

ILLUSTRATED BY GIOVANNI RIGANO

# ILLEGAL

EWIN COLFER  
ANDREW DONKIN

This is a powerful and timely story about one boy's epic journey from Ghana, across Africa to Europe, a graphic novel for all children with glorious colour artwork throughout. From Eoin Colfer, previously Irish Children's Laureate, and the team behind his bestselling *Artemis Fowl* graphic novels.

**Ebo's sister left months ago. Now his brother has disappeared too, and Ebo knows it can only be to make the hazardous journey to Europe.**

**Ebo's epic journey takes him across the Sahara Desert to the dangerous streets of Tripoli, and finally out to the merciless sea. But with every step he holds on to his hope for a new life, and a reunion with his sister.**

These Teacher's Notes provide:

- **Discussion questions** and activities to select from and use in class on a chapter by chapter basis as well as **activity suggestions** to complete after reading a section of several chapters. The discussion questions and activities focus on reading skills (deduction, inference, understanding of the story events), reflection, prediction, characterisation, the authors' use of language, the graphic novel genre, cross-curricular world knowledge
- A photocopiable **Reading Diary** template (to record story events and their own opinions as well as come to terms with some of the feelings that might be raised by the story)
- Suggested activities to **raise awareness** of the global refugee crisis in class

## CHAPTER 1

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: SCENE SETTING

- What have you found out from reading this chapter? Consider:
  - a) what facts you now know about Ebo
  - b) characters and Ebo's relationship to them
  - c) where the characters are and what conditions are like
- Look at the maps on the first page of the story. What countries do you recognise? (*Draw readers' attention to North Africa: Tunisia and Libya; Europe: Italy and the island of Sicily.*)
- Nuru says, 'Everyone knows you never put two brothers in the same boat. Someone must live to carry on the family name.' What do you think he is really saying?
  - a) If two brothers travel in the same boat, they might argue
  - b) It is usual for brothers to live in different places
  - c) This is a high-risk journey for both brothers

## ACTIVITY: READING DIARY

Ask readers what questions they have after reading this chapter. They should consider what they know about the reasons why Ebo is on the boat, and what they would still like to find out. Ask them to make a note of questions that are unanswered in their Reading Diary. They can revisit these questions after reading more of the story.

### CHAPTER 2

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What new things have you found out about Ebo? What difficulties does he face in his everyday life? *(His older sister has left home to go to Europe. His older brother has also left to find her and to earn money to send home. Ebo is a very good singer. Some of the older boys try to bully him but he stands up to them. His mother died and his uncle lives with him, but he does not look after Ebo very well. Ebo has to look after his uncle.)*
- How does Ebo respond to the older boys in the village? Do you understand his reaction? *(He sings to distract them and then he hits out.)*
- How would you describe Ebo's relationship with his brother, Kwame? Why? Explain your answer by referring back to Chapter 2.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- There are both difficult moments and beautiful moments in this chapter. Record them in your Reading Diary. Which moments do you remember the most?
- What problems do the characters on the dinghy have? What solutions do they find? Who thinks of these solutions? *(It is cold at night but baking hot in the day. They have run out of petrol. Ebo suggests they paddle with their arms after dark when it is not so hot.)*

### CHAPTER 4

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ebo meets a lot of different people in this chapter. Which of them are kind to him and which are not? *(The bus driver lets Ebo travel on the bus. The people he meets in Agadez try to help him. But the boys in the street steal the water bottles he has collected.)*
- How does Ebo help the other people on the bus? What does Ebo do which is not so good? Can you understand why he does this? *(Ebo sings a lullaby and the crying baby goes to sleep. He drinks some of the mother's water when she is asleep.)*
- Why does Ebo describe the land as 'a vast oven'? Is this a simile or a metaphor? *(This is a metaphor to describe how hot the land is on the journey from Ghana to Agadez.)*

## ACTIVITY: READING DIARY

Choose some significant moments from this chapter or ask readers to choose what they consider the most significant moments. Ask readers to write a section in Ebo's diary recording his feelings for one or more of these moments. They should write the diary from Ebo's point of view. Some suggestions of significant moments are: Ebo leaving home; the bus driver letting him travel on the roof of the bus; arriving in Agadez; talking to the woman who says she met Kwame; looking out across the vast city of Agadez; collecting the bottles and having them stolen; trying to sleep in his new 'home'.

