

Seeking Asylum

OVERVIEW

Through a simulation, students experience the difficult choices and struggles facing refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) when they are forced to leave their homes. Students learn about the root causes of refugee and IDP crises, and the options and obstacles each group faces.

INQUIRY/CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- Why and how does someone become a refugee or IDP?
- How do nations determine who qualifies as a refugee?
- How are refugee issues tied to other global issues?
- What are the impacts (negative and positive) of refugee and IDP populations on the environment, economies, and social fabrics of their host and home countries?
- What are some sustainable solutions to addressing the root causes of refugee and IDP crises?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Gain a sense of empathy for the hard choices facing refugee and IDP families
- Understand the root causes of refugee and IDP crises, and the root solutions for preventing these crises
- Learn about the asylum process, and the differences in protection offered to refugees and IDPs
- Be introduced to the debate within developed nations over setting immigration policies

TIME REQUIRED: 1 hour

KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- **Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons**
- **Asylum**
- **Resettlement**

SUBJECT AREAS

- **Social Studies** (World History, Geography, U.S. History, Economics, Global Studies)
- **Science** (Environmental)

NATIONAL STANDARDS CONSISTENCY

- **NCSS: 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10**
- **NSES: F**

GRADE LEVEL: 6–11



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FTF Related Reading

- Intermediate: Chapter 7 from *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions*
- Advanced: Unit 2, Chapter 3 from *It's All Connected*

Materials/Preparation

- Handout/Overhead: *Defining Refugees, IDPs, and Migrants*, overhead or 1 copy per student
- Handout: *Seeking Asylum - Items*, 1 copy per 4 students
- Handout: *Citizenship Certificate*, 1 copy
- 2 large pieces of blank paper with “Asylum in Petrus” written in large letters on 1 piece and “Internally Displaced Persons” on the other. Tape the 2 signs on opposite sides of the classroom
- 2 sheets of butcher paper and pens, place 1 sheet and pens by each area
- A jug of water and crackers (enough for 1 or 2 crackers per student for about half your class) placed in an area by the “Asylum in Petrus” sign

Activity

Introduction

1. (Optional) Do a Sides Debate using the following prompt (see Sides Debate description on page 28):
“The U.S. should allow more refugees into this country.”
2. Show and review the Overhead or Handout, *Defining Refugees, IDPs, and Migrants*.

Steps

1. Divide the class into “families” of 3-4 students.
2. Explain to the class that, due to an outbreak of civil war, all the families have

- to leave their homes immediately.
 3. Tell them that each family can only take 5 items with them, selected from the Handout *Seeking Asylum – Items* that you will pass out to them. They will only have 2 minutes to agree on what to bring and then flee before the fighting reaches their home. They can only choose items that are on the list.
 4. Pass out the list quickly and start timing for 2 minutes. Keep the pressure on them to complete their selections within the allotted time.
 5. After the 2 minute period, have them put their pens down. Have a representative from each family read off their 5 items. Make a note to yourself of which families chose to bring Identification Cards.
 6. After all families read off their lists, take those families that chose Identification Cards to the “Asylum in Petrus” section of the room. Take those families that did not list Identification Cards to the “Internally Displaced Persons” section of the room.
- Note: If no families have chosen to bring Identification Cards, have everyone go to the IDP side. Randomly choose 2 families and tell them that if they can prove they are from their home country and are in need of asylum, they can go to the refugee camp. Or, have a family that brought money “buy” their way into the camp. The goal is to have at least a couple of families in the refugee camp. Alternatively, if all the families bring identification cards, randomly select some families and move them to the IDP side of the room, telling them that their identification papers are not in order.

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7. Explain that families often need to be able to prove where they come from in order to be granted asylum (protection) by a neighboring country. Inform the families in the Asylum section that they are now in the fictional country of Petrus, housed in a refugee camp operated by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This is why they have been given some basic food and drink (the water and crackers). The Asylum families may eat the crackers and drink water.
8. Explain that people in refugee camps are often assigned jobs, so those in the refugee camp are going to brainstorm and write on the butcher paper, what their camp will need to function (e.g. kitchens, schools, doctors, etc.), and then identify the different types of jobs they might be doing.
9. Explain to those in the IDP area that families without identification papers were not granted asylum, and are stuck in the middle of the civil war in their home country. No United Nations agency has the authority to look after these families so, at the moment, they do not have any food or drink. Tell the IDP families to brainstorm and write on the butcher paper, what they will do to survive – they could try to set up their own camp using the items they chose to take with them, or they could try to enter Petrus illegally by bribing border guards with their items, etc.
10. After the students have brainstormed for a few minutes, take all but 1 of the families from the Asylum section and explain that the government of Petrus

has determined that the civil war in the refugees' home country has calmed down enough for them to return home. Explain that while Petrus is sorry the families have nothing, and their homes are probably gone, the refugees are using up the limited resources of their country and every family cannot be granted asylum forever. Take the families to the IDP section.

