

Second Story Press

Intermediate/High-Intermediate Level ESL

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

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A Long Way From Home

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Book Summary

A Long Way From Home is a chapter book of historical fiction. The central characters are Rabia and Colin, two teenagers from different parts of the world, who are on a plane scheduled to land in New York City on September 11, 2001. Rabia and her mother are travelling to the United States to escape the dictatorship of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Colin, flying home after a vacation with his mother, is upset by the possibility of his parents' divorce. Both of their lives change forever on 9/11. Because of the terrorist attacks in New York, their plane is diverted to the tiny community of Gander, Newfoundland. *A Long Way From Home* is based on the true story of how the residents of Gander welcomed the passengers of the diverted planes with open arms, providing food, clothing, and shelter, but more importantly friendship and solace in the dark days following America's worst tragedy. The book describes the close relationship between the stranded passengers and the residents of Gander, and of the life lessons learned by the two main characters. The book explores the themes of surviving tragedy, multicultural friendship, fellowship and kindness. It can be used as a core reading text in a credit ESL C (Intermediate) or ESL D (High Intermediate) class, or in a non-credit intermediate ESL classroom for teenagers or adults. The book has 188 pages.

PART A

Pre-Reading Activities



ACTIVITY 1

Introduce or review the elements of storytelling, which include some or all of these terms: plot, character, protagonist, antagonist, theme, setting, foreshadowing, flashback, flash forward, conflict, climax, and symbolism.



ACTIVITY 2

You will need to introduce the real-life setting and historical context of the story, which is the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Find an online newspaper article appropriate to your students' level. Read the article together as a class or have the students read it in small groups. Identify the important details by using questions starting with the 5 Ws and H. The questions would include the following:

When did this attack happen?

Who was attacked ?

Who were the attackers?

What is a hijacker? What did hijackers do on that day?

Where did the attacks happen?

Why is 9/11 considered a terrible tragedy?

How have the lives of people from other countries been affected or changed since September 11, 2001?

Brainstorm with the students and construct a web, chart, or any graphic organizer that you wish. Post the organizer prominently in your classroom so that it can be referred to as you read the story.



ACTIVITY 3

Find a short online newspaper article or encyclopedia entry on Afghanistan written at an appropriate level for your students. Use a map of the country to help students understand the country.

Do this activity as a class or in small groups and ask these questions to help students understand the reading:

Where is Afghanistan?

Who are Afghani people? What are some of their important religious or cultural beliefs?

What is the government like there?

What are some of the problems that people living there have?

When did these problems start?

Why do some people decide to leave Afghanistan to live somewhere else?

As with Activity 2, brainstorm with the students and create a web, chart, or any graphic organizer that you wish.



ACTIVITY 4

If your school has a teacher or an older student from Afghanistan, have that person give an informal talk about the country. Based on the talk, create a graphic organizer with important information.



ACTIVITY 5

Have students do a short research project using the Internet. Ask them to find five pictures about Afghanistan's culture, climate, customs, or people. Print out the pictures and mount them on cardboard. Under each picture write a caption, a short description of what is in the picture.

Have the students talk about their pictures in groups and then display them in the classroom.

PART B

Listening and Speaking Activities



ACTIVITY 6

Use this short questionnaire to help students to empathize with the main characters in the book. Have them choose a partner who does not speak their first language and instruct them to ask each other the following questions and record short answers.

Discuss the answers to these questions with the class.

 ACTIVITY 6**Directions:**

Choose a partner who does not speak your first language. Ask each other the questions below and take notes of the answers. Discuss the answers with the class.

1. Have you ever travelled far away from home? Where did you go?
2. What does the word *homesick* mean? How do people feel when they're homesick? What are other words that we can use to describe that feeling?
3. Make a list of important things you would miss if you were far away from home.
4. Imagine that you know someone who is feeling homesick. What would you do for that person to make them feel better?
5. If you were far from home and couldn't return there right away, what are some other feelings that you would have? Give reasons for those feelings.



ACTIVITY 7

Obviously, terrorism is a very difficult subject. If you feel that your students cannot cope with any visual material of September 11, 2001, do not present it.

Find a YouTube report of the events of 9/11. Make sure that it is fairly short so that the horrible events of the day are not belaboured. However, any newscast from that day that allows students to understand the day and its impact on world events would be beneficial.

Follow the viewing with a short discussion of the events of 9/11.

Use questions that begin with WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW.

