

**"Profound and timely."**

—KATHERINE APPEGATE, author of  
Newbery Medal winner *The One and Only Ivan*

**"Funny and compelling."**

—ADAM GIDWITZ, author of  
Newbery Honor Book *The Inquisitor's Tale*



WE'RE NOT  
FROM HERE

The illustration depicts a child with dark, spiky hair and a white shirt, holding a large, light blue rectangular sign with the text "WE'RE NOT FROM HERE" in white, hand-drawn capital letters. The child is standing on a red, rocky surface. Two large, blue, insect-like alien figures with long antennae and large, black, polka-dotted eyes stand on either side of the child. The background is a dark blue night sky with a large, pale moon and several small white stars.

Art © 2019 by Andrew Bannecker

**GEOFF RODKEY**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE TAPPER TWINS

**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

## About the Book

Imagine being forced to move to a new planet where **YOU** are the alien! The creator of the Tapper Twins, *New York Times* bestselling author Geoff Rodkey, delivers a topical middle-grade sci-fi novel that proves friendship and laughter can transcend even a galaxy of differences.

The first time I heard about Planet Choom, we'd been on Mars for almost a year. But life on the Mars station was grim, and since Earth was no longer an option (we may have blown it up), it was time to find a new home.

That's how we ended up on Choom with the Zhuri. They're very smart. They also look like giant mosquitoes. But that's not why it's so hard to live here. There's a lot that the Zhuri don't like: singing (just ask my sister, Ila), comedy (one joke got me sent to the principal's office), or any kind of emotion. The biggest problem, though? The Zhuri don't like us. And if humankind is going to survive, it's up to my family to change their minds. No pressure.



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## About the Author



Photo © 2018 Ash Fox

**Geoff Rodkey** is the author of the bestselling Tapper Twins comedy series; the Chronicles of Egg adventure trilogy; and *The Story Pirates Present: Stuck in the Stone Age*, a comic novel bundled with a how-to guide for kids who want to create stories of their own. He's also the Emmy-nominated screenwriter of such films as *Daddy Day Care* and *RV*. Geoff grew up in Freeport, Illinois and began his writing career on his high school newspaper. He now lives in New York City with his wife, three sons, and an easily confused gerbil. Learn more at [geoffrodkey.com](http://geoffrodkey.com), and follow Geoff on Twitter at @GeoffRodkey.

## Pre-Reading

While this is a book that addresses issues surrounding immigration and refugees, students can also relate to it from the perspective of feeling like an outsider. Based on your students' background knowledge, you can choose from two pre-reading strategies, or use both.

### OPTION 1

**Quick-Write:** Give students three to five minutes to respond to the following prompt. Explain that this is a private piece of writing and they will not have to share it with the class. Students can return to this piece of writing at the end of the book and connect their own experiences with those of the characters.

The word *othering* means treating or considering a person or a group of people as alien to oneself or one's group. The reasons why a group would do this are numerous, but ultimately it comes down to making the othered people feel inferior.

**Prompt:** Think about a time when you might have seen someone left out of a group, felt left out of a group yourself, or even contributed to leaving someone out. Describe the situation and how you feel about it now. What were the reasons for leaving them out? What happened as a result of this incident?

### OPTION 2

**Anticipation Guide:** Have students complete the anticipation guide following the directions below before they begin reading. Students should keep the chart to refer back to after reading the book.

Put a + in the box if you agree with the statement and a - in the box if you disagree. Students must choose one of these; no boxes should be left blank. Ask students to stand up after completing the chart. Make one side of your room the AGREE side and the other side the DISAGREE side. Read each statement and have students move to the side they chose on the chart. Ask for two or three students to explain why they chose each side.

Repeat this activity after reading the book, except have students who changed their statements explain why reading this book shifted their perspective.

Before Reading	After Reading	Statements
		The actions of a small group of people represent how the larger group really feels.
		Emotions can be dangerous because they can cause people to react too strongly to certain situations.
		Governments represent the beliefs of the people they govern.
		People from different backgrounds and cultures have too many differences to be able to understand one another.
		Governments should not have to help people who have been displaced from their homes.

## Wordplay:

There are terms in this text that can be understood in multiple ways. Create a Word Wall in your room so that students can continue to add definitions and ideas as their understanding of these terms change throughout the story. You can choose to look at just the roots, just the vocabulary words, or both.

### ROOTS

**Terra**—Earth    **Bio**—Life

1. Have students brainstorm all the words they know that have these roots in them. Discuss the way these roots are used in the story:
    - terraform    • bio-suspension
  2. Discuss: What do these words mean in the context of the story? How do they help you understand what the humans are experiencing?
  3. Have students create their own words using these roots. They can write a narrative paragraph that provides context for what the newly created words mean. Students can share their work with one another and guess the meaning of the new words based on the context clues in the paragraphs.
2. Students should look up the dictionary definition for any words they labeled a two or three, and write the word and definition on a large index card. They should then write the part of speech, use it in a sentence, and draw a picture that reminds them of the word. The index cards will be hung on the Word Wall.
  3. Students will keep track of how their words are used throughout the story. They will write the sentences in which the words are used and the context of each sentence on an index card to hang near their original card. Over time, students will see that these words have multiple meanings.

