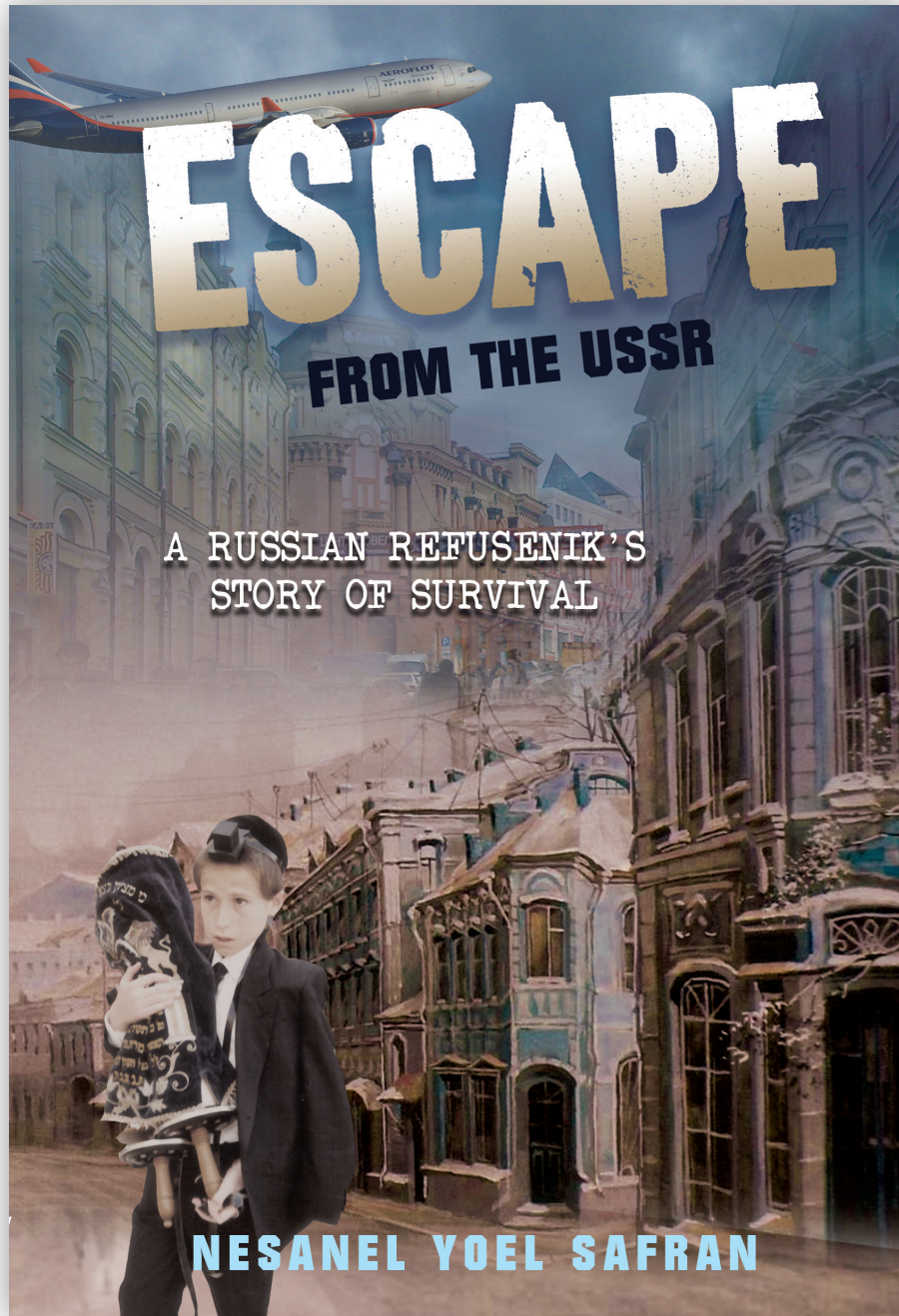


Educator's Guide



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FOR THE TEACHER

This guide consists of lessons to assist you in using *Escape from the USSR: A Russian Refusenik's Story of Survival* in your classroom. The guide is written in a chapter-by-chapter format and includes a synopsis, pre-reading activities, and comprehension questions, as well as supplementary activities to be used at the end of the book.