## CHAPTER 5

- In your Reading Diary, write a list of your own feelings as you read the chapter. How similar are they to Ebo's feelings? What does this tell you about the authors and illustrator? Do you think this is what they intended?
- At the beginning of this chapter, the authors use many word balloons. Why do you think there are so many? What impression does this create? (*Everybody is talking at once. It creates a feeling of anxiety and panic.*) At the end of the chapter, the authors use very few word balloons, only a few thought balloons. Why do you think this is? How does this affect you as you read? (*Ebo is underwater. The lack of word balloons emphasises the silence underwater and is in direct contrast to the activity on the surface. It is a shocking moment.*)

## CHAPTERS 1 TO 5

### ACTIVITIES

**Sharing** In small groups, readers share with the group one worry they have for Ebo or any other character and one thing they are pleased or relieved about. Ask readers to record the group's worries or feelings of relief by writing or drawing. The drawings or descriptions could be displayed in the classroom.

**Research** In Chapters 1 to 5 there are two sets of geographical co-ordinates. Ask readers to find them. As a class, enter the coordinates into Google maps and see where Ebo is. Readers draw their own map and mark Ebo's position on the map each time. Ask readers to predict where Ebo will go next.

**Reading Diary** Readers refer back to their questions from Chapter 1. How many of their questions have been answered by later chapters of the story? Are any of their questions still unanswered? Do they have any new questions?

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ebo says, 'I have an existence, but no family and no village.' What things does Ebo do to survive? (*He tries to find work. He finds some antiseptic wipes and exchanges them for food. He makes friends. The friends find him work. He gets paid for singing.*)
- Which three adjectives would you use to describe Ebo's character? Why did you choose these three adjectives? Find examples of things that Ebo says or does in Chapter 6 to back up your choices. Look back at Chapters 1 to 5; can you find evidence of these same character traits there too?

## ACTIVITY: STORY TIMELINES

1 In small groups, readers draw up a timeline of events in the story up to the end of Chapter 6. They can choose either: (a) the back story – the parts of the story which are marked **THEN**, beginning with Ebo discovering his brother has left, or (b) recent events – the parts of the story which are marked **NOW**, beginning with the argument in the dinghy at sea.

2 Display the timelines in different parts of the classroom. Ask readers to predict what events will happen to link up the two timelines.

3 Return to and add to these timelines at different points in the story and / or when readers have completed the story.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the mood of the characters on the boat at the beginning of Chapter 7. (*They are gloomy and depressed. They are giving up hope.*) What event changes the mood? (*They see a larger ship sailing towards them.*) How do you think Ebo is feeling now?
- How is the mood of the characters reflected in the colours of the illustrations? (*The illustrations are grey and gloomy.*)

## CHAPTER 8

### Discussion questions

- Ebo says, 'It takes us twenty-one weeks to save enough money for two fares across the desert.' How many days are there in twenty-one weeks? (*147 days.*) How many months are there? (*Around five months.*)
- Why do Ebo and Kwame get on the overcrowded truck across the desert? (*Because they have already bought the tickets. They saved up for twenty-one weeks to be able to afford the tickets.*) How do the men who are driving the truck gain control of their passengers? (*They take their water bottles and only allow them to drink one mouthful every time the truck stops.*)
- What reasons do the people on the ship have for not letting Ebo and his fellow travellers on to their ship? What reasons do they have for letting them board the ship? (*Reasons for not letting them on to the ship: it's not their problem. There is not enough space on the ship. They don't trust them. They haven't bought a ticket. Reasons for letting them board: there are not many of them. They will die if they don't help them.*) The captain decides to let them on to the ship – what two things help the captain make his decision? (*Ebo is from Ghana – the captain's wife comes from Ghana too. Ebo and his companions have money.*)
- The picture boxes on pages 60 and 61 are an unusual shape. Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to make them this shape? What effect do the boxes create? (*The tall thin boxes emphasise that the ship is much bigger than the dinghy, but also that the captain can decide what happens to the people in the dinghy – so in this situation he is more powerful.*)
- In Ebo's diary, describe the scene when Ebo talks to the captain. Write the description from Ebo's point of view.

- Ebo describes the crowded truck as 'full like a basket of reeds'. What simile might you use to describe the crowded ship?

## ACTIVITY: WRITING EXTENSION AND REFLECTION

Look at the picture on page 56. What do you think the people on the truck are thinking? Write thought balloons to put on the picture. Now compare your thought balloons with those of the people on the ship on page 58. Which are similar and which are different?

## CHAPTERS 6 TO 9

### ACTIVITIES

**Research** Ebo says, 'All sensible travellers fear crossing the desert.' Ask readers to find out information about the Sahara Desert which backs up this opinion. They should consider: climate, size, towns and cities, wildlife or plant life.

**Art project** Imagine you are Ebo travelling on the truck or in the larger ship. Draw what you can see. Think about the conditions close to you and further away. Think about the colours you can see.

**Reading Diary** Readers refer back to their questions from Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. Are any of their questions still unanswered? Do they have any new questions?

