Gulwali was born in Afghanistan but when the rich agricultural land of his family became a battleground, his grandparents and parents took the difficult decision to pay smugglers to take Gulwali and his brother out of Afghanistan. Gulwali endured a ‘hellish, difficult journey’ before finally arriving in the UK.

These notes provide background information to his story and help support students respond to the film and its themes through the suggested activities which follow.

Who? Gulwali Passarlay was born in 1994 and was eight years old when the war in Afghanistan started, and twelve when he left home, ‘and crossed half the world’.

What? Gulwali shares some memories of life in Kandahar Province, which is in the east of Afghanistan, and how since 2012 the situation in his home state has deteriorated. Gulwali and his family experienced rocket attacks and aerial bombardments until the constant fear of being killed forced his mother and grandmother to make the decision to pay smugglers to take the two boys to 'hoped for' safety in Europe. Gulwali discusses the harsh reality of being a vulnerable child seeking passage as a refugee, including the actions of people-smugglers and traffickers. He talks frankly about the physical perils of the journey and the emotional toll it took on him; at his lowest points he felt that he had lost his humanity.

Why? On the morning of 11 September 2001, 19 al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger planes in the United States. Two planes were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, causing both towers to collapse. A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon, just outside Washington, DC. The fourth plane crashed in rural Pennsylvania after the crew and passengers attacked the terrorists on board, preventing it from hitting another target in the US capital.

A few days later, US President George W Bush declared a 'War on Terror'. An invasion of Afghanistan was launched barely one month later, on 7 October 2001. American, British and Afghan United Front (Northern Alliance) forces were deployed to destroy al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime that had harbour the terrorist group in Afghanistan

When? By the end of 2001, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had collapsed but an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) remained. ISAF’s role was to oversee the transition to a new government and provide security for the redevelopment of the war torn country. In 2006, as part of a reorganisation of ISAF (now under NATO control), British troops were sent to the southern province of Helmand. Their intended role was to provide stability and security for reconstruction projects, but their arrival provoked a violent response from a resurgent Taliban. It was this escalation in the war that Gulwali experienced, and which forced his family to get him out of Afghanistan.
On 20 November 2010, NATO\(^1\) announced a timetable for the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan. In late 2014, British combat troops were withdrawn. With the Taliban still active, the future of the country remains uncertain. Gulwali has faced many challenges since arriving in Britain and has graduated from Manchester University with a degree in Politics.

\[^{1}\text{North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. An alliance of countries from Europe and North America founded in 1949}\]