The book and its accompanying guide can be used in a number of ways. Students reading at the same level might participate in a small-group guided reading of the book, returning to it over several weeks as they read and discuss it with the teacher. The entire class might read the book and discuss it in small groups using literature circles or reciprocal teaching. The teacher can then use the suggested questions to guide students in their discussions. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. Students should be encouraged to support their answers with evidence from the text. Students might keep a notebook of their responses throughout the year, which can then be used for progress monitoring and assessment purposes.

This teacher's guide includes many document-based questions. These questions focus on utilizing critical-thinking skills. Students are also asked to make comparisons, draw analogies, and apply historic analysis using primary and secondary sources from this time period. Source material for questions include photographs, maps, and documents. The questions can be used to teach students how to analyze source documents and deepen their understanding of the life and times of the family featured in this book.

Using this guide can help you as a teacher create more active readers. Students who are encouraged to think about their reading, make inferences, compare and contrast events and characters, and notice author's language will read more closely and carefully. They will become more thoughtful readers, and their reading comprehension will improve. Working on this in the context of authentic literature helps to inspire a motivation and love for reading.

SYNOPSIS Zev and Carmela Raiz want to leave the USSR for Israel. When government permission is denied, they become refuseniks and live in peril for many years until they are finally allowed to leave.

Pre-Reading Activities

Use one or more of the following activities to introduce the book.

1. **Predictions:** Have students preview the book by reading the title, the author, and looking at the picture on the cover. What do they think this book will be about? Have they read any other books in this series? What clues can they gather from the photograph on the cover?
2. **Building Background:** This book tells the story of Russian refuseniks. What is a refusenik? What base word is found in the word “refusenik”? Discuss with students their personal connections to Russian refugees — do they know anyone who left Russia and now lives in the United States? Have they ever heard that family’s story?
3. **Building Background:** This book includes many references to the KGB. Have students already heard of the KGB? In what context? What do they know about it?
4. **Genre Focus:** *Escape from the USSR: A Russian Refusenik's Story of Survival* is a true story. Students can read the disclaimer on the copyright page and discuss: Why are some conversations and minor episodes changed in the book?
5. **Geography:** Have students study the map on the inside front spread of the book to get acquainted with the USSR that the Raiz family knew. Which cities do students recognize on this map? Do they know any of these cities by other names (e.g., Vilna instead of Vilnius)?
6. **Current Events:** Discuss the current political climate in the USSR as well as recent political events in the region to build background knowledge for the book.



PROLOGUE


1. What are some questions you now have about the Raiz family’s escape from the USSR? Note these questions and leave space to record their answers as you read the rest of the book.
2. The text says: “Volodya looked at his wife and shrugged.” Why might he have shrugged? What thoughts and feelings were going through his mind at the time?
3. Explain the sentence at the end of the prologue: “It looked like that KGB agent had been right after all.”

CHAPTER 1 — THE SOVIET TRAP

SYNOPSIS Moshe Raiz and his family live in Vakhnovka, where life becomes increasingly dangerous during the Russian Civil War. En route to Israel, they spend three years in a Turkish village and then return to the Soviet Union, believing communist propaganda that a better life awaits.

→ **Prompt:** This story begins with Moshe Raiz, Volodya's grandfather. Read to find out what life is like for Moshe in the Soviet Union of the 1920s.

Guided Questions

1. This book begins two generations before Volodya's story. As you read, keep track of the story by creating a family tree of the Raiz family, including key details about the members of the family.
2. Explain the reason for the civil war that took place in Russia three years after the Russian Revolution.
3. Why did life become even more difficult for the Jews of Vakhnovka during the civil war?
4. Describe how Shalom's father, Moshe, reacted when he saw the envelope with money from America.
5. Explain why Moshe chose to return from the Turkish village to the Soviet Union.
6. Consider the title of this chapter, "The Soviet Trap." What does this mean? Can you explain what the "trap" was?
-  7. **Creative writing:** Write a card from Shalom's uncle that may have accompanied the money he sent from America.

CHAPTER 2 — VOLODYA'S CHILDHOOD

SYNOPSIS Shalom marries and has a son, Volodya, who grows up in Kiev and is a promising student.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Shalom raises a family, including Volodya, the main character of the book.

Guided Questions

1. Describe Liza, Volodya's mother, based on events in this chapter.
2. Explain why Shalom was relocated from Kiev to Novosibirsk.
3. Why did Shalom want to return to Kiev after the war was over? Why did the government want him to remain in Novosibirsk, Siberia?
4. Describe some of the ways Jews of the Soviet Union were persecuted when Volodya was a boy.
5. Using information from this chapter, add to the family tree you began in chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3 — HOPE FOR FREEDOM

SYNOPSIS Volodya Raiz and his wife, Carmela, dream of leaving the USSR and are willing to risk making this request for a chance to live freely as Jews.