PART C

Reading and Writing Activities



ACTIVITY 8

Plot Timelines

After reading one of the first chapters of the book create a plot timeline with students. For Chapter 1 it might look like this:

Chapter 1 Plot Timeline

1. Passengers on an American plane are stuck on a runway on September 11, 2001.
2. Police are circling the plane with dogs.
3. Passengers on board plan hear rumours of hijacking.
4. When the plane steward talks to Rabia, his appearance reminds her of her older brother in Afghanistan.

As you continue to read the book, have the students complete plot timelines for individual chapters.

 ACTIVITY 8

Creating Plot Timelines

Directions:

After you read each chapter of the book, create a plot timeline. For Chapter 1, it might look like this example:

Chapter 1 Plot Timeline

1. Passengers on an American plane are stuck on a runway on September 11, 2001.
2. Police are circling the plane with dogs.
3. Passengers on board plan hear rumours of hijacking.
4. When the plane steward talks to Rabia, his appearance reminds her of her older brother in Afghanistan.

 ACTIVITY 9

Chapter Questions

These are reading comprehension questions that can be used for discussion or assigned for evaluation. Use them as you are reading the book aloud with students, or when you are assigning individual reading. The questions deal with facts, vocabulary, and inference drawn from the context.

 ACTIVITY 9

Chapter Questions

CHAPTERS 1-10

1. Where are Rabia and her family at the beginning of the story?
2. What unusual things does she notice on the airplane?
3. What do the words *hostages* and *hijackers* mean? What horrible news do the passengers on the plane learn?
4. Who is Colin? Why are he and his mother on the airplane?
5. What is a flashback? Why are several of the first few chapters of the book a flashback? Why are these flashbacks important to the story?
6. What happened to Rabia's brothers, Yousef and Karim, in Afghanistan?
7. What kind of life do girls and women have in Kabul? Who is forcing girls to have this kind of life?
8. What is Rabia's physical injury? How did she become injured?
9. What happened to Rabia's father?
10. In your opinion, why does Rabia look at the old photographs?
11. Summarize all of the rules that the Taliban imposed on the people of Afghanistan.
12. Explain why Rabia's brother Amir leaves Afghanistan?
13. Why does Rabia's mother need to sell her jewellery?
14. What is your opinion of Rabia's relationship with her mother?
15. Why does Rabia's Aunt Roxanne want the family to come to Pakistan?
16. What items does Rabia take in their escape from Afghanistan? In your opinion, why does she choose these items to take with her?
17. What are some adjectives that you can use to describe Rabia's father's character? Why would you use those words?
18. What are *burqas* and *chadors*? Why do many Muslim women wear them?

19. What does Rabia do to get into Pakistan?
20. Whose house in Pakistan are Rabia and her family staying in?
21. What kind of work will Rabia and her family be doing in Pakistan? How does Rabia feel about the work?
22. What does Rabia's cousin Sima tell her about her upcoming marriage? How do you feel about Sima's situation?
23. Chapter 7 begins in "Flash forward." What do you think "flash forward" means?
24. Describe how and why Rabia and her family are accepted as refugees to America.
25. Describe Colin and what is happening in his family.
26. Who and where were Colin and his mother visiting before they boarded the plane for New York?
27. Describe the announcement that the captain of the airplane makes to the passengers? How would the passengers feel about this announcement?
28. Describe what is happening in the school in Gander, Newfoundland.
29. Describe Leah's character, her family situation, and her feelings about what's happening in Gander.
30. What is the meaning of the word *rumours*? What are some of the rumours that the stranded passengers hear about what has happened in New York?
31. What international organization is helping the stranded passengers when they land in Newfoundland? What does this fact tell Colin about the situation that he and the stranded passengers are in?

CHAPTERS 11-20

32. Describe Rabia's feelings about her future and the future of her family.
33. Who is Fatima? Why does Rabia want to telephone her?
34. What is the meaning of the term "culture shock"? Explain the culture shock that Rabia is experiencing in Gander?
35. Are the residents of Gander treating the stranded passengers well? Give your opinion and reasons for it.
36. Describe Rabia's fear about being an Afghani person in this situation.
37. How does Rabia compare Gander with Afghanistan?