11. Finally, tell the 1 family remaining in the Asylum section that Petrus has agreed to resettle them, offering permanent residency. A local agency will help them find a home and a job. Give them the *Citizenship Certificate*.
12. Bring the class back together for reflection questions.

Assessment Reflection Questions

For Intermediate and Advanced Students

- How did you decide what to bring with you?
- How did you feel having such a short time to decide?
- Did you feel the asylum process was fair?
- Why do you think it is important to have identification cards?
- If you were to change the rules for countries granting refugees asylum, what would you do? Would you accept anyone who claimed they were a refugee?
- Are there refugees in your community? Where are they from? How are they treated? What agencies exist to help refugees in your community?

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For Advanced Students

- Would you feel different about accepting someone who was not physically threatened with violence, but couldn't find any work in their own country?
- How do you think refugee and IDP crises affect other global issues like environmental destruction, poverty, and education?
- If the situation that caused a family to seek asylum is resolved, but the family has nothing to go back to in their home country, should they still be sent home? Why? Under what conditions should refugees be sent home?
- Why do you think the United Nations helps refugees, but is not authorized to help internally displaced persons?
- If the United Nations cannot help IDPs, can you think of any organization that could help IDPs?
- What could be a sustainable solution to preventing large scale refugee and IDP crises? Economic development? Participatory and effective governance? Who should be in charge of implementing this solution?



- Have students write a short “memoir” as if they were a refugee or IDP. Have the class share their stories with younger students, perhaps at a local elementary school.

Art Connection

- Create a family tree collage using photos of a student's family and images from magazines, the Internet, newspapers, and other sources that depict places in the world where the student's family originally came from.

Technology Connection

- Visit www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/master.html for an interactive experience in which students listen to the stories of refugee teens from around the world.

Action Projects

- Partner with a refugee or internally displaced person (IDP) school either through pen-pal relationships with their students or by raising money to send school supplies and equipment. When you partner with “RESPECT International” you'll get everything you need to get started and to find a partner school. For a detailed description of this and other service learning projects, visit www.facingthefuture.org and click on **Take Action**, and then click **Service Learning Projects**.

Writing Connections

- Have students write a poem based on their experience in the activity, keeping in mind the things their family chose to bring, and where they ended up. Have them use imagery, senses, metaphors, and descriptive words in their poems.

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- Research and contact resettlement organizations in your community to learn more about local refugee and IDP issues and to seek volunteer opportunities. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) at www.theirc.org is a good place to start your search.
- Visit www.facingthefuture.org, click on **Take Action**, then click **Fast Facts Quick Actions** for refugee-related information and action opportunities listed in the “peace and conflict” section.
- *Under the Persimmon Tree*, Suzanne Fisher Staples, Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005. This young adult novel offers a new level of insight into Afghanistan in the months following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The author alternately expresses the views of two survivors: young Najmah, a villager living in the Kunduz Hills, and Nusrat, the American wife of an Afghan doctor.

Additional Resources

Films

- *Refugee*, Spencer Nakasako, 2002, 60 minutes. Focuses on a boy from a tough neighborhood in San Francisco returning to Cambodia to meet his dad, who did not escape during Pol Pot's regime. www.refugeethemovie.com

Books

- *Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy's Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard*, Mawi Asgedom, Little, Brown and Company, 2002.

Websites

- www.unhcr.org - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees official website.
- www.theirc.org - Official website of the International Rescue Committee. The IRC provides emergency relief, rehabilitation, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, resettlement services, and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by conflict and oppression.

Lesson 11 Overhead/Handout:

DEFINING REFUGEES, INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, AND MIGRANTS

Refugee - A person who flees his/her country because he/she has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. A refugee, under this technical definition, is someone who crosses an international border to seek refuge in another country.

Asylum - Refugees who cross a border are seeking asylum, or protection within the country they entered. Under international law, a person who can prove he/she qualifies as a refugee must be granted asylum until he/she either chooses to return home, or conditions improve enough that it is determined he/she is no longer in immediate danger, and can be told to leave by the country that granted the protection.

Resettlement - Countries can choose to resettle refugees, officially granting them permanent residency within their borders.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP) - someone who is forced to leave his/her home for the same reasons as a refugee, but is unable to cross an international border to obtain asylum. IDPs currently do not have the same rights and protections offered to refugees by international law. Their plight is often not monitored by international agencies, since they have not left their home country. While intra-state conflicts are the most common source of mass IDP movements, in recent years large-scale economic and public works projects in developing countries have resulted in forced mass evacuations of citizens to make room for dams, logging, and other land use purposes.