➔ Prompt: Read to find out how life changes for Volodya and his wife.

Guided Questions

1. The text says, "Both Volodya and his wife...were considered to be at the top of Soviet society." Explain why.
2. In what ways were the communists even worse to the Jews than the anti-Semitic czars had been?
3. Explain the emigration tax on higher education and its effect on the Jews of the Soviet Union.
4. Why did the government drop this tax after six months?
5. In what way was asking to leave the USSR both brave and risky?

CHAPTER 4 — REFUSENIK

SYNOPSIS Volodya and Carmela Raiz ask for permission to leave the Soviet Union and are denied, officially becoming refuseniks.

→ Prompt: Read to find out what happens when the Raizes ask for permission to leave the USSR.

Guided Questions


1. Explain why the Raizes request to leave the USSR was denied.
2. "Now Volodya and his wife were officially refuseniks." What does this mean?
3. Describe some of the ways refuseniks tried to get permission to leave the USSR.
4. Discuss the Soviet government's treatment of the refuseniks as described in this chapter.
5. Explain how Volodya saved himself from the refusenik Petya, who was working for the KGB.
6. Describe how Volodya and his wife tried to speak without the KGB eavesdropping.

CHAPTER 5 — RETURN TO THEIR ROOTS

SYNOPSIS The Raizes join the refusenik community and slowly learn more about Judaism.

➔ **Prompt:** Read to find out how the Raizes become refuseniks and learn about their heritage.

Guided Questions

1. How did becoming refuseniks set the Raiz family "...on a path toward becoming more aware of what it means to live as Jews"?
2. Although the refuseniks knew little about being Jewish, they wanted to learn more. Describe some of the ways they were lacking Jewish knowledge at that time.
3. Who was Rabbi Eliyahu Essas, and how did he affect the Raizes?
4. How did the KGB make it difficult for Volodya to join the refuseniks' conference in Moscow?
5.  **Creative writing:** Write a diary entry for Volodya describing his thoughts and feelings after he was unable to attend the refuseniks' conference about Jewish life.

CHAPTER 6 — BLESSINGS AND SETBACKS

SYNOPSIS The Raiz family is tormented as refuseniks.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how life becomes even harder for Volodya and his family.

Guided Questions


1. Why did Volodya choose to name his son Moshe?
2. Explain what a show trial is and why Anatoly Sharansky was put on a show trial.
3. Why did the KGB call Voldya in for questioning? How did he manage to avoid signing a confession of guilt?
4. Explain why Nechushkin was removed from his job of harassing Volodya Raiz.
5. Consider the title of the chapter, "Blessings and Setbacks." What blessings did the Raiz family experience? What setbacks?

CHAPTER 7 — NEW LIFE AND NEW GROWTH

SYNOPSIS The Raizes have another baby boy and give him a bris.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the Raiz family grows.

Guided Questions

1. Explain why it was important for the Soviet government that other countries consider them democratic.
2. Add to the family tree you have been creating based on information in this chapter.
3. Describe Volodya's internal conflict at the end of the chapter.
4.  **Document-based question:** Look carefully at the photo on page 54. What details do you notice? What about this marriage ceremony is the same as a marriage ceremony today? What seems different?

CHAPTER 8 — TAKING RISKS

SYNOPSIS Six-year-old Moshe has his bris in secret.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Moshe receives his bris.

Guided Questions


1. Describe some of the steps taken by the refuseniks so their plans for the bris would remain a secret.
2. Describe Moshe's character based on events in this chapter. Bring evidence from the story to support your descriptions.
3. Describe some of the ways a bris celebration in communist Russia was different from one today.

CHAPTER 9 — THE DACHA

SYNOPSIS The Raizes seek continued opportunities to learn, even organizing their own dacha when necessary.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the Raiz family continues to learn Torah.

Guided Questions

1. How were the refuseniks similar to the Jews of the Chanukah story?
2. What was the dacha?
3. What can you infer about Zev's character based on events in this chapter?
4.  **Document-based question:** Study the photograph on page 66. What details do you notice in the picture?

