



Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies Outreach Program

Ideas for Teaching about the Arab Refugee Crisis

The Syrian refugee crisis, in its scale, intensity and duration, has served as a clarion call regarding the urgency of an ever-growing global refugee population. These activities aim to foster an atmosphere of conversation and broadened perspective of the crisis in the classroom. These activities explore the refugee crisis by incorporating stories of refugees, analyzing the global response to the crisis through political cartoons, evoking empathy, and more. The ideas below can be used to teach about refugees in a unit on Arab refugees, or integrated throughout the school year to ensure student understanding of the current global refugee crisis.

For other links on teaching about refugees, related themes, and numerous additional topics, visit the Middle East Consortium's Website with Teaching Resources at: <http://ncmideast.org/outreach/teaching/>. Ctrl + F "Refugee" to go directly to the refugee section.

Use Refugee Voices in Your Classroom

It is important to incorporate voices of those affected by the crisis to gain a better understanding of the situation. Here are two good sources of stories from Arab refugees:

- Washington Post: 18 Stories from the Syrian Exodus: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/syrian-refugees/story/refuge/>. These short vignettes tell the stories of 18 different Syrian refugees from all stages of life. The goal is to document the size and complexity of the crisis, showing its effects on the lives of individual refugees as well as the lasting impacts on the countries hosting them. Note: some of these stories include harsh realities – use discretion in assigning to your students.
- Stories collected from Duke students in a *Refugee Lives* interactive learning course from Iraq and Sudan: <http://sites.duke.edu/arabiccommunities/> (Click on Stories in the top right corner)
- **Utilize the stories as discussion pieces for learning about the lived experiences of refugees:** Assign a story to each student (or to each pair/group of students). Instruct students to read the story, and discuss (as a class or in pairs/small groups):
 - Who are you reading about? What is their name? Their age?
 - Where is this individual from (country of origin)? Where are they going?
 - Why and when did he/she leave their home country?
 - What challenges has he/she faced on their journey?
 - What does this story reveal about the lives of refugees?



Have students switch groups and read/discuss a different story. After students have had the chance to read more than one story, discuss the following as a class:

- Which story most impacted you the most and why?
- Did you see any similarities, repeated themes, common opinions, etc. among any of the individuals?
- Why should people care about the experiences of refugees around the world?
- **Writing Prompts:** Based on the information presented in the stories, provide students with a writing prompt that requires them to engage with the individual's experience and/or themes of human

rights. (For example, "Write a dialogue between two individuals who you've learned about." Or, "What is the role of the international community in protecting refugees?")

Utilize UNCHR Reports and Statistics

The UNHCR has several great resources explaining their work with refugee populations. You might assign your students reading as homework or classwork from:

- [The Global Appeal](#) (Use Global Appeal 2016-2017, or the most recent publication): The Global Appeal is an invaluable guide for general readers to UNHCR's worldwide operations. Go to
- [UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks](#) (Use the most recent yearbook): These yearbooks follow major trends in displacement, protection and solutions.
- The Statistical Yearbook Infographics are also good visual representations: [Page 1](#) and [Page 2](#)
- If you have time and the technology; use [A Bird's Eye View](#). This takes you on a virtual reality tour with the UN refugee agency of some of the world's major displacement crises and the humanitarian efforts aimed at helping the victims. See, hear and develop an emotional understanding of what it is like to be a refugee.



Regardless of the reading you assign your students. Have them answer the following questions as writing prompts, in small groups, or in a whole-class discussion:

- Who is the UNCHR? What does it do?
- Summarize its strategy for the Middle East and North Africa.
- What are the challenges of working in the Middle East and North Africa?
- What countries are accepting the most refugees?
- Compare and contract budgets for spending in the Middle East and North Africa with spending in other regions and countries.

