

## **Book Club Discussion Questions for *The Newcomers***

- Why did the author choose to situate herself inside Room 142? What takes place in that classroom over the course of the school year? Is what happens a local story, a national story, or an international story?
- How does the classroom represent the global refugee crisis as a whole? Where do the students come from? What journeys brought them to South?
- What happened in Iraq to displace Jakleen and Mariam?
- What happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo to displace Methusella and Solomon?
- Why were students from Burma in the room, and why did those students say they were from Thailand?
- Did the US play a role in these displacements?
- How did your sense of the students portrayed change over time? What was it like for the students when they first arrived? How did they evolve?
- Why did the author choose to put herself into the narrative? What purpose did that serve?
- Why did Eddie Williams teach English as a Second Language? How did his background affect how he behaved inside the classroom?
- What additional services were provided in Room 142, in addition to Eddie's lessons? Who else visited the room to care for the students?

- Does this book have heroes or villains? To what role would you assign the teacher, the students, their parents? Those running for national office?
- How does the author manage the tension between reporting and having feelings about the kids?
- At one point, the author visits the Congolese family, and after some conversation, both the father and the interpreter turn to stare at her. The author says she felt as if they were thinking, *'What are we supposed to do about the terrible innocence of Americans?'* What did she mean by that phrase? What do Americans not know and why is it terrible?
- What attributes make refugees remarkable? And how are they just like everyone else? In what ways are the students just like any other teens? What have they lived through that most adolescents have not seen?
- How did this book leave you feeling about refugees?

From the website of Helen Thorpe - [helenthorpe.com/events/](http://helenthorpe.com/events/)