38. Rabia and her mother say that the terrorists on September 11 have made a “mockery of our faith.” (page 78). What do they mean by these words?
39. How are the residents and businesses of Gander helping the stranded passengers?
40. Name the members of Leah’s family. Or, if you wish, create a family tree diagram. What is your opinion of Leah’s family?
41. Why is Rabia, as a Muslim, afraid of what people might do to her people after the attacks of September 11? Do you think that Rabia’s fears and concerns are reasonable? Explain.
42. How does Colin react when he sees film of the attack on New York on television?
43. Why does Colin believe that he might not get home to New York?
44. Who does Rabia blame for the problems in Afghanistan?
45. What is the meaning of the word *hostility* (page 98)? Explain why Colin shows hostility to Rabia.
46. What are the meanings of the words *stereotyping* and *profiling*? How does Colin show that he is stereotyping and profiling Rabia?
47. Colin says, “What would it be like to live in Gander?...Neighbours drop in on each other and no one seems to mind at all.” (page 103) What comparison is he making between living in New York and living in Gander?
48. Summarize Colin’s attitude about terrorists.
49. What news does Colin learn about his father when he calls his friend Grant in New York?
50. What important information is Colin’s mother hiding from him?
51. Why is the ambulance called for Rabia’s mother? Later on in the chapter, what do we find out has happened to her?
52. How does Colin feel when he speaks to his father’s friend Mr. Nestor?
53. How do Colin’s feelings about Rabia change? Why does he change?
54. Summarize the flashback that Rabia has about her father and the Taliban. (pages 131-133) Why is Rabia having this memory at this point in the story?
55. When Rabia says that she must “soldier on,” what does she mean? (page 133)

CHAPTERS 21-27

56. Why is Colin worried when he hears about the unidentified man taken to hospital in Corner Brook?

57. Colin's father is a diplomat. What is a diplomat?
58. In the days following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, television stations constantly showed pictures both of the attacks and of the people of Afghanistan. Why do you think that television showed these images over and over again? Do you think that was a good decision?
59. What is the Kevin's opinion of what the President of the United States should do about the terrorists who attacked New York?
60. Explain the important information that Kevin knows about the history of Afghanistan.
61. What do Millie and Kevin realize when they see Rabia's pictures of her family in Afghanistan?
62. Explain the plan Leah is making for hers and Colin's adventure?
63. Colin "felt so badly for being so rude to her" (Rabia). (page 149) Why is Colin feeling sorry for his behaviour?
64. Why is Rabia so worried when she thinks that she will miss her plane to California?
65. Why is Colin disappointed when he goes into room 312 in the hospital in Corner Brook?
66. When Colin talks to his mother, what does he find out about his father's travels after September 11?
67. What does Rabia learn about her mother's health?
68. What are two ways that Fatima's telephone call makes Rabia feel relieved?
69. What does Fatima tell Rabia about the way that Muslim people are treated in America after September 11, 2001? What do you think of that treatment?
70. Why does Rabia feel guilty about the way that she has acted toward Kevin?
71. What does Colin say to Leah when they meet at the hospital?
72. Why is Rabia afraid when the police come up to her and Karim in Corner Brook? Why is she so relieved after their meeting?
73. What do the children build together at the mall? What is the symbolism or importance of the children building this?
74. How long did the "plane people" stay in Gander?
75. What is "Ground Zero"? How does Colin feel when he looks at this sight every day?
76. At the end of the book, we read Rabia's letter to Colin? What does the fact that Rabia and Colin are writing letters to each other show about the change in their relationship?
77. What is the tone or mood of Rabia's letter to Colin? Why does the letter have this tone?



ACTIVITY 10

As they are reading the book, the students can fill out character charts for Colin and Rabia with headings similar to these.

CHARACTER'S NAME	PERSONAL QUALITY	PROOF OF QUALITY

 ACTIVITY 10

Character Charts

Directions:

As you are reading the book, create and fill out character charts for Colin and Rabia with headings similar to these:

CHARACTER'S NAME	PERSONAL QUALITY	PROOF OF QUALITY



ACTIVITY 11

After completing the charts, have the students write character studies in paragraph form. Review that the complete paragraphs need a title, topic sentence, a body including main points and supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.



ACTIVITY 12

Brainstorm a list of themes in the book, which include RACISM, MULTICULTURAL FRIENDSHIP, RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION, and HUMAN KINDNESS.

Have the students complete theme charts with headings similar to these.

THEME	PROOF	PAGE REFERENCE

 ACTIVITY 12

Theme Charts

Directions:

With your classmates, brainstorm a list of themes in the book.

Then complete theme charts with headings like these:

THEME	PROOF	PAGE REFERENCE



ACTIVITY 13

After completing the charts, ask students choose one theme from the story. Similar to Activity 10, they should write theme analyses in paragraph form. They can choose one of the themes they outlined and then give examples of that theme from the story. Review again that complete paragraphs need a title, topic sentence, a body including details and examples to support main points, and a concluding sentence.

PART D

Social, Cultural, Media Literacy Activities



ACTIVITY 14

Have students do Internet research on “Operation Yellow Ribbon” which was the Canadian effort to handle 6,122 passengers on 255 different aircraft that were diverted to 17 airports across Canada in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

They can research, do point-form notes, and create board displays on these subtopics: Emergency Measures, The Operation, and the Aftermath.



