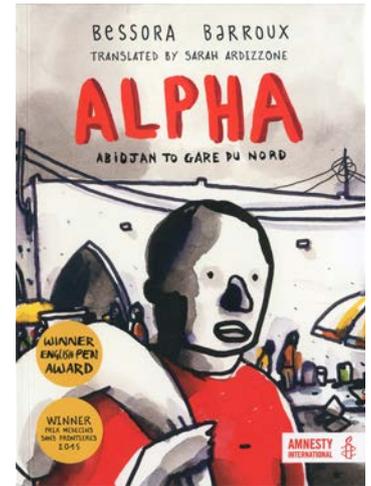


# ALPHA

By Bessora (translated by Sarah Ardizzone)  
Illustrated by Barroux

The Bucket List  
(Upper Secondary)



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Powerful graphic novel Alpha is the heart-rending story of one man's journey from Côte d'Ivoire to France in search of his wife and son who fled the country months earlier. He doesn't know what has become of them. It's an unflinching portrayal of the refugee crisis today – Alpha is one of millions on the move seeking sanctuary from poverty and violence. As he crosses continents illegally, Alpha meets a host of characters, desperate, in danger and exploited, each one giving another human face to the crisis.

## TEACHING NOTES

This resource helps students aged 14+ to explore the characters, storyline and issues around the refugee crisis. Themes include unaccompanied children, trafficking, HIV/AIDS and sex work. It is important to be sensitive to young readers' experiences and family history.

**'Once you read this deeply troubling book, passing by, looking away, is no option.'** Michael Morpurgo, Foreword to Alpha

## WHAT IS THE HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT?

The relevant Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are:

**Article 3** We all have the right to life and to live in freedom and safety.

**Article 5** Nobody has any right to hurt or torture us or treat us cruelly.

**Article 14** Everyone has the right to seek asylum in another country if you are being persecuted in your own country.

**Article 25** We all have the right to a good life, with enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare.

- See and download a summary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at [www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)
- For the Convention on the Rights of the Child, see [www.unicef.org.crc](http://www.unicef.org.crc)



# DISCUSSION POINTS

- What does the class know about the migrant crisis? Why are people fleeing? From where? How many people have come to the UK?
- What is the difference between a refugee and a migrant? Are the differences clear-cut? Why might someone leave their country for economic reasons?
- What has the media coverage about the refugee crisis and migrants been like? Look at the headlines (right). Study the language used. What does it suggest the writers feel about refugees? What is your view about how the media portrays the crisis?
- Alpha is not technically a refugee under the UN definition. Go to [www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention](http://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention) and read the 1951 Refugee Convention. How are refugees defined? What rights are they entitled to? What does **non-refoulement** mean?
- The right to work is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Is it possible to argue that people travelling to secure work or a livelihood have the right to international help as do those fleeing persecution?

## FACTS TO SHARE

**Refugee** Someone who has left their own country because they are afraid of being persecuted (abused or mistreated) because of their religion, political beliefs or social behaviour. When you are given 'refugee status' by another country you are allowed to live in that country, safe from harm. Many people consider themselves refugees, and are considered so by others, whether or not they have been officially recognised by the government of the country in which they are seeking asylum.

**Asylum seeker** Someone who has come to another country asking the government to stay there as a refugee. They are waiting to hear whether they are allowed to stay or not.

**In the UK** Approximately 117,000 refugees live in the UK. This amounts to less than 1 per cent of refugees worldwide.

As numbers break all records ...  
**MIGRANTS:  
HOW MANY  
MORE CAN  
WE TAKE?**

**MIGRANTS  
MILKING  
BRITAIN'S  
BENEFITS**  
Foreigners more likely to claim handouts

**ILLEGALS  
HAVE  
LANDED**

# QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOOK

## PAGE 2: My name is Alpha and I'm a cabinet maker



- Look at the image of Alpha. How has he been drawn? Why in this style?
- How would you describe Alpha's facial expression? What emotions is he feeling?
- Alpha describes himself as 'marital status – wife and a child'. This is an unusual way to describe your family. Whose language is he echoing? What might this suggest about how he is treated?

## PAGE 5: My grandfather fought for France in the war



- What do you learn about Alpha's grandfather?
- Does the class understand the term 'the colonised'? Alpha says that 'the colonised became French'. Is this true? Is it easy for people from former colonies to immigrate to the lands of former colonisers?
- Do former colonial powers have a duty to grant citizenship to people from ex-colonies? Discuss.

## PAGE 14: I start talking to a funny guy called Antoine



- Look at the images of Antoine and the old man and read the words. What makes people leave their home and try to reach Europe?
- Is it likely that Antoine will become a signed football player? Why might his family have clubbed together to pay for his trip?
- The old man believes he only needs to cross the water to get to Spain and receive medical care. Alpha says: 'They've lied to him, for sure. There are some truths that are best kept quiet'. What does he mean? Do you agree?

