

Without Refuge by Jane Mitchell

Teaching Guide

JANE MITCHELL | AWARD WINNING WRITER OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

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About the author

Jane Mitchell is one of Ireland's leading authors for children and young adults. She has published seven novels—several of which are award-winners—and three short stories. In 1994, her debut novel *When Stars Stop Spinning* won Ireland's premier youth literature award: *CBI Bisto Book of the Year Award*. Her novel for older children *Chalkline* won the inaugural *CBI Children's Choice Award* in 2010. She lives in Dublin and works in an NGO providing services for people with disabilities.

You can find out more about Jane at www.janemitchell.ie.

About the story

Thirteen-year-old Ghalib wishes his life could go back to normal. He wishes he could still hang out at the market with his friends, root for his favorite soccer team, even go to school. But civil war has destroyed his home. As violence rages around them, his family makes the difficult choice to flee Syria.

Together they start out on a dangerous journey toward Europe. Along the way, they encounter closely guarded borders, hardscrabble refugee camps, and an ocean crossing that they may not survive.

Rationale and Themes

This beautifully-written novel is suitable for use in Middle Grades classrooms (Grades 4–7).

It deals in a compelling and sensitive manner with themes such as **refugees, discrimination, and gender equality**, all of which are relevant in the contemporary world.

Without Refuge is highly relevant today in light of events in places such as Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan, and in view of current challenges faced by refugee children fleeing areas of war and armed conflict.

The subject matter of the story provides plenty of opportunity for **discussion, activities, debate**

and the **development of personal opinion**. Themes are powerfully explored and carefully researched. They resonate with clarity and authenticity.

The main discussion areas woven into the fabric of the story include:

Civil war

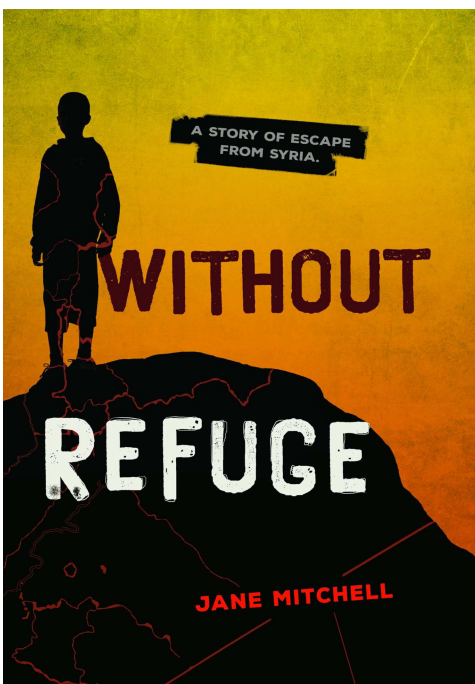
Injury and death

Forced emigration and refugees

Human Rights

Gender equality & discrimination

Family and friendship



Teaching guide approach

For the purposes of this teaching guide, the novel has been divided into four units, loosely based on the structure of the story.

Chapter summaries, discussion points and activities, mostly based on language development, are included for each unit.

The pace at which the novel is read depends on the teacher and the students.

What is a refugee?

A refugee is an adult or child who has been forced to leave his or her country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. Thousands of refugees are currently seeking help and support throughout the world. This is the greatest migrant wave since World War II. Find out why this is happening.

Unit 1: Chapters 1 to 6 (pages 1-58)

Summary of Unit 1: chapters 1 to 6

Chapter 1

13-year old Ghalib runs through the wreckage of bombed-out Kobani with his little brother Alan and his cousin Hamza. The boys carry looted goods from stalls in the old *souk*. Alan is younger than the others, and is slower because of his weak leg and arm. Hamza is unhappy that Ghalib brought Alan, afraid the shopkeepers will catch them.

An air-strike frightens the boys, who shelter in a ruined library before hurrying home. They meet Ghalib's mother Gardina and sister Bushra, who are searching for them. Gardina and Bushra are angry with Ghalib for bringing Alan downtown, but Alan covers for his big brother, telling his mother that he forced Ghalib to bring him.

Chapter 2

At night, families in Ghalib's district cook with diesel generators purchased by the *mukhtar* before Isis came to Kobani. Hamza bullies Ghalib to go into the city after dark to steal more goods. The streets are frightening at night. They smell of death. A soldier from the Kurdish People's Protection Units stops the boys and tells them to go home, but before they can leave, a helicopter blazes through the sky, tossing out a barrel bomb. Ghalib's world explodes.

