

# THE MIDDLE EAST EXPLAINED

A project of the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

### Video: The Historical Roots of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

*This video is recommended for use in advanced Middle School, and High School classrooms.*

#### Video Overview

The civil war in Syria has resulted in an ever-growing refugee population. This 10 minute video provides the context for understanding why so many Syrians have fled their homes.

Dr. cooke situates Syria on the map before providing a brief political history of the country, focusing on the rule of the al-Assad family from 1970 until the present day (2016). 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. Examining this history is key to understanding why so many Syrians have fled their homes.

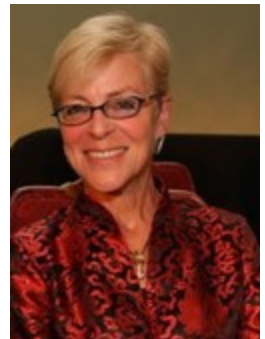
#### Learning Objectives

After watching this video, students will be able to:

- Outline a brief political history of Syria.
- Summarize the factors that led to the beginning of the war in Syria.
- Identify the key players in the civil war.
- Explain the role of outside powers in the conflict.
- Conclude how the conflict has affected the civilian population in Syria.

#### About the Speaker

miriam cooke is Braxton Craven Professor of Arab Cultures at Duke University. She has been a visiting professor in Tunisia, Romania, Indonesia, Qatar and in Istanbul. Her publications focus on Arab culture. Her writings have focused on the intersection of gender and war in modern Arabic literature and on Arab women writers' constructions of Islamic feminism. Her more recent interests have turned to Arab cultural studies with a concentration on Syria, and to the networked connections among Arabs and Muslims around the world. Her forthcoming book, *Dancing in Damascus: The Aesthetics of the Syrian Revolution* examines the role of creative arts in sustaining the people's revolution against the al-Assad regime.



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## Classroom Activities: The Historical Roots of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

**Materials/Resources Needed:** “The Historical Roots of the Syrian Refugee Crisis” video link (<http://youtu.be/tR2IaJSOLGw?list=PLSdleNHvfGH0itmAtuBzkfsedc18vDP3>), copies of the Student Viewing Guide  
*Option: Rather making copies for each student, teachers may project one copy of the discussion questions for the entire class.*

**In preparation for this lesson,** students should be aware of the Syrian refugee crisis.

**Step 1:** Explain that Syria’s civil war has caused the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Tell students that it is important to understand Syrian history to understand why so many people are fleeing the country. Tell students that they will watch a 10-minute video that will provide background knowledge of the crisis.

**Step 2:** Pass out the Student Viewing Guide. Before playing the video, ask students to read through the key terms and timeline. Discuss key terms as a group. Then, inform students that they will answer Comprehension Questions as they watch the video.

*Differentiation: Divide students into small groups and assign a couple of questions to each group member. After the video, ask students to explain their answers to their small group.*

**Step 3:** Play the video. Give students extra time after the video is complete to finish answering the Comprehension Questions on the Student Guide. Check for understanding by going over answers to the questions out loud as a class.

**Step 4:** To encourage further understanding, consider facilitating a class discussion or addressing the following points:

- Why is it important to recognize the neighboring countries of Syria? Which countries have accepted the majority of Syrian refugees?
- What is the significance of the al-Assad family’s identity as Alawite?
- How has the emergence of the Islamic State changed the way the al-Assad regime is fighting the war in Syria?
- What does this video reveal about the lives of refugees?
- Now that you understand the background of the war in Syria, do you have a different understanding of refugees?

### **Assessment:**

Informal Student Performance Assessment: Observation of each student participating in small group or class discussions.

Formal Assessment: Written student responses on the Student Viewing Guide. Good responses will demonstrate understanding of learning objectives.

**Extension:** After watching the video, further topics for exploration include the journey of migrants out of Syria, the lives of refugees, the impact of the refugee crisis on Europe, policy in the United States for accepting refugees, and the role of the international community in protecting refugees.