



Classroom Guide for
PASSAGE TO FREEDOM
The Sugihara Story
 by Ken Mochizuki
 illustrated by Dom Lee

Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades 1-6

Reading Level: Grades 2-3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.5/.5

Lexile Measure®: 670 AD

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 4.2

Themes

Courage, War, Holocaust, Freedom, Fathers and Sons, Asian/Asian Americans

Synopsis

In 1940, five-year-old Hiroki Sugihara is living with his family in Kaunas, Lithuania. His father, Chiune Sugihara, is the Japanese consul. In July of that year, the family's life is forever changed when hundreds of Jewish refugees crowd outside the gates of the consulate. These people have escaped from Poland and the Nazi soldiers who have overrun their country. If they can get visas from Sugihara to travel east across Russia and then to Japan, they might eventually go from there to safety. Hiroki's father agrees to petition his government for visas even though it might put his own family in danger. The Japanese government refuses his request three times, but Chiune Sugihara makes the decision to grant the visas anyway saying, ". . . if I don't, I will be disobeying God." The family agrees to help as many people as possible, and Sugihara tries to write 300 visas a day. When the Germans and Soviets take over Lithuania, Sugihara is ordered to leave. Even as his train pulls away from the station, Sugihara continues to hand out permission papers to refugees who run alongside the train.

Passage to Freedom is based on Hiroki Sugihara's own words and includes an Afterword with information about the family's story from 1940 to the present time. It is estimated that Chiune Sugihara saved the lives of 10,000 Jewish refugees.

Background

World War II began when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Although Germany and Russia were at that time supposedly partners, Stalin distrusted Hitler and sought to strengthen the Soviet's western borders. As a result, in 1940 Stalin annexed Lithuania, along with Estonia and Latvia. However, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union

the following year, and Lithuania was occupied by the Germans until 1944. In that year, the Soviets—now fighting with the Allies—took over Lithuania once more. Lithuania did not gain independence again until 1990.

The Holocaust was the systematic and planned extermination of Jewish people and others by Nazi Germany during World War II. By 1945, two out of three European Jews (about 6,000,000 people) had been killed.

At the time this story takes place, Japan had already invaded China and had troops in what is now Laos and Vietnam. It was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 that brought the United States into the war.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before reading the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What is courage? What might a courageous person do that shows his or her courage?
2. What does it mean to take a risk? Can you give an example of when you or someone you know took a risk for something you believed was right?
3. Sometimes one person does something unusual that helps many other people. How might you be able to tell that this person made a difference in the other people's lives?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Invite students to examine the front and back covers of the book. Whom might this story be about? What does the title suggest? Who are the people on the back cover? What do all the seals and writing represent? Ask students to write down some questions they hope to have answered as they read the book. Suggest that students keep their questions in mind as they read.

Vocabulary

The following words have special or particular meanings in this story. Many may also be new to students.

Hanukkah
refugees
exhausted
permission
embraced
absolutely

diplomat
visas
cable/cabled
superiors
massaged

translated
issue/issued
representative
disobey
reassigned

Introduce each word and have students make three-column charts with the headings given below. Each student should list the words under the heading that matches her or his knowledge of the word.

I Know the Word

I Have Seen or Heard the Word Before

I Am Unfamiliar with the Word

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

After reading, discuss the story with students. You may wish to use some of the following questions to generate discussion.

1. Why do you think people say "the eyes tell everything about a person"? What did Hiroki's father's eyes tell the young boy at the beginning of the story?
2. Where does this story take place? What was happening in Europe in 1940?
3. Where were the Sugiharas from? Why were they living so far from their own country?
4. Who were the people outside the Japanese consulate? Why do you think they thought Chiune Sugihara could help them?
5. Hiroki was only five years old when the story takes place. How do you think he felt about what was happening? How did he feel about the refugees? How did he feel about what his family was doing?
6. Why did Chiune Sugihara and his family decide to help the Jewish refugees? Was it a difficult decision? Why? What beliefs do you think the family members had that helped them make their decision?
7. Why do you think the Japanese government refused Chiune Sugihara's repeated requests for visas?
8. What does it mean to obey your conscience? How is this story a good example of obeying your conscience?
9. Read aloud the two proverbs facing the title page of the book. Ask students to talk about what the proverbs mean and how they relate to the story.
10. Have students reread the Afterword, or read it aloud to the class. Explain that Hiroki Sugihara wrote the Afterword as an adult to explain what happened to his family after they left Lithuania. Why do you think the Soviets and Japanese government treated Chiune Sugihara and his family badly after they left Lithuania? How was Sugihara finally honored for helping the refugees?
11. Hiroki Sugihara now travels all over the world telling his family's story. Why is it important for people to learn about the Sugiharas? What can people learn from them?

Vocabulary

Have students refer back to the word charts they made before reading the book. Ask students to discuss the meaning of each word and how the word is used in the story. Have volunteers check their meanings against the dictionary meanings. Other meanings of the words may also be discussed.

Reader's Response Journal

To promote active reading, you may wish to have students keep a reader's response journal. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading. Also encourage students to use as many of the vocabulary words as possible in their journal entries.