Chapter 3

Ghalib comes to after the explosion in a burning building. His world has changed utterly. He is confused and injured. He finds Hamza, bleeding and unresponsive, and saves his cousin from the blaze. The boys are

carried home and treated for their injuries. Gardina wants the family to leave Syria, but Ghalib's father refuses. Hamza is brought to the foreign aid clinic for treatment for his severe injuries, while Ghalib is treated at home.

Chapter 4

Ghalib's mother's cousin, Dima, arrives to the family house. She is a soldier of the People's Protection Units and wants Ghalib and Bushra to fight in the Syrian war with the Protection Units. Bushra wants to fight, but Ghalib is frightened. Their father refuses to allow them to become soldiers. Ultimately, to keep the family safe, he decides they must flee Syria to find safety, leaving Hamza and his family behind.

Chapter 5

Getting ready to leave is difficult for everyone, but especially Ghalib as he tries to adjust to such a huge change in his life. The family's departure must remain a secret in case the Protection Units find out, so they leave in pre-dawn darkness. They cram into a minibus with their luggage. The driver drives to Aleppo, passing bombed-out vehicles, roadblocks, refugees, and ruined buildings. He refuses to go through the city and deposits the family with their heaps of luggage on the side of the road outside Aleppo.

Chapter 6

Aleppo is a frightening place, far more damaged than Kobani. The streets are heaped with rubble and burnt-out cars. Children pick through the rubbish in search for food, while women appear like

ghosts in Sharia clothing. Ghalib's mother, sister and grandmother are so frightened, they cover their faces with hijabs. The family sees a crowd watching public punishments, and have to run to escape. They finally get out of Aleppo and walk all day. Ghalib's burnt feet cause him great pain. In a village, they find rooms to stay overnight in a shopkeeper's home.

Unit 1 Discussion Points

In **Chapter 1**, we learn that Ghalib is running through the streets, looting goods from abandoned and burnt-out stalls. Why do you think the boys are not at school? Is it right for them to take the damaged goods from bombed-out shops? Give reasons for your answers.

In **Chapter 4**, Ghalib's father decides at last that they must leave Kobani. What makes him change his mind? Why do they decide to keep the important decision about leaving from Alan? Why do they have to keep it a secret at all?

In **Chapter 6**, Ghalib sees a crowd watching public punishments. Why do you think the family is frightened by the sight? Do you think it is good to punish law-breakers in public? Give reasons for your answers.

Unit 1 Activities

Without Refuge is set in Syria, where a civil war is taking place. Look up Syria on a map and find out what countries border it. Why is there a war in Syria? What other countries are involved?

In **Chapter 5**, it is difficult for Ghalib to decide what to bring with him when leaving Kobani. If you had to leave your home forever and could only bring one bag with you, what items would you bring? Write a list of your **Essentials**, **Maybes**, and **Definitely Nots**. Explain what you included in your **Essentials** list and why.

Look up pictures of **Aleppo** or **Kobani** as they looked before the war. Now find images of the cities as they look during the war. Compare the differences as a result of the Syrian war.

Unit 2: Chapters 7 to 12 (pages 59-124)

Summary of Unit 2: chapters 7 to 12

Chapter 7

The family walks all day, making for the border. They are hot and tired. When Ghalib stops to give Alan a drink, someone shoots at them from the hills. The family hides in a stony ditch, and finally manages to reach safety in a ruined house. When Ghalib sprints outside to retrieve one of their bags, he finds himself face-to-face with the sniper.

Chapter 8

The shooter is a girl! She is frightening and mesmerising at the same time, and demands food, water and medicine. Ghalib and his father go with her up the hill to help her little brother, who is hidden in a hut. He is very ill and Ghalib's father carries him down the hill. The girl Safaa and her brother Amin stay overnight with Ghalib's family, sleeping under the stars, and the next morning, all eight of them walk to the next village.

Chapter 9

In the village, the family stocks up on food and water. Safaa and Amin make the big decision to travel on with the family, much to Bushra's disgust. Everyone is tired, Ghalib is in pain from his injured feet, but they must keep walking. It is almost sunset when they finally reach the Turkish border.

Chapter 10

The border is crowded and loud and confusing. The family clings together and moves off the highway where they find a small space in the crowds to sit down and

rest. Ghalib, his father and Safaa walk back to the border, where they find out it is closed because of a bomb attack in Turkey. People have been waiting for days to cross. Ghalib and his father get lost on their way back to the others, but Safaa leads them back safely.

