



### **Arab Refugee Lives: Sanaa Domat’s Story**

**Overview:** Through this lesson, students will gain a greater understanding of the various challenges that Syrian refugees face. Students will read excerpts from interviews with Sanaa Domat, a Syrian woman originally from Homs. Students will learn about her experience in both her native country and in her new host country. By using oral histories in the classroom, distant events will become more real and relevant to students. Oral histories were collected by students in a *Refugee Lives* interactive learning course at Duke University, and are part of the Refugee Lives Oral History Project, <http://sites.duke.edu/arabiccommunities/>.

<b>Grades</b>	9-12
<b>NCSCOS Essential Standards</b>	<p>WH.H.7 Understand how national, regional, and ethnic interests have contributed to conflict among groups and nations in the modern era.</p> <p>WH.H.8 Analyze global interdependence and shifts in power in terms of political, economic, social and environmental changes and conflicts since the last half of the twentieth century.</p> <p>AH2.H.7 Understand the impact of war on American politics, economics, society and culture.</p> <p>AH2.H.8 Analyze the relationship between progress, crisis and the “American Dream” within the United States.</p>
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conclude how the conflict in Syria has affected the civilian population</li> <li>• Examine challenges of adjusting to new life in another country</li> <li>• Analyze the concept of ‘home’</li> <li>• Evaluate the individual experience of a Syrian refugee living in Canada</li> </ul>
<b>Materials/Resources</b>	<p>Copies of interview excerpts and analysis worksheets</p> <p>Computer with internet access</p> <p>Projector</p>
<b>Time Required For Lesson</b>	1 hour

#### **Opening Activity – 10 minutes**

1. Ask students to write down their ideas of what it means to be a refugee. You might want to have students use a word web to guide their thinking with the word “refugee” at the center. What words do they associate with the concept of “refugee”? What might be some challenges of moving to a new country as a refugee?

→ As homework the night before or as the opening activity, you might ask students to make a collage of images and words that they associate with the word, “refugee.” Students may cut old magazines and/or newspapers to make their collage. Put up the artwork around the class and have students do a gallery walk around the room. Come back as a group and discuss collages that interested them, that they had questions about, and that they found visually appealing.

2. Ask students to share their ideas out loud with the class.

3. Briefly share that there are refugees in the Unites States from several Arab counties including Iraq, Sudan, and Syria. Explain that these refugees have fled various conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Iraq War, the Syrian Civil War, etc. These refugees are seeking a new life in the United States.

### Main Activities | Excerpt 1: Life in Syria – 20-30 minutes

1. Provide background information on the Syrian conflict. In 2011, revolutionary movements across the Arab World inspired protests against the authoritarian rule of Bashar al-Assad. Rather than stepping down or being forcibly ousted from power, al-Assad cracked down on all opposition to his rule. The result was a multi-sided civil war that has destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and turned residential neighborhoods into war zones. In 2013, the Islamic State established itself in northeastern Syria, furthering instability and conflict.

→ To establish a greater understanding of the crisis in Syria, show the 10 minute video, "The Historical Roots of the Syrian Refugee Crisis," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR2IaJSOLGw&feature>. In this video, Dr. miriam cooke (Duke University), provides the historical context key to understanding why so many Syrians have fled their homes. See the [Teacher's Guide](#) for class activities. Optional: Students may complete the [Student Viewing Guide](#) to encourage greater understanding of the conflict.

2. Pass out the excerpts and analysis worksheet. Ask students to read excerpt one from Sanaa Domat's interview, "Life in Syria." Explain that her story provides personal insight on the everyday life of Syrians in the midst of the Syrian revolution. Individually in small groups, have students fill out the worksheet. As a class, discuss:

- Was Sanaa's decision to leave Syria immediate? Did she want to stay in Syria at first?
- What does her story tell us about life like in Syria during the conflict?
- Sanna's family decided to move from Homs to another town in Syria. At this point, she and her family were Internally Displaced Persons. Discuss the concept of Internally Displaced People. How is this different from the concept of refugees?
- As a class look at a map of Syria, such as this one from the University of Texas at Austin: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/syria\\_rel-2007.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/syria_rel-2007.jpg). Locate the cities mentioned in Excerpt 1: Homs (Hims), Daraa (Dar'a), Aleppo, Kefram. While Kefram is not on the map, speculate where the small village might be by looking at the topography of the map. What do you notice about the map? Does geography play a role in where people live in Syria? Discuss.
- Was it easy or difficult for Sanaa and her family to leave Syria? Justify your response.