Use Political Cartoons to Understand the Global Response to the Refugee Crisis

Political cartoons are vivid primary sources that offer insight into political and public attitudes toward a certain situation or event. In this activity, students will understand the variety of responses to Arab refugee crisis by working in jigsaw groups. Remind students that political cartoons are expressions of opinion! They use emotional appeals and other techniques to persuade others to accept those opinions, and represent only ONE point of view, which is often a heavily biased.

Make copies of four political cartoons taken from newspapers and magazines about the refugee crisis. We recommend cartoons that represent interpretations of different countries' responses to the crisis, i.e. the European Union, Arab Gulf States, US policy from both the Democratic and Republican parties, from the perspective of Syrians, etc.

- Jigsaw: Divide the class into mixed groups of four with one member assigned to each cartoon and distribute the [Cartoon Analysis Checklist](#) from TeachingHistory.org. Working individually, have them answer the following questions, and then briefly share with their group.
 - What are your first impressions of this cartoon? Interpret the message of the cartoon.
 - Who likely drew this cartoon; someone in the United States? A refugee? Someone in Europe?
 - Describe what is happening in this cartoon.
 - What visual symbols and metaphors are used?

- Consider whether irony is used and if so, how?
- Identify any stereotypes and caricatures and consider what they communicate.

Next, gather students into "expert" groups, in which all members are assigned the same cartoon. Students revisit their initial responses to these questions and synthesize information. Have groups come up with a challenge to the point of view represented in the cartoon, regardless of their personal opinions. Then have students return to their "jigsaw" groups to share their learning. Afterwards, as a class, discuss the following:

- What groups did each cartoon appeal to?
- What values does the cartoon express?

- **Assignment: Students will create their own political cartoon that represents the opposite point of view from the one they were assigned.**

Final cartoons should:

- Include at least one of the following elements: irony, exaggeration, symbolism
- Depict a challenge to the point of view represented in their 'expert group' cartoon (for example, a student assigned a cartoon that critiques the European Union's acceptance of Arab refugees might create a cartoon expressing the opinion that the European Union is being as accommodating and welcoming as possible)
- Be creative and show that that the creator of the cartoon put forth thought, time, and effort into the design



Research Groups Working with Refugees in North Carolina

The refugee crisis can be perceived as something distant/far-away and difficult to understand. Bring conversations about refugees closer to home by having students research an organization that works with refugees in North Carolina.

- **Assign an organization to pairs or small groups of students:**
 - Carolina Refugee Resettlement Agency (CRRRA): <http://carolinarefugee.org/default.html>
 - Church World Service-RDU: <http://cwsrdu.org/>
 - Injaz, Duke: <https://duke.collegiatelink.net/organization/injaz>
 - North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/refugee-services>
 - Lutheran Services Carolinas: <http://www.lscarolinas.net/services-for-refugees/refugee-resettlement/>

Ask students to research their organization and answer the following questions:

- What is the mission of this organization?
- Where is it located? What communities or cities does it work in?
- Who does the organization serve? (Does it focus on refugees only, or does it serve other populations?)
- What services does it offer refugees?
- Where does funding come from for this organization?
- What other services do you think the organization could offer that would be of use to refugees and their families?

- **Have each student create a brochure or poster for incoming refugees that explain what these organizations offer.**

Final products should:

- Include visuals such as art work, pictures, symbols, etc. that represent the organization and its work (can be literal or abstract)
- Teach the reader what the organization provides
- Be creative, colorful, and show that the creator of the brochure or poster put forth thought, time, and effort into the design

- **Have students write a proposal to the fictional “North Carolina Foundation”, raising money for their organization’s projects.**

Final reports should:

- Include background information about the organization
- Describe the project that needs funding
- Explain how this money would be spent
- Be persuasive: Why is this topic important? Why should the Foundation allocate money for this cause?

Creative Writing Prompt: Use Empathy

After students have an understanding of various refugee experiences, assign a creative writing prompt that encourages them to use empathy. Empathy is an important 21st century skill to develop in students, and is essential to building relationships, appreciating differences across humankind, and developing communication skills. Read, “[Empathy: The Most Important Back-to-School Supply](#)” by Homa Tavangar. Come up with a writing prompt such as, “Imagine that you are a refugee who has just arrived in North Carolina. You speak limited English and are unfamiliar with American cultural norms. Describe your first reactions of being in another country. You have heard America described as a land of immigrants. Does your experience match this description thus far?”