### VOCABULARY


**Refugee    Alien    Immigrants**  
**Hive    Democracy    Progress**  
**Tradition    Pod    Swarm**  
**Species**

1. Ask students to label each of these ten words based upon how familiar they are with them.

- 1 = Know it well and use it regularly
- 2 = Familiar with it, but not sure of the exact definition or how to use it in a sentence

- 3 = Never seen it before

**EXTENSION:** If you feel students are ready, you can talk about the denotation versus the connotation of the words. How is the definition different from the way people use these words and the feelings that they evoke?

 CCSS. RL.6.4-8.4



**During Reading:** As students are reading the text, they may choose to track different structures and themes found throughout the story. The following can be used as discussion questions, small group activities, individual activities, or extensions for certain students.

### CHAPTER TITLES

Each chapter has a very specific title. Use what you read in the previous chapter to help you predict what the next chapter will be about. See if you start noticing patterns in the types of events that the author has chosen to highlight in each chapter title.

### SETTING

There are specific descriptions of the different settings in the book, especially Choom. How do the settings help you understand what is happening in the story? For each new setting, draw what you imagine it might look like.

### CHARACTER, GENDER, AND IMAGINATION

The author never identifies the gender of Lan, the narrator and main character. Instead, this choice is left up to each reader's imagination. As you read the story, how do you imagine Lan: as a boy, as a girl, or as non-binary? Why did you make this choice? Was it based on what you read in the text—the way Lan acts, talks, or describes something? Or was it just your own preference or projection? If you imagine Lan as a girl, do you think a reader who imagines Lan as a boy is wrong? Or could you both be right? Within the story, does it ever matter what Lan's gender is? Draw a picture of Lan, then think about which parts of your picture came directly from the book and which parts you imagined.

### EMOTIONS

Throughout the story, Lan describes various smells, from fresh-baked doughnuts to the gasoline-like smell the Zhuri emit when they feel certain emotions. Lan eventually learns that emotions are discouraged on Choom, as they are believed to cause violence. Track the different smells Lan experiences, as well as what they mean. When do these smells appear? How do the Zhuri's emotions shift throughout the story? Why is this important? What role do emotions play in both character development and plot? Make a list of emotions for which the book doesn't describe a smell (for example: sorrow, confusion, joy, excitement), then imagine what smell you might pair with these emotions if you were writing a story about the Zhuri.

### IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Track the challenges the humans face as they leave Earth and try to find a new home. What are all the things they have to do in order to locate, travel to, and settle permanently on Planet Choom? What are some of the assumptions that Choom's other species make about Lan's family? Do you think the author is trying to say anything about the experiences of immigrants on Earth? How do the experiences of Lan and family parallel what you know about immigration, past and present, in the United States?

### ALLIES, BULLIES, BYSTANDERS

Throughout the story, there are characters Lan can count on and characters who make Lan's life more difficult. Keep track of who the allies, bullies, and bystanders are. Do any of them switch categories? Are some static, meaning they stay in the same role throughout the book? How do these three types of individuals impact Lan's experience on Choom?

## ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

There are many hints about the type of government that has come to power after the incident with the Nug. Track the different discussions about government. Make sure to note both positive and negative outcomes of governmental policy. What is the government's role in keeping order on Choom? Do the citizens believe in the same ideals as the government? What is the power structure on Choom, and how did it come to be this way? Do you see any similarities between the governmental structures of Choom and the United States?

## EDUCATION

Lan and Ila spend a good amount of time in school on Choom. What is their experience with the education system there? How is it similar to or different from the American education system? What is the role of education on Choom? Is it an important component of their society?


## MOB MENTALITY

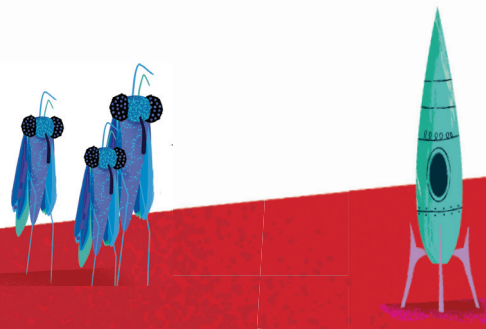
*Mob mentality* refers to the way humans can follow the behavior of a group for emotional reasons rather than rational ones. There are several instances in the story when Lan and/or Lan's family members are surrounded or attacked by a swarm of Zhuri. Why do you think these swarms occur at these particular times? In each case, what do you think causes the citizens of Choom to behave this way? How might these swarms have been prevented? What role do they play in the story?