### Main Activities | Excerpt 2: Life in Quebec – 20 minutes

1. In pairs or small groups, ask students to list words that they associate with "home." After they have brainstormed words, have a representative from each group write their words on a white board or on sheets of chart paper where all students can see.

2. Ask students to read the second excerpt from Sanaa Domat's interview, "Life in Quebec." This excerpt sheds light on the process of seeking refugee status and navigating a new space in hopes of it becoming "home." Individually in small groups, have students fill out the worksheet. As a class, discuss:

- Describe Sanaa's journey to Canada.
- How were Sanaa and her family welcomed in Canada?
- Sanaa talks about her children. What challenges might refugee children face, in particular?
- Does Sanaa feel like part of the Canadian community, or does she feel like an outsider? Justify your response.
- How can we help new people feel welcome into our community? Why is it important to create an inclusive community?

- As members of a global community, what do you think should be the role of the United States in welcoming refugees into this country?

3. On the board or chart paper, circle the words describing “home” that the class has noticed in Sanaa’s story. Tell students that Sanaa now resides in Montreal, Quebec. She lives with her husband and two children.

#### **Assessment | Exit Ticket – 5 minutes**

Have students complete the following exit ticket:

1. Write down one way that the conflict in Syria has affected the civilian population.
2. Write down one difference between refugees and Internally Displaced Peoples.
3. Write down two challenges that Syrian refugees may face in adjusting to life in a new country.

## Excerpts of interviews with Sanaa Domat by Sandy Alkoutami, Duke University Class of '16

Source: <http://sites.duke.edu/arabiccommunities/2016/05/04/sanaa-domat/>

*The following is the transcript from two interviews conducted on March 26, 2016 and April 26, 2016 with Sanaa Domat, a Syrian woman originally from Homs. As the Syrian crisis worsened, Sanaa and her family were forced to leave their Syrian home in December 2015. She moved to Montreal, Canada during the wave of Syrian refugees coming to Canada.*

### EXCERPT 1: LIFE IN SYRIA

March 26, 2016

Montreal, Quebec

**Sandy:** I guess we can start at the beginning- Homs in 2011. What was it like living there during the advent of this crisis?

**Sanaa:** We were in shock for most of the first year. You know, Homs is one of the worse cities after Daraa and Aleppo. Our neighborhood was in a predominantly Sunni area, so we were always worried of protests. At first, we imagined things would end quickly. So we did a lot of waiting. We imagined that something, anything, would stop Syria from becoming what we have now. But for the most part, things didn't drastically change. Our kids still went to school, my husband and I worked, so for the most part we did not truly feel the effects until much later.

**Sandy:** When was later?

**Sanaa:** Things starting feeling more serious when people we knew were getting hurt. The violence and protests started feeling a lot closer. My husband, Rami, went grocery shopping one day and just as he was leaning into the car trunk to place the bags, he heard—then felt— an explosion. He was rushed to the hospital. Luckily, only the bottom of his leg was injured. That was when we knew Homs wasn't safe for us though.

**Sandy:** Where did you live after that?

**Sanaa:** We decided to take the kids and move to Kefram, a Christian village in the mountains of Syria. Because there were not any Muslims (who are predominantly the ones protesting), it was a much safer alternative.

**Sandy:** What was it like to move from the city to the village?

**Sanaa:** Since my parents and family came with us, it was nice. We were all together, so knowing everyone was safer put us at ease. The kids went to the elementary school, and started making friends in the village. My husband kept driving to and from Homs, though. He is a French teacher so he would travel to Homs to teach. The roads, because of the checkpoints, were always so scary.

**Sandy:** What was the hardest part of living in the village?

**Sanaa:** Basic amenities were not always provided. We wouldn't have electricity or water for hours at a time. Prices were much higher since 2011, so it became more difficult to afford items we would normally buy. At one point, Rami's brother opened up a store where we sold sandwiches and pizza. That generated some money for a while. After that, we started selling some of our clothes we weren't wearing anymore. We kept ourselves busy with little projects.

