



## Celebrating Identity & Diversity with Children's Literature: Exploring Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes' *Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush's Incredible Journey*

*This resource guide was created by the Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee to support families in talking and teaching about identity, diversity, and being proud of the things that make us who we are. For more information about LRSJC, email us at [LRSJCommittee@gmail.com](mailto:LRSJCommittee@gmail.com) or visit us on the web at [lrsjcommittee.weebly.com](http://lrsjcommittee.weebly.com).*

In this beautifully illustrated picture book, we meet a real-life refugee family who left Mosul, Iraq in 2015. Sura and her five children—and their beloved cat, Kunkush—spent weeks traveling by foot, bus, and boat through Turkey, Greece, Germany and, eventually, into Norway. Along the way, they are aided by an international community of volunteers, who provide transportation and support to the millions of refugees fleeing war and famine. When Kunkush was lost amidst the chaos of the journey, the family had no choice but to travel on without him. Days later, a team of volunteers (including the authors of the book!) found Kunkush in Greece. They used the Internet—and helpers from all over the world—to reunite Kunkush with his family.

### Key ideas:

- People have migrated throughout history, and continue to migrate today. Finding commonalities between our experiences and those of other immigrants and refugees can promote understanding and empathy.

### Activity 1: Book Discussion

After reading the story, lead children in a discussion of key ideas in the text, including:

- There are many reasons why people migrate. Sometimes people migrate because they are leaving, or fleeing, something unpleasant or dangerous; other times, they migrate because they are hoping to find something new or exciting. What are some things that might push people out of their homes or home country? What are things that might draw people to explore somewhere new?
- Sura and her family had a long and difficult journey. They traveled across hundreds of miles, and spent weeks on the road. However, they never got discouraged. Why not?
- When Kunkush got lost in Greece, the local cats knew he was a stranger. They hissed, and spat at him, and chased him away. How do you think that made Kunkush feel? How would it make human refugees and immigrants feel if they were treated unkindly for being different?
- There were many people who helped Sura, her children, and Kunkush along their journey. Who were some of these people? What did they do to help? How did people work together across linguistic and geographic distance in order to reunite Sura and Kunkush?
- Sura's family traveled together. How did this affect their journey? How might the story be different if Sura traveled alone? How would traveling as a family unit help the journey? Is it possible that traveling as a family might hinder a journey?

*Preschool extension:* *Lost and Found Cat* features a rich and descriptive vocabulary, including some words that may be unfamiliar to young children. As you read, invite children to define or act out the new words they encounter, paying attention to how the words differ from synonyms. How is *smuggle* different than *bring*? What does it mean to *flee* rather than *leave*? What might it look like to give permission *grudgingly*?

*Curricular connections:* In addition to examining central themes, narrative structures, and vocabulary, *Lost and Found Cat* also offers the opportunity to compare literary and nonfiction accounts of Kunkush's journey. Examine the similarities and differences across multiple accounts of the journey, such as the stories on Amy's "[Reunite Dias](#)" facebook page, or articles and videos like [these](#), published in *The Guardian*.

## Activity 2: Stories of Migration

The authors of *Lost and Found Cat* include photographs and a map of Kunkush's journey. Use the details in the story to track the migration of the family. What types of transportation did they use for each leg of the journey? How long did the journey take?

Next, create a map honoring the geographic diversity of your family and community. Where have you lived? Where are your ancestors from? Use an app like [TravBuddy](#) or [amCharts](#) to see how much of the world is represented in your family, school, or community.

*Deepening the discussion:* Most families have migrated at some point in their history, sometimes across small distances and sometimes across great ones. What are the migration patterns of your own family? Where is your family from, and why did you migrate? Does your family include refugees, who fled violence or famine? Was anyone in your family forced to migrate against their will? Who in your family moved in the hopes of finding new opportunities, adventure, or a better life? As you research your own family history, pay special attention to the challenges your family faced, and how they persevered in spite of these challenges. Who were some of the people who helped members of your family along their journeys, or welcomed them to their new homes?

