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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Interview with Book Reviewers Nadeen Al Rifaei and Ean Fulks on Recommending Books and Publishing

Nadeen Al Rifaei, Ean Fulks, and Stacia Long

For our spotlight this month, we hear from two reviewers from our Fall 2017 issue who reviewed *Refugee* by Alan Gratz. In this interview, they will share some of their behind-the-scenes thinking about why it is important for teachers and students to publish their work.

Nadeen Al Rifaei is a seventh-grade poet at NYOS Charter School. She's a hard fighter, a hard worker, and most of all, she's kind.

Ean Fulks is currently a middle school teacher at NYOS charter school, an advocate for authentic reading and writing experiences, and a member of her local National Writing Project Site.

JoLLE(J): Why did you two decide to read *Refugee* by Alan Gratz?

Nadeen Al Rifa'ei: I liked how the book was different stories – they all had problems and ways to solve them.

Ean Fulks: *Refugee* was popping up on "must-read" lists, and I was immediately intrigued. I have a friend who was working for a non-profit organization, aiding Syrian refugees in Greece. I had been reading a lot of articles about the on-going crisis, so I was immediately drawn to this book after discovering that one of the story lines was a young Syrian refugee's story.

J: While you were writing your reviews, what did you think about or focus on?

Ean Fulks: When I was writing my review, I was thinking about the ways in which humans' experiences and stories overlap. Alan Gratz's choice to weave three refugees' experiences together drives this important message home. Though the stories are all different, there are elements of the human experience that connect them all; as a reader, I found aspects of my own heart interwoven as well. Even though our experiences in life may be different, human beings have much in common. Stories like *Refugee* also open windows for people; we see life through the eyes of others. This creates compassion, and compassion - really seeing others - is one of the most important things we can cultivate in ourselves and our students.

Nadeen Al Rifa'ei: I was really focused on the characters and their lives and how they might be related to mine.

J: What was it like seeing your writing published?

Nadeen Al Rifa'ei: I felt amazing because I actually had something I wrote published on the internet.

Ean Fulks: I was honored to see my writing published, and especially to publish alongside my student Nadeen. She's an incredible thinker and writer, and I won't ever forget sharing this incredible experience with her!

J: Why do you think it is important to share book recommendations in this way? Would you recommend publish book reviews to others?

Ean Fulks: Most of my favorite books have been based on recommendations from friends or students. I think it's important for us to tell others about the books that have taught us, moved us, inspired us... it's another way to connect to others through literature. I would recommend this to everyone. We all need connection, and literature can be a conduit for connection.

Nadeen Al Rifa'ei: Recommending a book is important because people might think of a book as a really boring thing, but if you recommend one, people might get the courage to read it. Books have fun stories and good messages.

J: Did people in your community see your book review? If so, how did they respond to it?

Nadeen Al Rifa'ei: I was called up by my principal and he told me how much he liked my review. Most teachers told me that I did a great job. It was a good feeling to have everyone being nice to you about something you wrote.

Ean Fulks: Our principal shared our review with our staff! Nadeen was also recognized by our school board for her review. Others wanted to know how they could get their book reviews

published, too! It was a positive experience, and it reminded me of the importance of getting our

voices out there to share the things we love and care about.