Chapter 11

In spite of what he believes, Ghalib manages to sleep, but is cold and uncomfortable. The next morning, Safaa and Amin are missing. Ghalib worries, but his family must go to the border. In the afternoon, Ghalib thinks he sees Safaa and Amin. He rushes down to them, only to cause a major security crisis. As soldiers shoot guns and tear gas, and crowds run screaming from the border, Ghalib panics and sprints alone across the border by mistake. Three other men and a family manage to cross with him. While they are elated to have made it into Turkey, Ghalib feels wretched, alone and very frightened.

Chapter 12

Ghalib and two of the men—Musab and Ali—climb into the barren hills of Turkey to hide from Turkish soldiers responding to the security alert. They are joined after dark by the family. All six of them stay overnight outdoors, in the bitterly cold hills. Ghalib doesn't sleep. He is terrified, in pain, dehydrated and hungry. The next morning, he suffers cuts and bruises in a fall. The men want him to travel with them to Ankara, but Ghalib decides to go with the family to a refugee camp. When they arrive, Ghalib is taken immediately to the medical centre for treatment.

Unit 2 Activities

In **Chapter 7**, Bushra hides with her family in the stony ditch when Ghalib runs to the ruined house after a sniper has shot at them. Bushra is angry. She is determined not to let the shooter win. Pretend you are Bushra. Describe what you can see and hear from the ditch. And explain what you are going to do to get through this experience. Try to include something of Bushra's fighting spirit.

In **Chapter 11**, Ghalib is convinced he sees Amin and Safaa at the border. He runs down to speak with them. He causes a major security alert. You are one of the guards at the border when this strange boy runs up, carrying a suspicious-looking bag. Write up your report of what happened that day. You will need to state the **facts** clearly. Include **witness statements**, and report the **final outcome** of the incident.

Unit 2: Activities continued

In **Chapter 12**, Ghalib spends a long and lonely night in the freezing mountains of Turkey. He thinks of his family and wants to be with them. Write a letter Ghalib might send to his family from his lonely hideout. Explain how he feels, how much he misses them, and what he would like to happen. Use what he sees, hears and feels around him to echo his feelings of loneliness.

Unit 2: Discussion Points

In **Chapter 8**, Ghalib is astonished to find out Safaa is a girl. Why should he be surprised? Can you think of other situations where someone might be surprised that a girl is doing something? What about certain sports—like boxing or rugby? What about boys doing something unexpected—like ballet or sewing? Is it fair to have certain expectations because someone is a boy or a girl?

In **Chapter 9**, Ghalib passes through fields of olives, vines and grazing goats. Research what climate you need to grow olives and vines. Find out what other crops and farm animals are reared and tended in Syria. Are any Syrian fruits and vegetable exported to Europe? See if you can find any in your local supermarket.

In **Chapter 12**, Ali and Musab want Ghalib to go with them to Ankara. What do you think he might have ended up doing in Ankara? What makes you think this? Do you think Ghalib knows what Ali and Musab are planning for him? Give reasons for your answers.

Unit 3: Chapters 13 to 18 (pages 125-172)

Chapter 13

Ghalib wakes up two days later in a camped in the refugee clinic. He is heartbroken about being separated from his family. He's weak and hungry, but in clean clothes with fresh dressings on his feet. When he is well enough to be discharged, Mohammad gives him new trainers, warm clothes and other items. He brings Ghalib to the children's centre where staff work to reunite unaccompanied children with their families. When Ghalib meets the other children in the canteen tent, he is shocked to see Safaa sitting at the same table.

Chapter 14

Ghalib storms away after seeing Safaa, but not before they lock eyes. Amin is there too. Ghalib can't understand how they got there, and blames them for getting separated from his family. He spills his heart out to Mohammad, who insists that Ghalib speak with Safaa. Safaa explains what happened. Ghalib's anger fades and he feels affection for Safaa and Amin.

Chapter 15

As his feet heal, Ghalib starts at camp school. He struggles to concentrate and is constantly distracted by memories of his family. His friendship with Safaa draws critical comments from other boys. Eventually, his family arrives in the camp in search of him. Ghalib is overjoyed to see them, but heartbroken to discover that his beloved Dapir has died before crossing the border to Turkey. Alan is admitted to the clinic for treatment for dehydration and exhaustion.

