

# BOOKNOTES

READERS GUIDE

## thematic connections

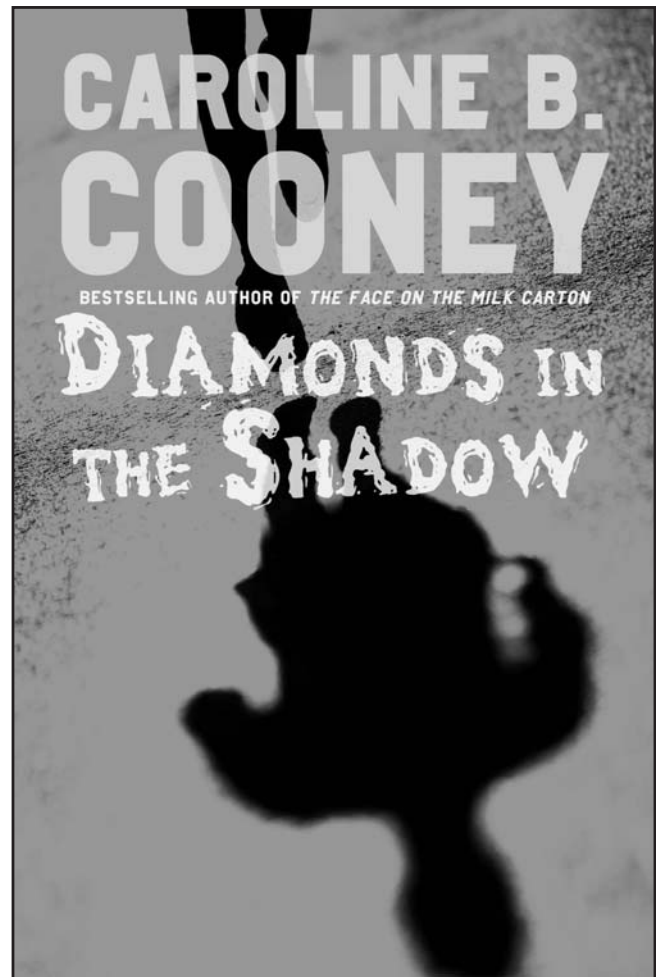
**Family • Courage**  
**Fear • Betrayal**  
**Hope • Social Situations**

**Grades 7 up**

## about the book

**The Finch family and their church represent hope for four wartorn African refugees who arrive in America with a box filled with a brand of terror no one would foresee.**

The Amabo family, four African refugees, arrives at a New York City airport to begin a new life. They are met by the Finch family, who has agreed to provide temporary housing for them since their Connecticut church is the sponsoring organization. Jared Finch is the only member of his family who questions the arrangement. There is something odd about the refugees. They don't act like a family at all, and Mattu, the teenage son, is clinging to a box that he claims to be the ashes of his grandparents. Meanwhile, a fifth refugee gets off the same plane but is sent onto Texas. He is met by a representative from the Refugee Aid Society, who also suspects that something is wrong. The Texas refugee and the Amabo family are dangerously connected, and it takes a brave act by Jared to change the fates of his family and the Amabos.



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and bestselling author of  
*The Face on the Milk Carton***

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## pre-reading activity

Ask students to read about conflict diamonds in the library or at [www.diamondfacts.org/conflict/index.html](http://www.diamondfacts.org/conflict/index.html). Then have them write a brief paper detailing the social and ethical issues surrounding conflict diamonds.

# thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**FAMILY**—Describe the Finch family. Why does Mattu think that Kara Finch is the weakest member of the family? At what point does Mopsy suspect that the Amabo family isn't really a family? Why were Celestine, Andre, Mattu, and Alake so willing to come to America disguised as a family? Mattu had never planned to love his American family. When do his feelings change? In the beginning, Alake seems to contribute the least to the guise of the family. How does she contribute the most in the end?

**COURAGE**—Discuss the relationship between courage and survival. Who displays the most courage in the Amabo family? Mattu realizes that he was a coward when he didn't turn Victor in to the officials. How does being a coward contribute to his courage at the end of the novel? Explain what Victor means when he says to Alake, "So you were the strong one after all." (p. 209)

**FEAR**—Alake is silenced by fear and guilt. How does Victor prey on her fear? Why does Victor insist that Mattu carry the "conflict diamonds" on the airplane? Discuss the scene in the novel when it is evident that the Finch family may be in danger. Why is George Neville, the representative from the Refugee Aid Society, fearful the moment he meets the Amabo family? Compare and contrast his feelings with those of the woman from the Refugee Aid Society that meets Victor's plane in Texas. Why does Celestine fear for the safety of the Finch family?

**BETRAYAL**—Ask the class to discuss how Mr. Finch feels betrayed by Brady Wall. How does this betrayal affect the way he feels about the refugee family? Discuss the relationship between suspicion and betrayal. Why is Jared suspicious of the Amabo family from the very beginning? How does the Amabo family betray the Finch family and the entire congregation of the church? At what point does Celestine become nervous about the betrayal?

**HOPE**—America was considered the land of hope for immigrants in the early part of the 19th century. How is America the land of hope for Celestine, Andre, Mattu, and Alake? At what point does their fate seem hopeless in America? How does honesty give them hope in the end?

