

The Suitcase: Refugee Voices From Bosnia and Croatia Julie Mertus, Jasmina Tesanovic, Habiba Metikos and Rada Boric

About the Book

This time our focus is not on a novel but on creative writing of a different kind, a powerful collection of poems written by refugees who escaped the ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian and Croatian conflicts. Over 75 displaced people contributed to this book. Their words tell us of their fears and feelings of despair at the time of the crisis. Some write of their hopes and dreams for a better future. Some long to go home, others write about loss and heartbreak and believe that they can never return home. There are contributions from people of all ages. Some poems are simple, others more complicated but they all help us to remember that refugees, displaced people and asylum seekers are human beings trying to rebuild their lives.

These creative responses to personal tragedy work well when linked with the poem *Don't Call Me That Way* by Majana Burazovic, a twelve year old student. Majana sends an important message from one human being to another. In the poem she says:

I know how to laugh too
and I know how to cry as well
so don't think if you call me
a refugee that I differ from you.
Look at me well
And you will see yourself.

Whilst in *You Won't Find Me Here*, Mujo Mustafic, aged 11, writes about living as a refugee with a heart in another place - home.

Discussion Questions

Read the poems *Don't Call Me That Way* by Majana Burazovic (aged 12) and *You Won't Find Me Here* by Mujo Mastafic (aged 11)

They work best if one person reads them aloud whilst the group listens.

1. what do you think people have said to Majana which lead to the request 'Don't call me that way.'?

2. how does Majana remind people that she is a human being ?
3. from your reading of the poem what things do you think Majana lost when the 'ethnic cleansing' was taking place?
4. what has she lost since?
5. what do you think she means when she says 'Look at me well and you will see yourself.'
Clue: Look at the words in the poem, what emotions and experiences does she describe which match things you have experienced yourself?
6. how is it possible for Mujo Mustafic to 'not exist' ?
7. who is the stranger whose hand is stealing the scent of summer?
8. Mujo writes about a soul struggling all evening. What difficulties do you think displaced people face as they remember what happened in their home country and as they try to begin their lives again in a strange land?