Migrant - Someone who chooses to leave his/her home and obtain citizenship in a different country through an official citizenship process, or chooses to leave his/her home and enter a new country by circumventing the citizenship process (illegally). The most common reason for emigration is a lack of economic opportunity and/or quality of life in the person's home country. In recent years there has been a movement to change how destination countries treat migrants from the poorest parts of the world, dubbing them economic or environmental refugees.

Seeking Asylum – Items

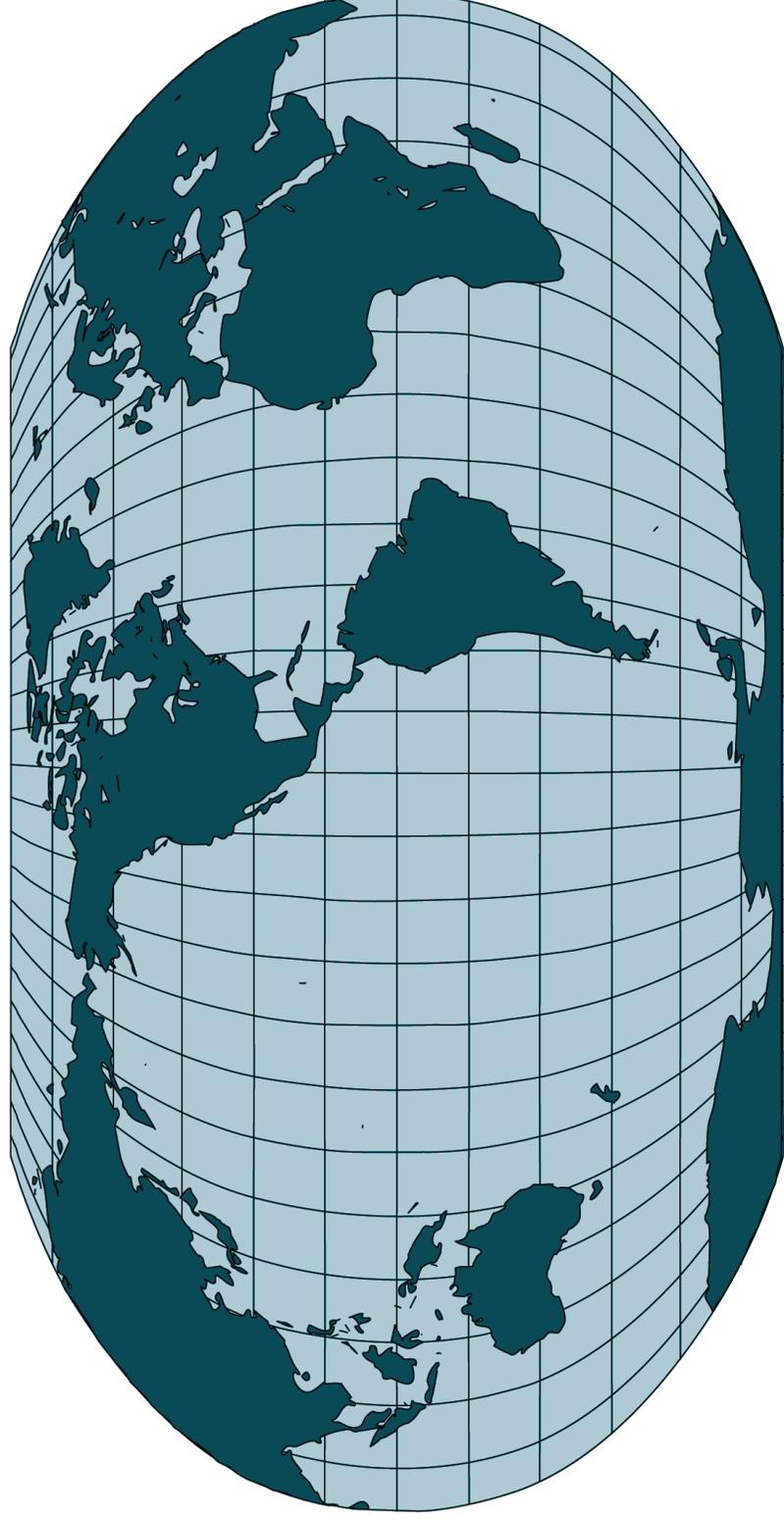
Directions:

There has been an outbreak of civil war in your country and you are being forced to leave immediately. Your “family” must choose only 5 of the items below to take with you. Review the list together and circle the 5 items you agree to take. You have 2 minutes to reach a decision!

- **Cooking pot**
- **Hammer and nails**
- **Water jug**
- **Radio**
- **Sack of grain**
- **Waterproof tarp**
- **Identification cards**
- **Cooking stove**
- **Family savings (around \$35)**
- **Soap**
- **Machete (large curved knife)**
- **Photo album**
- **Pet dog**
- **Rifle**
- **Blankets**
- **Lantern**



Certificate of Citizenship



For the Country of Petrus