**SOCIAL SITUATIONS**—The church agreed to provide food and shelter for the Amabo family for three months. The committee at the church enjoys hearing how good and generous they are. Debate whether the church is helping the refugees for the right reasons. Kirk Crick says to Kara Finch, "You are the innkeeper. The good deed is helping them leave." (p. 148) Why is Kara Finch so reluctant to give up being the "innkeeper"?

# connecting to the curriculum

**LANGUAGE ARTS**—“In a civil war, there are no good guys. They’re all guilty of something.” (p. 11) Engage the class in a discussion about the civil war that Mattu and Alake have managed to escape. What is their guilt? Why might they be considered “bad guys”? Ask students to write a paper from the viewpoint of Mattu or Alake titled “Guilty but Free.”

Celestine Amabo is reading a book called *Welcome to the U.S.: A Guidebook for Refugees*. Prepare a brief booklet that the Refugee Aid Society might give to a sponsoring organization called *A Guidebook for Helping Refugees Adjust to American Society*.

**SCIENCE**—The World Health Organization ([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)) is the public health arm of the United Nations. Have students find out how this organization monitors and assesses epidemics and pandemics in countries throughout the world. Ask students to work in small groups and find out the most recent health threats in poverty stricken countries in Africa. What is the World Health Organization doing to help?

Ask students to research the diamond industry. Which diamonds are the most valuable? Why are diamonds not detected by x-ray equipment in airports? What are the many uses of diamonds? Write a brief article on the diamond for a gemstone dictionary. Include an illustration and a small world map that identifies the countries that mine diamonds.

**SOCIAL STUDIES**—The Refugee Aid Society is the organization that sponsors the Amabo family. Find out about organizations like Refugees International ([www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org)) and Doctors Without Borders ([www.doctorswithout-borders.org](http://www.doctorswithout-borders.org)). Make a brochure that summarizes their programs, how they get their money, and the amount of money spent on administrative costs and the amount that goes directly to the victims.

The United Nations has taken the lead in eliminating conflict diamonds by implementing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. Write a guest editorial for a local newspaper about this program.

**CAREERS**—The Refugee Aid Society requires refugees to work. Celestine gets a job working in housekeeping at a motel. What jobs might Andre do once he gets his prosthetic hands? Mattu and Alake are in school, but they may contribute to the household income during the summer months. Brainstorm possible job opportunities for them, and write a description for each job that might help them in making their work decision.

## vocabulary/ use of language

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t terribly difficult, but students should jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, using clues from the context of the story. Such words may include: *felon* (p. 4), *foisted* (p. 6), *siphoning* (p. 8), *circuitous* (p. 23), *episode* (p. 24), *famine* (p. 26), *statuesque* (p. 29), *conviction* (p. 30), *decipher* (p. 33), *ferocity* (p. 43), *fathom* (p. 45), *prosthetic* (p. 55), *palpable* (p. 61), *comatose* (p. 67), *barrage* (p. 76), *deficient* (p. 146), *ludicrous* (p. 175), *revelation* (p. 188), *contaminated* (p. 208), and *vigilance* (p. 223).

## related titles

### by theme

#### Heroes

**Robert Cormier**

Heroes & Heroism • World War II • Making Choices  
Self-Discovery • Morals & Values in Conflict  
Grades 7 up  
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-22769-4 (0-440-22769-0)

#### How I Live Now

**Meg Rosoff**

War • Family & Relationships • Self-Discovery  
Survival • Love & Romance  
Grades 7 up

Wendy Lamb Books PB: 978-0-553-37605-0 (0-553-37605-5)  
Wendy Lamb Books HC: 978-0-385-74677-9 (0-385-74677-6)

#### Refugees

**Catherine Stine**

Responsibility • Friendship • Hope • Social Situations  
Grades 7 up  
Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-23876-8 (0-440-23876-5)  
Delacorte Press HC: 978-0-385-73179-9 (0-385-73179-5)

#### Light Years

**Tammar Stine**

Self Discovery • Contemporary Issues/Social  
Problems • Jewish Interest • Coming of Age  
Grades 7 up  
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-83023-5 (0-375-83023-5)  
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## about the author

**Caroline B. Cooney** is the author of many books for young people, including *A Friend at Midnight*, *Hit the Road*, *Code Orange*, *The Girl Who Invented Romance*, *Family Reunion*, *Goddess of Yesterday*, *The Ransom of Mercy Carter*, *Tune In Anytime*, *Burning Up*, *Driver's Ed*, *Among Friends*, *Twenty Pageants Later*, *Found; What Child Is This?*, the Time Travel Quartet (*Both Sides of Time*, *Out of Time*, *Prisoner of Time*, and *For All Time*), and *The Face on the Milk Carton* and its companions, *Whatever Happened to Janie?*, *The Voice on the Radio*, and *What Janie Found*. She lives in Madison, Connecticut, and New York City.

## internet resources

### DiamondFacts

**[www.diamondfacts.org/conflict/index.html](http://www.diamondfacts.org/conflict/index.html)**

Discusses conflict diamonds and what the UN is doing to eradicate the issue

### Refugees International

**[www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org)**

One example of an international humanitarian organization that assists refugees

### Refugees and Asylum

**[www.hias.org/immigration/refugees.php](http://www.hias.org/immigration/refugees.php)**

Provides information on topics like fees for immigration applications, green cards for refugees, and travel for refugees and asylum seekers.

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