Chapter 16

With his family now with him, Ghalib moves from the children's centre to one of the cramped family tents, which they share with two other families. Life is difficult and challenging: facilities are poor and the camp is dangerous after dark. The family tells Ghalib about Dapir's death, and how they were smuggled across the border. Safaa and Amin feel isolated now that Ghalib's family has arrived, but gradually adapt to the changes.

Chapter 17

Ghalib's parents tell the family that they are going to leave the camp and travel to Europe. Ghalib and Bushra are angry and upset, not wanting to go on the road again; Alan is worried. Bushra and Ghalib argue about it, and Bushra tells Ghalib how different and difficult it is for her, as a girl. Ghalib breaks the news to Safaa about his leaving. Ghalib and Safaa both realise how close they have become as friends, but understand that Safaa and Amin will remain behind.

Chapter 18

Leaving the camp is difficult for Alan and Bushra, while saying goodbye to Safaa and Amin is heartbreaking for Ghalib. The family walks into the nearby Turkish town of Reyhanli. Ghalib finds it difficult to understand how the town can appear so normal and peaceful when there is a war just across the border and a refugee camp full of desperate people just down the road. Bushra and even Alan also notice the contrast, yet their parents don't seem to be aware of the differences.

Unit 3: Discussion Points

In **Chapter 14**, Ghalib is furious with Bushra. He blames her for being in the refugee camp, for being alone, for being separated from his family. Do you think Ghalib is being fair to Bushra? Bushra explains that nothing was planned—that it just happened. Could she have done things differently? If so, how?

In **Chapter 15**, the boys in the children's centre tease Ghalib about walking around the camp with Bushra. Why do the boys think that Bushra should be accompanied by a male relative? Is this the same where you live? If not, how is it different?

In **Chapter 17**, Bushra says to Ghalib: *'You don't know what it's like for girls. We don't have the same freedom.'* What do you think Bushra means by this? Do you think she is right—do girls have less freedom than boys? Should things be different? Explain your answer.

Unit 3 Activities

In **Chapter 13**, Mohammad gives Ghalib essential items to use in camp. What items does he give him? Find out what emergency items are given to refugees when they arrive in refugee camps. Put together a sample emergency pack and display it in your classroom or library.

In **Chapter 13**, as Ghalib walks from the medical centre to the children's centre, he describes what he sees. Draw an imaginary map showing the layout of the refugee camp. Include some essential locations, such as the clinic, school, toilet block, kitchens and so on. See if you can find any maps of real refugee camps.

In **Chapter 16**, Ghalib is moved from the children's centre into a cramped family tent. Pretend you are already living in the tent with your family when Ghalib's family moves in. Describe what it is like when they arrive. How are you affected? What change does it make for you?

Unit 4: Chapters 19-23 pages 173-218

Summary of Unit 4: chapters 19 to 23

Chapter 19

At the local bus station in Reyhanli, the family buys tickets to the town of Adana, where they walk through the bigger bus station to buy food. To Ghalib's shock and humiliation, the family is thrown out of a café because they are Syrian, after which they see 'No Syrians' signs everywhere. Upset and bewildered, they eat street food outside before getting tickets for a bigger bus to bring them to Izmir.

Chapter 20

The bus drives through the night, arriving eventually at the coastal town of Izmir. An older wealthy Syrian couple asks to travel with the family for a while, and together, they go to an Internet café to eat, to link up with family in Syria and to get news from home. The Syrian couple infuriate Ghalib and Bushra with their sexist and insulting comments. They all make their way to the Sinbad Restaurant, where Turks arrange for Syrians to cross the sea illegally to Europe. They wait until after dark, when Ghalib's father pays a lot of money for the family to travel to Greece.

Chapter 21

Three nights later, the family, the older couple and other refugees and emigrants are collected by lorry after dark. Each group is checked by the Turks: nobody is allowed to bring any belongings with them. They are driven for many hours through the darkness, and then marched through grasses and along the beach. They walk through a makeshift and squalid camp under the trees, watched closely by the men living there. Ghalib's

group are guarded by Turks with knives and sticks, which frightens Ghalib and Bushra.

Chapter 22

At the choppy water's edge, Ghalib catches a glimpse of the leaky dinghy they are about to travel in. He is terrified. The Turks put lifejackets on those who paid for them, but there are none small enough for Alan. Ghalib and Alan are strapped together in one lifejacket. The older Syrian couple refuse to get into the boat with Alan as they believe he will curse the boat. As they are about to launch, a wild group of men from the makeshift camp under the trees charges out to jump in the boat. The Turks fight them off as the boat launches into the waves, leaving the man from the older Syrian couple wallowing in the water; his wife is pulled into the boat.

