



Harmony Tree International Speech Festival (HTISF)

2026-2027 Set Pieces for Asia Division

Prose Reading

Born in 2011-2012

Refugee

by Alan Gratz (Adapted Version)

Mahmoud drifted in and out of sleep as cold waves broke over the rubber boat,
each one forcing him back into awareness before pulling him under again.

Time no longer felt real. Minutes and hours lost their meaning,
replaced only by exhaustion and the constant movement of the sea.
His thoughts slipped between reality and fragments of uneasy dreams.

In one of those moments, he imagined a boat approaching them,
its motor cutting steadily through the endless sound of water.

For a brief second, it felt real enough to believe.

Then he woke suddenly.

His hand moved across his wet face as he tried to understand where he was.
Everything felt uncertain, as if the world itself had no clear shape in the darkness.

And then he heard it again.

A sound—faint at first—but growing stronger. A motor. Real this time.
Mahmoud held his breath. He listened carefully, afraid that if he moved or spoke,
the sound might disappear. But it did not. Instead, it became clearer, closer, more certain.

Slowly, a shape appeared through the darkness.

A Greek Coast Guard ship, moving steadily toward them through the waves.

Relief came suddenly, overwhelming him in a way he could not control.

After everything they had endured, help was finally here.

When they reached land, his father fell to his knees,
pressing his hands into the ground and whispering words of gratitude.

Along the shore were rows of abandoned life jackets,
stacked and scattered like silent reminders of all those
who had passed through this place before them.

Mahmoud stood still, looking at them, understanding that their journey was only one among
many—some ending, some continuing, all carrying the weight of survival.