## CHAPTER 10

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 'The men who drive the jeeps and trucks are more interested in getting money than saving lives.' Can you find two examples in the story that back up this point of view? (*They fill up the truck with cigarettes to sell and make the people get off. They do not take the passengers to their destination. They leave the passengers in the desert even though they have paid for their tickets.*)
- What do you think Kwame and Ebo will do next? What are their choices?

### ACTIVITY: DURING READING

Stop reading at various points during this chapter and ask readers to close their books and predict what will happen next. Suggested points to pause the story:

'There's a rumbling sound that gets louder.' (Page 63)

'Into jeep!' (Page 65)

'He cannot get the engine to work.' (Page 66)

Were readers surprised by what happened? What events shocked them the most?

## CHAPTER 11

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Before reading**, ask readers to brainstorm reasons why Kwame and his brother are making this dangerous journey. **After reading**, compare their reasons with the reasons the other ship passengers have on page 72. Which are similar?
- Ebo says, 'They are a family. They need to stay together.' What about Ebo's family? Are they together? Where are they? Does he wish they were together? (*Ebo and Kwame are together, but*

*Sisi is in Europe. Sadly, his mother has died. His uncle has stayed in Ghana. There is no mention of his father. His feelings about the small family on the boat demonstrate that he also wishes his family were together. He takes his photo of his family with him wherever he goes.)* Write an entry in Ebo's diary all about his family.

## CHAPTER 12

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do Ebo and the others find their way across the desert? (*They follow the tracks of the truck.*)
- How do they find enough water to drink? (*They drink their own urine and they find some bottles of water in a jeep that has crashed.*)

## CHAPTER 13

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do the passengers feel when they see the helicopter and rescue boat? What do they do when they see them? What does this accidentally lead to? (*The passengers are very excited to see the helicopter and rescue boat. They all rush to the side of the ship. This unbalances the ship and the ship sinks.*)
- Look at the authors' use of simile and metaphor in this chapter.
  - a) How does Ebo describe the water when he falls into it? Is this a simile or a metaphor? (*'hard as stone' – simile*)
  - b) How does Ebo describe the sound of the helicopter? Is this a simile or a metaphor? (*'a heartbeat' – metaphor*) Why do the authors choose to describe it like this? (*The physical sound of the helicopter thuds in your chest in a similar way to a heartbeat, but it is also bringing them new life and encouragement represented by the heartbeat.*)
  - c) Which verb does Ebo use to describe the wind on his face? (*ripple*) What is this verb usually used to describe? (*water*) Why might the authors have chosen to describe the wind in this way? (*It is a sea wind and also because the boys are surrounded by water everywhere they look.*)

## CHAPTER 14

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- At the end of Chapter 14, Razak says, 'He's your brother. It's your choice, Kwame. It's up to you.' What choice is it that Kwame has to make? What would you do? What do you think Kwame does?
- How would you describe Ebo's relationship with his brother now? Has this changed from how you felt at the beginning of the story?
- What are the rules for survival in Tripoli? (*Stay away from the street gangs and dogs. Keep your money somewhere safe. Be careful about rabid dogs. Never drink from street drains. Watch out for the army and the police. Don't trust anyone.*)
- Which of these things help Ebo survive? Give reasons for your answer. Refer to the story in Chapter 14 and earlier chapters.

- a) being quick-thinking
  - b) being a good singer
  - c) being mean
  - d) being generous
  - e) having a lot of money
  - f) his brother's love
  - g) the kindness of others
- (a, b, d, f and g all help Ebo to survive; c and e are not true of Ebo.)*

## CHAPTERS 10 TO 14

### ACTIVITIES

**Drama** Use one of the following scenes as the basis for a drama activity:

- Razak buying tickets for himself, Ebo and Kwame to travel to Europe. Consider what Razak says in order to get the tickets. Why should he have these tickets and not someone else?
- Razak taking the tickets back to Ebo and Kwame. Consider how they feel when they see the tickets. What questions do they have for Razak?
- The helicopter pilot at the scene of the disaster off the Italian coast. What does the pilot say to the rescue service back at base? What is happening and why? What does the rescue service need to do next?
- A TV reporter at the scene of the disaster off the Italian coast. Consider what viewers will want to know about the disaster. Explain why there were so many people on the ship.

### READING DIARY: STORY REVIEW

Ask readers to think about the story so far. What parts of the story have they enjoyed or not enjoyed? Ask them to explain their opinions. Now ask readers whether they think the authors and illustrator have told the story effectively. What have they done well? Is there anything they have not done so well? Again ask readers to justify their opinions, and record them in their Reading Diary.