ACTIVITY 15

Show a short video of the real historical setting from the story. There is a short video narrated by Tom Brokaw available on YouTube.

After the video, have the students answer the discussion questions below.

 ACTIVITY 15**Directions:**

The class will watch a short video of the real historical setting from the story. The video is narrated by Tom Brokaw and available on YouTube.

After the video, answer the discussion questions below.

1. What new ideas about Canada's help on Sept. 11 did you learn from watching this film?
2. How did the stranded airplane passengers show their appreciation to the residents when they were returning home?
3. What feelings do you have about the actions of the people of Gander on September 11?
4. How do you think that you would have acted if you had been a resident of Gander?

There is a longer documentary called *9/11: Operation Yellow Ribbon* also narrated by Tom Brokaw (YouTube) and a TV movie called *Diverted*. (Amazon.ca)

PART E

Extension/Enrichment Activities

 ACTIVITY 16

Letter Writing

Ask students to try this creative writing activity. They can choose to be Rabia writing to Colin or Colin writing to Rabia.

 **ACTIVITY 16**

Letter Writing

Directions:

You can choose to be Rabia writing to Colin or Colin writing to Rabia. Here are some ideas to help you get started.

Rabia Writing to Colin

Imagine that it is now September 11, 2002 (one year later) and that you are Rabia, now living in California. Write a short letter to Colin describing your new life. You can write about your new school routine, any changes in your lifestyle, new friends but also any difficulties adjusting to life in America.

or

Colin Writing to Rabia

Imagine that it is now September 11, 2002. You are Colin, now back home in New York City. Write a short letter to Rabia about how it feels to be living in New York City. You can write about your family and routine, and how your feelings and family may have changed in the last year.



ACTIVITY 17

Writing Linked Paragraphs

If your students are ready for multi-paragraphs, try the following assignment. Ask them to write four linked paragraphs that describe Colin's character development in the story. This title and introduction may help them get started.

Note: *You can choose to write the introduction as a class activity.*

Colin's Character Development

In the novel *A Long Way From Home*, Colin has some changes in his character from the beginning to the end of the story. At the beginning of the story, Colin's relationship with his mother is very shaky because he blames her for his parents' divorce. Also at the beginning of the story Colin is very rude to Rabia because of her different culture. However, by the end of the story his relationships with both his mother and Rabia change because of his experiences.

Now, ask students to finish the linked writing with a body paragraph about Colin's change in attitude toward his mother and a second body paragraph about the change in his relationship toward Rabia.

 ACTIVITY 17

Writing Linked Paragraphs

Directions:

Write four linked paragraphs that describe Colin's character development in the story. Here is a title and introduction to help you get started.

Colin's Character Development

In the novel *A Long Way From Home*, Colin has some changes in his character from the beginning to the end of the story. At the beginning of the story, Colin's relationship with his mother is very shaky because he blames her for his parents' divorce. Also at the beginning of the story Colin is very rude to Rabia because of her different culture. However, by the end of the story his relationships with both his mother and Rabia change because of his experiences.

Now, finish the linked writing with a body paragraph about Colin's change in attitude toward his mother and a second body paragraph about the change in his relationship toward Rabia.



ACTIVITY 18

Multi-Cultural Fair

Your students can either organize or participate in a multicultural fair in your school. Students representing various nationalities could have tables or booths that display the history, culture, food, and customs of that country or nationality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Helen Wolfe has been an educator for almost 40 years. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education and has earned professional certification in Senior English, ESL, Law, Special Education, and a Guidance Specialist.

Helen is experienced in all grade levels from Kindergarten to Grade 12. She has taught in a wide variety of public and private school settings. Since 1988, her focus has been as an adult educator in secondary school credit programs. During that time, she has written, revised, and implemented many courses of study in English, Social Science, and English as a Second Language.

In 2011, she wrote *Terrific Women Teachers*, a non-fiction chapter book for young readers that is part of the Women's Hall of Fame Series from Second Story Press. Her belief is that every student, even those with language and other learning challenges, has the right to read and appreciate well-written children's literature. That philosophy of inclusion motivates her to write teacher's guides to help make quality literature accessible to all learners.

Helen lives in Toronto and continues to work in adult education and ESL.

QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about this guide or would like to get in touch with Helen Wolfe, please send an e-mail to info@secondstorypress.ca.

FEEDBACK

Let us know about your experience using this guide by completing a short online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CQHKZG5>