

# Ayah and the Big World Outside

## Teacher Guide

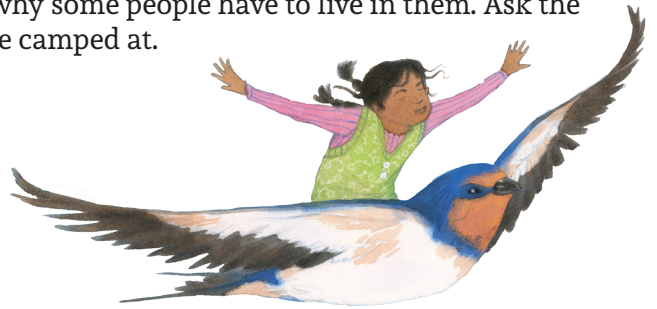
Ayah has lived in a refugee camp her whole life, so when her teacher asks her what she wants to be when she grows up, she isn't sure. Then she dreams of traveling the world on a swallow's back and sees many places without war. Now she knows what she wants to be when she's older: free, like the swallow.

### Pre-reading Activities:

1. Discussion: Imagine growing up in a camp
  - Have you ever gone camping? Did you sleep in a tent? Do you like camping?
  - What would it be like if you could never go back home, but had to stay in the campground all the time? Would you like it? Would you miss being home? What would you miss?
  - What if there was a big fence around the campground and you could never go outside the fence? You couldn't visit anyone outside the fence and you couldn't go anywhere else. How do you think you would feel?
  - What if you were born in the campground and you didn't know anything about the world outside? Do you think you would wonder about what was outside? Would you want to leave the camp?
2. What is a refugee camp?
  - Show the students some images of refugee camps. Explain why some people have to live in them. Ask the students if they look different than the campgrounds they've camped at.

### During Reading:

1. Comprehension Questions
  - Why don't Ayah and her mother have their own oven?
  - Why hasn't Ayah ever met an engineer or a singer?
  - Why does Ayah hear the bird talking to her?
  - Why does Ayah think it's dangerous to travel?
  - Do you think Ayah has ever seen oceans or mountains before? Why not?
  - What are bombs? In the city, why is no one looking at the sky for them?
  - Why is Ayah suddenly back at the camp?
  - What does Ayah mean when she says she wants to be a swallow?
2. Visual literacy
  - What do you think it's like to live in this camp? How do people cook? Do children have toys? How do they get water? How does their classroom look different from yours?
  - What are some differences you see between the swallow's summer and winter homes?
  - What happens when it rains in the camp? How is it different from winter where you are?
  - There's a war in Ayah's country outside the camp. What happened to people's houses? Does the picture on pages 18 and 19 show why Ayah had to leave her home to live in the camp? What emotion do you feel looking at that picture?



- When the swallow takes Ayah to the big city, does it look like there's a war there? Why not?
- What emotion do you feel looking at the last picture of Ayah with the swallows?



## Post-reading Activities:

### 1. Discussion

- Do you think Ayah will be able to leave the camp and live somewhere else? How do you think that could happen?
- Are you a migratory swallow? Do you have more than one home? Do you sometimes travel to another home, maybe one where you were born or where your parents were born?
- Imagine you have to live in a camp and can't leave. What animal would you talk to, to find out what the world is like outside? What do you think it would tell you?

### 2. Art and writing

- If you have more than one home country, draw a picture of your two homes. How are they different? If you only have one home, imagine a place you would like to live some of the time. Draw a picture of that place and show how it's different from the place where you live.
- Write a letter to Ayah describing where you live. Tell her what you'd like to be when you grow up.

### 3. STEM connection

- Show students a map of the migratory route of barn swallows. Ask the students if they've ever been to any of the countries on that migratory route. What would they like to ask a swallow if they could talk to one?

## About the authors:



**Souad Shehab** is a Palestinian writer who was born in a tent in a refugee camp in southwest Syria. She spent twenty-four years in the camp, where she experienced firsthand the difficulties of refugee life. Trained as a teacher, she taught in Syrian primary schools for twenty-five years and raised four of her own boys. She became a refugee a second time when civil war broke out in Syria, escaping to Lebanon and then arriving in Canada in 2017. She currently lives in Edmonton with her family, where she teaches preschool and is working toward her dream of establishing herself as a writer in her new home.



**Julie Sedivy** is a citizen of three countries. At the age of two, she left the country of her birth (Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic) soon after the Soviet invasion of 1968. She has made her home in many places, including Montreal, upstate New York, Providence (Rhode Island) and Calgary, where she currently lives and writes. She has taught linguistics and psychology at Brown University and the University of Calgary and is the author of several nonfiction books, including *Linguaphile: A Life of Language Love*. She is especially interested in the complicated and beautiful lives of people who are not sure where to call home.

## About the illustrator:



**Barkha Lohia** is an illustrator and visual artist who brings stories to life through her artwork—whether in picture books, editorials or prints. She is a recipient of a Binod Kanoria Illustration Award for *A Tree of My Own*, and she has illustrated books like *So Many Leaves* and *Let's Talk About Trees*. Barkha's work delves into the unseen connections between humans and nature, inviting deeper reflection and a sense of wonder. When she's not creating, she's out in the wild—clicking, sketching and drawing inspiration from the world around her.



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