Note: Be aware of students who may have personal connections to this topic

Though the focus of these activities is on Arab refugees, it is important to stay aware and support students in your classroom who might have certain associations with this theme. For example, your Latino students might have family members who have made similar journeys. Your Muslim students might be fearful of xenophobic rhetoric. You may have refugees from other countries in your classroom. Be sure to: model open-mindedness, have the class establish ground rules for discussion, never ask a student to speak for a whole group, and make sure all students feel that they belong in your class. Check out [these strategies](#) for anti-bias education in the classroom from Teaching Tolerance.

Links for Additional Ideas, Lesson Plans, and Resources (hyperlinks in blue)

- [Pulitzer Center lesson on “Syria’s Children”](#): The Pulitzer Center has some great lessons/materials on Syria. Check out this lesson – with a PDF of a book with readings that you can assign to different groups in your class.
- [The Syrian Refugee Crisis and U.S. Policy: A Civil Conversation](#): The United States has been a safe haven for the world’s refugees throughout its history. In recent years, violent and brutal conflicts in the Syrian civil war have driven millions of people from their homes. What should U.S. policy be for these refugees? The Constitutional Rights Foundation’s civil conversation method gets your students

engaged in policy-based discussions on this crucial controversy of the day. Access [The Syrian Refugee Crisis and U.S. Policy civil conversation activity](#) and [FAQ on the Syrian Civil War](#).

- [Refugee Stories: Mapping a Crisis](#): A free lesson by The Choices Program, Brown University. Includes a vocab sheet with good key terms!
- [“I Am Syria” Website](#): This website has resources to help teachers teach about the crisis in Syria. It’s a not-for-profit educational site made by teachers, for teachers. The directions don’t have a complicated curriculum guide that no one has time to read; but instead, the site offers materials that you can click and use tomorrow in a secondary Social Studies or English class—with copies, video links, and power points all good-to-go!
- [The Chapter on Refugees in the TeachMideast Digital Book](#): The end of the chapter on refugees has great classroom activities. The rest of this book is yet to be completed- stay tuned!
- [UNCHR Lesson Plans on Refugees](#): The UNHCR has developed lesson modules for three different age groups that will help teachers introduce refugee issues into the curriculum of these different subject areas. This extends beyond the Middle East.
- [How to Teach about Refugees](#): This article from The Guardian (based in London) provides lesson ideas for teaching students about Refugee Crises around the globe. The article was originally published in honor of Refugee Week (begins June 15 in the UK).
- [Short Video \(6:30\) on the Refugee Crisis](#): This short video is titled “The European Refugee Crisis and Syria Explained.” It’s animated and high-interest – though they explain things very quickly.
- [Syria’s War: a 5-minute history](#): This short video by Vox explains the political and diplomatic crisis around Syria chronologically in 5 minutes.
- [Understanding the Refugee Crisis in Europe, Syria, and around the World](#): In [this 9 minute video](#), John Greene discusses the growing number of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea crossing the sea with the help of smugglers to seek refuge in the EU. He speaks quickly, but brings up many important points. Disclaimer; it’s a pretty liberal take on things.
- [Slideshow: Photographers Aim to Put a Face on Europe’s Migrant Crisis](#): At the bottom of this article, “The 5 Big Questions about Europe’s Migrant Crisis” is a good slideshow titled “Photographers Aim to Put a Face on Europe’s Migrant Crisis.”
- [Frontline Article](#): How Europe’s Refugee Crisis Was Years in the Making... also, [Frontline’s Syria at War](#)

For questions regarding these ideas or additional information, contact Emma Harver, Program/Outreach Coordinator for the [Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies](#): harver@email.unc.edu.