Chapter 23

The night crossing in the old dinghy is terrifying. The boat leaks. Dark waves threaten to swamp them. Alan has hypothermia. The engine fails. At dawn and with Greece on the horizon, another dinghy tows Ghalib's stricken vessel to shore. Rolling waves tip them over before they can land. Ghalib and Alan are torn apart from each other. Ghalib is rescued, but Alan can't be found. His lifeless body is eventually pulled from the waves. Every effort is made to resuscitate him. Ghalib struggles to beside his little brother, and his warmth, presence and sheer determination breathes life back into Alan. The family has arrived safely and faces a new life in Greece.

Unit 4 Discussion Points

In **Chapter 19**, Ghalib and his family face racism in a café in Turkey. How does this make you feel? What could the young Turkish man with the backpack—or others in the café—have done to help the family? Have you ever witnessed or experienced racism? Describe what happened.

In **Chapter 20**, Baraa Rateb makes offensive comments about Bushra, because she is a girl, and Alan, because he has a disability. These are also forms of discrimination, based on sex and disability. Why is discrimination like this unacceptable? Why do you think Baraa Rateb thought it was acceptable to make these comments?

In **Chapter 22**, the Turk doesn't have a lifejacket for Alan. Do you think the Turks care about the refugees they are sending to Greece? Why do they fight off the men who attack the boat with knives and sticks? Does this show that they care? Explain your answer.

Unit 4 Activities

In **Chapter 20**, Ghalib says it is the first time he has ever seen the sea. Find out what sea he is looking out at when he gets to Izmir in Turkey. Look up Syria on a map. What would be the nearest sea to Ghalib's home town of Kobani?

The book describes the route taken by Ghalib and his family from their home in Kobani to the shores of Greece. Trace out and mark their journey on a map, labelling the villages and towns they travel through on their way.

A lot of volunteers travel to Greece to help Syrians who arrive by boat from Turkey, exhausted and terrified. Imagine you are a volunteer on the beach when Ghalib's dinghy overturns as it arrives. Describe what happens and what you do to help.

Chapter by chapter comprehension questions: chapters 1 to 6

Chapter 1

- What are the names of the three boys?
- How are they related to each other?
- Name four items they have looted.
- Where do the boys hide during the airstrike?
- Why does Ghalib decide Alan might be useful to bring next time?

Chapter 2

- What did the *mukhtar* in Ghalib's neighbourhood buy in the industrial centre?
- Why did he buy them?
- Why does Hamza want Ghalib to go down town at night?
- Who do they meet along Aleppo Way?

Chapter 3

- Where does Ghalib find Hamza?
- How do they get out of the burning building?
- How do they get back home?
- Who comes to Ghalib's house the next morning?
- Where do they take Hamza?

Chapter 4

- Who are the two visitors to Ghalib's house?
- What do they want?
- Why does Bushra say she is not afraid to fight Isis?
- What do Bushra and Ghalib each want to be when they grow up?
- What are Baba's savings invested in?

Chapter 5

- Name two items from each of Ghalib's Essentials, Maybes and Definitely Nots piles.
- What does Baba take down from the roof space?
- What does Baba give Ghalib and Bushra to wear?
- Who comes to see them off?
- Who controls the roadblock out of Kobani?

Chapter 6

- What do most of the women in Aleppo wear?
- Why are there no foreign aid clinics in Aleppo?
- What does Baba say is happening in the crowded square?
- What is the first town the family gets to after Aleppo?
- Where do they stay overnight?

Chapter by chapter comprehension questions: chapters 7 to 12

Chapter 7

- Why does Ghalib stop with Alan on the road?
- What makes the stone hop up in the air?
- Where do Ghalib and Alan hide?
- Who is the first of his family to follow Ghalib and Alan into the stone house?
- Why does Ghalib sneak out of the house and run down the road?

Chapter 8

- What does the girl remind Ghalib of?
- What three things does she want?
- What are the girl's and boy's names?
- What is the next village the family walks to?

Chapter 8

- What does Alan's mom do to help his weak leg?
- What do they get in the village?
- What language does Baba think Safaa and Amin speak?
- What is the name of the Turkish border crossing?
- What is all along the dusty highway leading to the crossing?

