rocks and sand, free as birds.

Then the birds stopped singing. People began to leave our village. First a trickle, then a stream, across dusty fields under a burning sun, a stream driven by hope. Mothers, fathers, children, seeking a better place, a better life.

Rama and her family are forced to leave behind everything they know and love. With only what they can carry on their backs, Rama's family sets out to find refuge in Europe. Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr's stunning stone images illustrate Margriet Ruurs's thoughtful and moving story.



Teacher Notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher. A full version is available on our website.

Themes:

- Refugees
- Syria
- Hope
- Freedom
- Action

Discussion Questions:

- Using the illustration on the front cover, discuss the challenges faced by refugees.
- The conflict facing Rama and her family is unveiled in the first sentence. Discuss the way in which the author foreshadows the issue rather than telling the reader exactly what has happened to the family. Why is this a more effective way to tell a story?
- Discuss the symbolism of the title of the book, *Stepping Stones*.
- Discuss Albert Einstein's quote at the start of the book: 'Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding'.
- Discuss Margriet Ruurs' use of figurative language throughout the book. Some examples include:
 - ◇ I played on sunbaked soil
 - ◇ Wrapped in silk and hugs
 - ◇ My legs were trees, rooted to the soil
- Why does Jedo say they weren't truly free? Why is it important to him that they be free to 'dance our dances' and pray the prayers of our choice'?
- What can be learnt about Syrian customs and traditions from *Stepping Stones*? Use examples from the text to support your response.
- How are your childhood memories similar to and different from Rama's?
- How important are the messages of peace, hope and love in this story? How are these conveyed?
- Rama comments that she cries in her Mama's lap 'even though I am a big girl'. Why is Rama crying? Why is it important that she can shed these tears? Reflect on a time you cried, even though you felt too old. How does this reflection help you to empathise with Rama? Do you think that you are ever too old to cry?
- Why is it difficult for Rama and her family to leave Syria?
- Discuss the artist's ability to convey emotion through his artwork. How has he achieved this?
- Create your own stone artwork to depict the emotions encountered in *Stepping Stones*.