## Activity 3: A Question of Perspective

One of the things that makes this book special is that the authors worked with Kunkush's family to decide how to tell their story. Why is it important that people get to decide how to tell their own stories? How might this story have been different if it was told from someone else's perspective? *Extension activity:* Think of a time when you had a very different perspective about an experience than other people around you. What shaped each of your perspectives? Can you find a way to tell the story of that experience through each of your eyes?

## Extending the Conversations: Using Picture Books to Talk about Identity and Immigration

**Exploring Stories of Migration:** There are many children's books that grapple with chosen and forced migration. These books can be useful for young readers and older children alike, as they examine the ideas raised in the text and make connections to their own experiences. To find other children's books related to diversity and social justice, visit your local library or use the resources below.

[6 Elements of Social Justice Education](#): This website features an annotated list of children's literature, organized around six key themes (self-love and knowledge, respect for others, exploring issues of social injustice, social movement and social change, raising awareness, and taking action).

[Multicultural Children's Book Day](#): This website features resources, instructional materials, and recommendations to help teachers and parents use children's books to promote respect and understanding among culturally, geographically, and experientially diverse communities.

**Taking Action:** There are a diverse array of local, national, and international organizations focused on immigration policy, advocacy, or providing legal, financial, and social support to immigrants and refugees. Here in California, the [California Federation of Teachers](#) has curated a comprehensive set of legal and educational resources for students, teachers and families affected by changing immigration policies. Other groups, like [United We Dream](#), are led by young people themselves and suggest ways [teachers can meet the needs of immigrant and refugee children](#). *Extension Activity:* What are the groups and organizations that are most active in your community? How do they respond to the needs of diverse immigrant and refugee communities in your area? How can you, your family, and your school help welcome the immigrants and refugees in your community?

## Other Instructional resources:

[10 Myths about Immigration](#): Many of us think we know about immigration, but actually only know some of the facts about the experiences of diverse migrants. This statistics-rich resource examines some of the most common myths about immigration, including the reasons why people migrate, ways documented and undocumented people enter the United States, and trends in employment among immigrants in the U.S.

[My Family Journey \(Grades Pre-K-5\)](#): Many children do ancestry projects in elementary school. This standards-aligned lesson includes additional resources to help children examine their ancestry in its broader sociopolitical context by exploring historical trends in migration, pressure towards assimilation, and cultural influences in their own community. *Extension activity*: Older children might use examine how their family's immigration experience was impacted by broader policy questions within and beyond the United States. Resources like [this one](#) use primary source documents to help children analyze the role of the United States as a sanctuary for refugees and immigrants, as well as the rationale for and impact of historical and contemporary anti-immigrant policies.

[Who is an Immigrant? \(Grades 1-5\)](#): In this standards-aligned lesson, children explore multiple aspects of their own identity and culture. Next, they examine ways they are similar to and different than those around them. Finally, children read stories about children who are immigrants, and look for similarities and differences across diverse cultures and journeys. Extension activities include writing and art projects related to identity and shared experience.

[The Motivation for Movement \(Grades 6-12\)](#): In this set of seven standards-aligned lessons, children read interviews with undocumented women who immigrated to the United States from Mexico, Guatemala and other Latin American countries. They then analyze what pushed these women to leave their countries, as well as the factors that pulled them towards the US. Available resources include a [teachers' guide](#) with activities for mathematics, English Language Arts and social studies classes.

## Other Recommended Resources:

The Anti-Defamation League's [Checklist for Assessing Children's Literature](#) offers suggestions for evaluating multiple aspects of children's books, including the ways they portray diverse people, ideas and perspectives.



**The Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee**  
**Building a Loving Community from the Ground Up**  
[lrsjcommittee.weebly.com](http://lrsjcommittee.weebly.com)

## About us:

The Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee was formed in September 2016, and has blossomed to a vibrant community of more than 350 households in Ladera Ranch, California. We host social and educational events, participate in local cultural and educational activities, and work together to build a loving community that embraces and celebrates diversity. We look forward to getting to know you!

For more information about us, or to get copies of other curricular resources, email us at [lrsjcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:lrsjcommittee@gmail.com) or visit us on the web at [lrsjcommittee.weebly.com](http://lrsjcommittee.weebly.com)