Chapter 9

- Where does the family sleep for the night?
- Where do Ghalib, Baba and Safaa go?
- Why did the Turkish government shut the border?

What is the nearest Turkish town on the far side of the border?

What does Bushra buy at the sup-sup van?

Chapter 10

- Who is missing when Ghalib wakes the next morning?
- Where does the family stay for most of the day?
- Who does Ghalib think he sees at the border?
- What does he do when he sees them?
- How do the border guards react to Ghalib?

Chapter 11

- Where does Ghalib spend the night?
- Who is with him?
- Where do Musab and Ali want Ghalib to go? Why?
- Where does Ghalib decide to go? Why?
- Where does Mohammad bring Ghalib as soon as he arrives in the camp?

Chapter 12

- Where does Ghalib wake up?
- What food does the woman bring him?
- What does Mohammad bring Ghalib to use in the camp?
- What is the name of the woman who runs the children's centre?
- Who is sitting at the table when Ghalib sits down?

Chapter by chapter comprehension questions: chapters 13 to 18

Chapter 13

- Where is Ghalib when he wakes up?
- What does the nurse bring him to eat?
- What does Mohammad give to Ghalib before he is allowed to leave the clinic?
- Describe the children's centre at the camp.
- Who does Ghalib see at the dinner table?

Chapter 14

- How does Ghalib react when he sees Safaa and Amin?
- Why does he feel this way?
- Why does Mohammad say to Ghalib that he should talk to Safaa?
- What does Safaa says happened to her and Amin when

they were separated from Ghalib's family?
How does Ghalib feel after talking to Safaa?

Chapter 15

- Describe the school in the refugee camp. How is it different from your school?
- Why do the other boys tease Ghalib for walking with Safaa?
- How does Ghalib feel when he is told his family has arrived in camp?
- How does Ghalib's mom react when she meets him?

Chapter 16

- How did Ghalib's family cross the border?
- Why does Ghalib blame himself for Dapir's death?

Chapter by chapter comprehension questions: chapters 13 to 18 (continued)

Where does Ghalib go when he leaves the children's centre?

Why does Ghalib's mother want to get back to the tent before dark?

Chapter 17

What news does Ghalib's father tell them?

How does Ghalib react?

Why does Bushra get so upset?

What does Safaa tell Ghalib when he tells her he is leaving?

Chapter 18

How is leaving the refugee camp different from leaving Kobani?

What does Ghalib bring with him this time?

What does he give to Safaa and Amin?

What do Bushra and Ghalib notice about the town of Reyhanli when they arrive?

What do Turks call a bus and a bus station?

Where do the names for the characters in *Without Refuge* come from?

Hundreds of innocent children have been killed needlessly in the Syrian civil war, either in direct conflict, or indirectly when seeking safety.

Every fictional character in *Without Refuge* is named as a tribute to an actual Syrian child who has died in the civil war. This is a small way to remember these lost children.

To find their names and ages, Jane Mitchell drew on the daily lists of the dead published by the **Syrian Network for Human Rights**.

The **Syrian Network for Human Rights** is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental, non-partisan organisation, founded in 2011. It documents violations committed by all conflict parties against the Syrian people.

Chapter by chapter comprehension questions: chapters 19 to 23

Chapter 19

What happens to the family when they go into a café in the bus station in Adana?

Where do they eat instead?

What do they get to eat?

Describe the bus they get from Adana to Izmir.

Chapter 20

How is Izmir different from Reyhanli and Adana?

How is Hamza getting on in the foreign aid clinic back in Kobani?

What does Ghalib do when he gets his turn on the computer in the Internet café?

Why does Baraa suggest that Ghalib's mother leave Bushra and Alan behind?

What happens at the Sinbad Restaurant?

Chapter 21

What happens on the third night at the Sinbad Restaurant?

Why are there so many Turks with the truck?

Where does the truck drive the group to?

Who is under the trees along the shore?

Why does Bushra get annoyed with Ghalib?

Chapter 22

Describe the boat as Ghalib first sees it.

Why is there no lifejacket for Alan? What does the Turk do?

Why does Baraa refuse to get into the boat?

What happens just before the boat departs from shore?

Who gets left behind?

Chapter 23

Why does the engine in Ghalib's boat fail?

What do they see in the water alongside the boat?

What does the other boat do to help?

What happens to Ghalib and Alan when their boat capsizes?

How does Ghalib get out of the water?

What does he do to save Alan?