CHAPTER 10 — DANGER AND HIDING

SYNOPSIS When he hears that the KGB wants to arrest him, Zev goes into hiding, and the KGB raids his apartment in the middle of the night.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how Zev and his family continue to avoid the KGB.

Guided Questions


1. What happened to the Raiz family that "... turned [their] happy home into a place of fear"?
2. Explain why the Raiz children were left alone at home the night the KGB arrived.
3. How did Zev avoid being sent to serve in the Russian army?
4.  **Creative writing:** Write a diary entry for the Raiz family neighbor describing events of the night when the KGB arrived.

CHAPTER 11 — COURAGEOUS CHILDREN

SYNOPSIS The Raiz children bravely keep mitzvos even in Soviet schools.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how the two boys in the Raiz family bravely keep the mitzvos.

Guided Questions

1. How did Moshe get excused for wearing his hat in class?
2. Why did Shaul choose to wear tzitzis instead of covering his head?
3. The title of this chapter is "Courageous Children." In what ways were the Raiz children courageous?
4. At the end of the chapter it says, "...Carmela felt tears in her eye." Explain why she had tears in her eyes.
5. Consider what you have read about the Raiz family until now. Create a chart listing each of the mitzvos they learned, and evidence from the story to support your ideas.
6.  **Document-based question:** Study the photographs on pages 76 and 78. What details do you notice in the two pictures? Why might school have been particularly difficult for the Raiz children?

CHAPTER 12 — HELP FROM AFAR

SYNOPSIS Jews from America and other free countries try to help the refuseniks in whatever ways they can.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how help from other countries comes for the Raiz family.

Guided Questions

1. Why couldn't the American guests actually come to visit the Raiz family?
2. How did life change for the Raizes once Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union?
3. What were some of the ways the American guests helped the Soviet refuseniks?
4. It says in the text, "Maybe some things were changing in the USSR, but, clearly, not everything was." What was changing? What was not?
5. The visiting rabbi promised to do everything he could to publicize the Raiz family's situation. How would publicizing their story help them become free?

CHAPTER 13 — THE DOORS BEGIN TO OPEN

SYNOPSIS The Raiz family is promised their freedom but are disappointed once again.

→ **Prompt:** Read to find out how the Raiz family continues to try to leave the Soviet Union, with help from other places.

Guided Questions

1. Consider the title of this chapter. What doors might be beginning to open?
2. Name two ways life changed with Gorbachev's reforms.
3. Why do you think the Raiz family's application to emigrate was constantly refused?
4. Why did the Lithuanian government promise the Raiz family freedom only if Albert Reichmann would visit Vilnius?
5. Explain why the Raiz family was not allowed to leave if Gorbachev himself gave permission.




6. **Creative writing:** Write a thank-you note from Zev Raiz and his wife to Albert Reichmann for all of his efforts on their behalf.

CHAPTER 14 — FREEDOM AT LAST


SYNOPSIS First Carmela and Moshe, and then Zev and Shaul, finally leave the Soviet Union.

→ Prompt: Read to find out how the family becomes free at last.

Guided Questions

1. Describe Zev and Carmela's plan to get their boys out of Lithuania.
2. Why was Moshe surprised at the food he received on the plane?
3. Why would Carmela be returning to the Soviet Union and leaving her son in America?
4. In what ways did Carmela work to get her family's freedom while she was in the United States?
5. Why was it so important for Shaul to visit his friend Yuri before he left the Soviet Union?
6. What steps were taken to be sure Zev and his family arrived safely in Israel after they were granted permission to leave?
-  7. **Document-based question:** Study the photographs on pages 98 and 99. What is Moshe doing in these pictures? Why? What might he have been thinking and feeling at the time?

EPILOGUE

1. Consider events in the story up to this point. Who do you think were some of the people who joined Moshe's bar mitzvah celebration at the Kosel? Why did they come?
2. Why was it important to determine which Russians who arrived in Israel were Jewish and which ones were not?
-  3. **Document-based question:** Study the photograph on page 105. Who are the Raizes meeting? Why do you think they met with him?
4. Consider the author's note at the end of the book. Why is the Raiz story "a special one to tell"?

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

Use one or more of the following activities to conclude the book.

Life Lessons

Read the author's note at the back of the book. What lessons can we gain from reading the Raiz family story?

Creative Writing

- Interview a Russian Jew. Ask them to tell you their family's story.
- Write a speech that Zev may have delivered at his son Moshe's bar mitzvah. Reflect on the lessons he learned from his life story and the message he'd want his children to take from that.