## PAGE 34: I'm going crazy I tell you...



- Discuss the artist's choice of bright colours for the tourist and dark ones for the other people and surroundings. What does this symbolise?
- Alpha describes the tourists as 'happy people touring around Africa on bicycles.' How is this different to the kinds of journeys he and other Africans make across the continent?
- European or American travellers are described as 'tourists' when they travel, or 'ex-pats' if they resettle permanently in another country. What kinds of connotations does the word 'ex-pat' have in comparison to 'migrant'?

## PAGE 36: So my new job is as a people-smuggler



- Alpha's new job is a people-smuggler although he stresses that he will be an honest one. Is this morally justifiable, or even possible? What problems might Alpha and the people he is trafficking face?
- Do you think differently about Alpha now? Form a 'conscience corridor'. One person should be Alpha. The rest of the class should form two lines, a metre apart. 'Alpha' should then walk through the two lines as each side call out what his conscience might be telling him about his decision to become a people-smuggler.

## PAGE 43: Everyone is set on leaving straight away



- Look at and describe Abebi's expression. Why has she been drawn beside a road-sign or billboard?
- Alpha says that women either 'take care of the children, or they take care of the husbands'. What does this mean?
- Why does Abebi choose the husbands? How does this make you feel?

## PAGE 76: One evening, we watch a man from Chad arrive



- Why is the man from Chad drawn in this way?
- Why does nothing happen to the soldiers who beat him?
- 'The graves are to the east of the camp. Facing the rising sun.' What effect does this description have? How does it make you feel?

## PAGE 79: Disappeared. Augustin has disappeared



- What do you think has happened to Augustin?
- Could Alpha really do anything to find him?
- Look up the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([www.unicef.org/crc](http://www.unicef.org/crc)). Which rights has Augustin been denied?

## PAGE 95: The child is born. It doesn't cry. It's a little girl. And she's dead



- Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)). What rights has Abebi been denied which lead directly to her death?
- Was Abebi right to lie about the whereabouts of Alpha's family? Did she have a choice?
- The baby girl is an innocent victim of the harsh controls used to prevent migrants and refugees from crossing borders. What message is the illustrator sending with this image?

## Page 100: If you climb into a dugout, death will be sitting right next to you

- How is death presented in Antoine's conversation with the grocer?
- The grocer says, 'We are rotten, we are not worth anything to anyone'. Is there any truth to this bleak view? Research and discuss how countries have responded differently to the refugee crisis.
- How does the image of the sea emphasise the despair of the men's conversation?

## PAGE 119: Epilogue

- In the Epilogue, the fate of each character is revealed. It is depressing. Is it a realistic ending?
- Alpha is deported back to Côte d'Ivoire. On the plane, another illegal migrant jokes that it's taken him 18 months to reach Europe and it will take him less than nine hours to get back to where he started. Earlier, on page 4, Alpha joked that if your visa is refused, 'seek advice from your travel agent'. What does this tell us about who can and can't travel? How does this make you feel?



# ROLE PLAY AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Imagine you are a reporter assigned to interview Alpha about his experiences once he reaches Paris. Write out 10 questions along with the answers you think Alpha would give.
- Host a class debate: This House Would Grant all Refugees Asylum. To research your arguments, use credible news sources and organisations, such as [www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum)
- Design an eye-catching postcard for a campaign to welcome refugees in the UK.
- Improvise a short play or sketch based on one of the stories in Alpha. You could call it Home or Borders.
- Rewrite Antoine, Abebi or Augustin's experiences as a short story. For Antoine, for example, use his football kit to symbolise his hope for a better future.
- The idea of giving sanctuary to the persecuted derives from Ancient Egypt. Research and present a history of how refugees have been treated. Are there lessons for how we should act now?
- Write a letter to your local MP arguing that we should give sanctuary to refugees. Give reasons for your views. Find your MPs contact details at: [www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-your-mp/](http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-your-mp/)
- Alpha compares the treatment of Western tourists to that of African migrants and refugees. Write the text of a 'travel guide' for Alpha's journey, using details from the story to highlight the dangers. You could use features such as maps, price lists and accommodation options. Compare this with a brochure for a visit to Côte D'Ivoire. What differences do you notice?
- Create activities based on Alpha's story to teach refugee rights to 7-11 year olds. It could be a board game, flash-cards, story-telling with props or role-play. Contact a local primary school to share your resources.
- Re-write the ending of Alpha. What steps are needed to make this happen?

## TAKE ACTION

- ➔ If you are under 18 and want to write a letter of solidarity to a refugee, or tackle some of the issues facing refugees, see [www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/youth](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/youth)
- ➔ For more educational activities around refugees and migrants, and other human rights issues, go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)