## ROLE OF MEDIA

One of the things Lan is most surprised to find on Choom is television. However, Lan soon notices that the information the media is conveying to the citizens of Choom about the humans is either not true or very biased. What role does the media play on Choom? How does the media impact Lan's experience on this new planet? What parallels do you see between the media on Choom and the media in our world today?

**After Reading:** Through their word study and discussion questions, students may have become interested in learning more about one of the themes covered in the book. Students can find classmates with similar interests and engage in a study of the topic of their choice. The final piece could be sharing what they learned with the class and discussing how this research helped them to better understand the theme in the book.

 CCSS. RL. 6.1–8.1; CCSS. RL. 6.2–8.2



## Additional Resources to Teach About Immigration

**Teaching Tolerance** provides a lesson plan for helping students understand the language and debates surrounding immigration: [tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/the-language-of-the-immigration-debate](https://www.teachingtolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/the-language-of-the-immigration-debate)

**The Anti-Defamation League** (ADL) has multiple resources for educators that help students better understand immigration, immigrants, and anti-immigrant bias: [adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti](https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti)

**The National Park Service** has an activity to help students understand the decisions immigrants needed to make when first entering the United States at Ellis Island: [nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/finding-a-home.htm](https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/finding-a-home.htm)

**Newsela** has a text set that explores many aspects of immigration in the United States, past and present: [newsela.com/text-sets/41](https://newsela.com/text-sets/41)

**National Council of Teachers of English** (NCTE) has a blog post that offers resources for teachers looking to discuss different aspects of immigration with their students: <http://www2.ncte.org/blog/2016/09/talking-immigration-classroom/>

## Additional Resources to Teach About Refugees

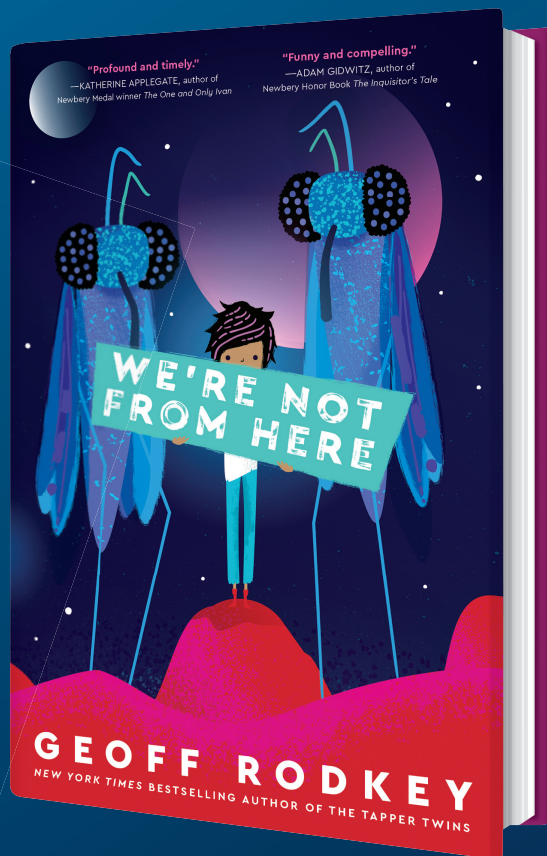
**The UN Refugee Agency** (UNHCR) has numerous resources for teachers to help students understand the current global refugee crisis: [unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html](https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-about-refugees.html)

**Facing History** offers three cohesive lessons to teach students about the current refugee crisis from a historical perspective: [facinghistory.org/resource-library/understanding-global-refugee-crisis](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/understanding-global-refugee-crisis)

**The National Education Association** (NEA) offers resources and lessons for teaching students about the effects of war and migration on refugees: [nea.org/tools/lessons/63678.htm](https://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/63678.htm)

**Amnesty International** has a series of lessons in their Seeking Safety packet aimed at helping students understand what asylum means and why refugees need to seek asylum: [amnesty.org.uk/files/2017-06/Activity%20-%20Seeking%20safety.pdf?D7urbCyyopydnnGsfttF\\_8CbdfcXPVJC=](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2017-06/Activity%20-%20Seeking%20safety.pdf?D7urbCyyopydnnGsfttF_8CbdfcXPVJC=)

This guide was prepared by Rebecca Marsick,  
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★ **"A quirky sci-fi adventure with a surprising layer of political irony."**

—Kirkus Reviews, Starred

**"In *We're Not from Here*, Geoff Rodkey has created the near-impossible: a profound and timely story that just happens to be hilarious.**

**Whip-smart, wildly inventive, and truly important."**

—Katherine Applegate, Newbery Medal-winning author of *The One and Only Ivan*

**"Funny, compelling, and important. Who knew that giant talking mosquitoes and brilliant marshmallow girls on a distant planet could provide such crucial insight into what is happening on our planet right now? If you're like me, you'll read *We're Not from Here* in a single day and then hand it to everyone you know."**

—Adam Gidwitz, Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Inquisitor's Tale*

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