**Sandy:** So you stopped working?

**Sanaa:** Yes, of course. There were not any opportunities in the village, and I was not going to drive to Homs.

**Sandy:** When did you feel like it was necessary to take them out of Syria altogether?

**Sanaa:** Well, we applied for visas to the US well before the revolution started. We were all denied, so we waited to apply again. At that point, the revolution had begun, so we applied as asylum seekers to the US. We were rejected again. We tried through the humanitarian parole process. We were rejected again. After 4 years, we decided to apply to Canada. We heard they were more welcoming and that people were finding success making it there. So we applied. Several months later we found out our case was accepted. Two days after Christmas, we flew from Syria to enter Canada as refugees...

## **EXECEPT 2: LIFE IN CANADA**

**APRIL 26, 2016**

**Montreal, Quebec**

**Sandy:** What was it like to leave Syria for the first time in your life?

**Sanaa:** Saying goodbye to everyone was the hardest part. My children were crying as they hugged their grandparents goodbye for what could be years and years. They would hold their cousins and cry...

**Sandy:** How did it feel to be traveling as a refugee? Were there other with you?

**Sanaa:** Yes. In fact, most of the plane had Syrian refugees going to Canada. It was nice not to feel alone in the process. But the journey was so tiring. The kids were frazzled and confused; no one was able to sleep throughout the journey. After two days of travel, we arrived in Montreal.

**Sandy:** How was the arrival?

**Sanaa:** I could not have expected the arrival. After our plane landed, we were bussed to a big warehouse. I remember when we walked off the bus, one of the volunteers threw a snowball at us and said "Welcome to Canada." In the warehouse, everyone was given boots, snow clothes, puffy jackets, you name it. I could tell they were prepared for us.

**Sandy:** Where did you stay that night?

**Sanaa:** Well, we actually knew some distant relatives in Montreal. So we stayed with her until we started renting a place to live. A week later, we moved into our own place and the kids were immediately enrolled in French schools for non-native speakers.

**Sandy:** How have the kids adjusted?

**Sanaa:** At first not well at all, my youngest one, Jad, started exhibiting some psychological responses to the move. He wouldn't eat or sleep. He cried a lot, and told us that we were punishing by taking him out of Syria. In the middle of the night, he will wake us up and tell us that he misses a certain person in Syria. At school, the teachers say he will often sit and cry... My oldest son is a lot better, but around Jad, he also talks about Syria a lot.

**Sandy:** And what about Rami? Have you found work, or has he?

**Sanaa:** My husband is fluent in French but is taking higher level classes to get familiar with the dialect. He is currently looking for work, but so far, we are still adjusting.

**Sandy:** Is there a Syrian community? Do you feel like an outsider?

**Sanaa:** Not at all, I feel like I would feel differently in the US, but people here have been so friendly, so helpful. There are a lot of other Syrians, so we group together often.

**Sandy:** What's the future for your family? Do you want Montreal to be home?

**Sanaa:** At this point, yes. We are ready to settle here and make this space our new home. I want my kids to be safe, be able to go to college, have a normal life, and maintain their roots. I only wish the rest of my family can join us. But the future is in Montreal...

Sanaa Domat's Story | Analysis Worksheet

**EXCERPT 1: LIFE IN SYRIA**

**1. Was Sanaa's decision to leave Syria immediate? Did she want to stay in Syria at first?**

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**2. What does her story tell us about life like in Syria during the conflict?**

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**3. Sanna's family decided to move from Homs to another town in Syria. At this point, she and her family were Internally Displaced Persons. Discuss the concept of Internally Displaced People. How is this different from the concept of refugees?**

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**4. Was it easy or difficult for Sanaa and her family to leave Syria? Justify your response.**

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## Sanaa Domat's Story | Analysis Worksheet

### EXCEPT 2: LIFE IN CANADA

**1. Describe Sanaa's journey to Canada.**

**2. How were Sanaa and her family welcomed in Canada?**

**3. Sanaa talks about her children. What challenges might refugee children face, in particular?**

**4. Does Sanaa feel like part of the Canadian community, or does she feel like an outsider? Justify your response.**

**5. How can we help new people feel welcome into our community? Why is it important to create an inclusive community?**

**6. As members of a global community, what do you think should be the role of the United States in welcoming refugees into this country?**