1. Hiroki's parents told him to think as if he were in someone else's place. Think about a situation where someone you know or a group of people are in need of help. What would you want someone to do for you if you were in that situation?
2. In recalling this story, Hiroki Sugihara shows great pride in his father's actions. What things make you feel proud? Why?
3. The Sugihara story shows that one person can make a difference in the lives of others. What are some ways you feel you can make a difference?
4. Chiune Sugihara took an enormous risk in disobeying his government to help the Jewish refugees, but he felt it was important. What are some risks you think are worthwhile? How do these differ from foolish risks?

Other Writing Activities

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities.

1. The author wrote this story from the point of view of Hiroki Sugihara. Suppose you were one of the refugees outside the consulate. Try writing about what happened from the point of view of a Jewish refugee from Poland.
2. Work with a partner or a few classmates to think of an award you might give to honor the Chiune Sugihara and his family. Create a name for the award and write an explanation of why the family deserves it.
3. Write a poem or short paragraph that expresses your ideas about courage.

ESL Teaching Strategies

The following activities may be used with students who speak English as a second language.

1. After discussing what the story is about, have students "picture read" the book. Help them identify the characters, setting, and events.

2. Have two or three students work with a strong English speaker to read the book. Every few pages, have students take turns retelling what they read in their own words.
3. Encourage ESL students who are reading the book independently to write or dictate questions about the story as they read. Set aside time to help students answer their questions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you may wish to have students complete some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Have students use a globe or world map to locate places mentioned in the story: Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Russia (the former Soviet Union), and Japan. Have students trace a path the Jewish refugees might have taken from Poland to Lithuania, and across Russia to Japan. Students may also research information about which countries were receptive to refugees during World War II and where the people Chiune Sugihara helped might have immigrated to once they were in Japan.
2. Have students do research to learn about Holocaust memorials such as Yad Vashem in Israel, which honored Chiune Sugihara with the "Righteous Among Nations" Award in 1985, and the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. As students learn about the memorials, also have them look for information about other people, such as Oscar Schindler, who were active in saving Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Students should be able to find information about these subjects on the Internet. Discuss why memorials exist and what people can learn from them.
3. Students may also search the Internet to learn more about the Sugihara family and Chiune Sugihara's role in helping Polish refugees escape the Nazis. Information about "Sugihara survivors," as mentioned in the Afterword, could be particularly interesting.

Art

1. Suggest that students study the illustrations in the book. Why did the artist use brown (sepia) tones instead of bright colors? What mood(s) do the illustrations create? What do the characters' faces show about how they feel? How do people's hands help explain the story? How do students think the artist felt about the story?
2. Have students choose a scene from the book that is not illustrated and create their own pictures using a variety of art materials. Encourage them to consider beforehand the mood and feelings they wish to convey and to choose their illustration materials accordingly.

Mathematics

Remind students that Chiune Sugihara wrote about 300 visas a day. Have students estimate how many days he did this if he saved about 10,000 people.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Ken Mochizuki brings his background as a newspaper journalist with an interest in Asian American issues to the children's books he writes. In addition to *Passage to Freedom*, Mochizuki is the author of *Baseball Saved Us*, a Parents' Choice Award winner, and *Heroes*, a Smithsonian Notable Book for Children.

All three of Mochizuki's books are linked by the theme of heroism. Says Mochizuki, "The basic theme of my first book, *Baseball Saved Us*, is the power of positive thinking and believing in oneself. One of the themes implicit in my second book, *Heroes*, is the definition of a hero as one who knows that actions speak louder than words. *Passage to Freedom* is about a moral choice: Does one do what is considered 'correct' at the time? Or does one do what is 'right' for all time?"

Mochizuki, a native of Seattle, Washington, received his bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Washington. He continues to live in Seattle, but travels around the country giving presentations to schools, educational groups, and booksellers.

Dom Lee has illustrated all three of Ken Mochizuki's children's books and has collaborated with his wife, Keunhee Lee, to illustrate *Journey Home* by Lawrence McKay, Jr. To familiarize himself with the era of each story and to ensure accuracy in his illustrations, Lee carefully researched photos and books of the period. He then used a unique illustration process to create pictures that resonated with the mood and period of each story. After applying handmade encaustic beeswax to paper, Lee scratched out the images and then used oil paint and color pencil to add color.

Lee is a native of Korea. He earned his bachelor's degree in fine arts from the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University and received his masters degree in illustration from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. He presently lives in New Jersey with his wife and children.

Awards, Reviews & Comments

- **ALA Notable Children's Book**, American Library Association
- **Teachers' Choices**, International Reading Association (IRA)

"This testament to one man's courage should be read in homes and classrooms across the nation and the world."—*Smithsonian*

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Passage to Freedom*

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/89/pb/passage_to_freedom_the_sugihara_story

Passage to Freedom in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/154/hc/pasaje_a_la_libertad_la_historia_de_chiune_sugihara

Also by Ken Mochizuki, illustrated by Dom Lee**Heroes:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/61/hc/heroes>

Baseball Saved Us

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/17/hc/baseball_saved_us

Baseball Saved Us in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/141/hc/el_beisbol_nos_salvo

Be Water, My Friend

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/18/hc/be_water_my_friend_the_early_years_of_bruce_lee

Also illustrated by Dom Lee**Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/109/hc/sixteen_years_in_sixteen_seconds_the_sammy_lee_story

Journey Home:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/74/hc/journey_home

Booktalk with Ken Mochizuki on *Passage to Freedom*

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/mochizuk.mhtml>

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