## CHAPTER 15

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Ebo loses his brother Kwame in the disaster. What does Kwame do before he dies? *(He makes sure Ebo has a life-vest. He asks the rescuer to take Ebo and the baby first.)*
- Make a list of times Kwame saves Ebo's life. Refer back to the story. *(Kwame saves Ebo from drowning. He gets him medicine when he is very ill. He saves him from being carried away by the flood waters in the drain. When the ship sinks, Kwame finds Ebo a life-vest and insists that the rescuer takes Ebo on to the helicopter first.)*
- The ship journey ends in disaster. Why do so many people die? *(There are too many people on the ship. People are trapped inside the ship. Many of the people on the ship cannot swim.)*

## CHAPTER 16

### ACTIVITY: CLASS DISCUSSION

Ebo says, 'I am scared of going. But I'm scared of staying too.' Where is he frightened of going to? How will he travel there? Where is he frightened of staying? Divide the class into pairs or small discussion groups. Half the class brainstorm a list of reasons why Ebo is scared of going to Europe. Half the class brainstorm a list of reasons why he is scared of staying in Tripoli. As a class, compare both lists. Which list has the most reasons on it? Take a class vote – what would readers do if they were Ebo?

## CHAPTER 17

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Ebo feel at the start of this chapter? How does he feel at the end?

Choose from the list of adjectives:

angry	confused	excited
guilty	happy	lonely
sad	relieved	scared
shocked	worried	

- The title of this graphic novel is *Illegal*. What does 'illegal' mean? Why do you think the authors chose this title? What can you learn from the quote by Elie Wiesel on the page before the story starts?

## CHAPTERS 15 TO 17

### ACTIVITIES

#### GENRE AWARENESS & CREATIVE WRITING

1 Look at the following text from page 72 of the story with your class.

*Everything smells of oil. Oil and people.*

*For the first time in days, I can't hear the waves.*

*Everywhere is the hum of the engines and people's voices.*

Ask readers where Ebo is when he says this. (*On the large ship off the coast of Libya.*)

2 Ask readers to work in pairs and choose another scene or chapter from the story. Encourage readers to imagine themselves in that scene and make notes about what noises they can hear as well as what they can smell.

3 Discuss the authors' choice of genre for this story. Discuss with readers whether the story works well as a graphic novel. Ask readers to consider other ways of telling a story (*a novel, a poem, a play, a film, a TV series*). Which do readers consider would or would not be good ways to tell Ebo's story? Ask them to justify their choices.

4 Ask readers to rewrite their chosen scene or chapter in a different genre: as a book chapter, a poem, a scene from a play, a script for a film or TV series. Encourage them to include, where appropriate, descriptions of what they can see, hear and smell.



**Reading Diary** Ebo says, 'I will never forget.' Imagine that Ebo is writing in his diary about how he feels now he has lost his brother. Ask readers what they think Ebo might say in answer to the questions below. Readers can talk about his answers in small discussion groups or write them in their Reading Diary.

What things did Ebo and Kwame do together?

What was Kwame good at?

What things did Kwame like?

What things did Kwame not like?

What was Kwame's dream?

If Kwame could come back for five minutes, what would Ebo say to him?

## STORY THEME: THE REFUGEE CRISIS

### GLOSSARY

The distinction between a **refugee** and a **migrant** is important but can be confusing.

A **refugee** leaves their country because it is not safe for them to live there or because they cannot survive there, perhaps because of war or perhaps because there is not enough food. It is too dangerous for them to return home.

A **migrant** chooses to leave their country, perhaps to find work, for education or to join family.

**Note to teachers:** This is a sensitive topic and it is important not to draw attention to the personal experiences of any child in the class or member of staff. Keep any discussion restricted to the experiences of the characters in the stories. The activities below are based around the story in *Illegal* and *Helen's Story* at the end of the book.

### ACTIVITY: HOPES AND DREAMS

In small groups, students write a list of Ebo's dreams for his new life. Now ask students to think about each of Ebo's dreams. Have his dreams come true? What is the reality of his situation now? Encourage students to think of adjectives to describe how Ebo feels about his dreams now.

### ACTIVITY: FAMOUS REFUGEES

Suggest the names of some famous people who are refugees or from refugee families, e.g. singer Rita Ora, graphic novel author Neil Gaiman. Choose celebrities that will resonate with your students. Ask students to select a celebrity to research. Give them some headings as guidance, e.g. country where they have their roots, member of family who was a refugee, the situation they were fleeing from, what they have achieved, reasons why they are special. Students can share their information in small groups or by giving a presentation.

### ACTIVITY: HELEN'S STORY

Read Helen's Story as a class. Make a list of aspects of her story that are similar to Ebo's story.

### ACTIVITY: WORLD REFUGEE DAY

World Refugee Day takes place every year on June 20th to raise awareness of the refugee crisis. The number of refugees around the world is now more than 50 million. Ask readers to suggest an event that should take place on World Refugee Day to help people understand the stories of people like Ebo and Helen. Readers design a poster or a webpage to advertise the event.