



The Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies Outreach Program

Arab Refugee Lives: Sufyan’s Story

Overview: Through this lesson, students will gain a greater understanding of the various challenges that Iraqi refugees face. Students will read excerpts from an interview with Sufyan A., an Iraqi man originally from Baghdad. Students will learn about his experience in both his native country and in his 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/>.

Grades	9-12
NCSCOS Common Core and Essential Standards	WH.H.7 Understand how national, regional, and ethnic interests have contributed to conflict among groups and nations in the modern era. 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. AH2.H.7 Understand the impact of war on American politics, economics, society and culture. AH2.H.8 Analyze the relationship between progress, crisis and the “American Dream” within the United States.
Learning Outcomes	Students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the concept of ‘identity’ • Examine challenges of adjusting to new life in another country • Evaluate individual experiences of Iraqi refugees living in North Carolina
Materials/Resources	Copies of interview excerpts and analysis worksheets Computers or tablets with internet access Speakers
Time Required For Lesson	1 hour

Opening Activity – 10 minutes

- Write one or all of the following sentence starters on the board. Ask students to free write using the sentence starter(s) for 5 minutes.
 - An object that was passed down in my family is...
 - Something important that I learned from my parents or grandparents is...
 - My earliest memory from my childhood is...
 - The language(s) spoken in my home are...
- Ask volunteers to share their responses.
- Explain that refugee families often become separated as they transition from one home to another. Refugee children may end up spending most of their lives in a new country, and may not remember the language, culture, people, and places of their countries of origin. These families may feel like they have multiple identities: they may identify with their country of origin and also their new host country.

Main Activities | Excerpt 1: Moving to the United States – 20-35 minutes

1. Though the media has most recently focused on Syrian refugees, there are many other Arab refugee populations resettling in the United States. Share that millions of Iraqis have been forced by insecurity to flee their homes throughout the past 30-40 years. Iraqis have fled their country due to series of conflicts including the Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988), Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait (1990) and the Gulf War (1991), and the most recent Iraq War (2003-2011) and continuing conflict. The number of people fleeing Iraq increased significantly during the latest Iraq War.

2. [Optional] If you would like to provide a more in-depth history of Iraq, you may do the following match-up activity:

- Cut out the Iraq Timeline cards, and pass out one to each student. Each card either has an event or a description of an event. You may add additional details if you would like.
- Ask students to pair up, matching event to description. During this process, ask students to organize themselves in chronological order.
- Have each pair read out their event and description to the class. Determine whether or not they have found their correct match. Re-pair students so that they have the correct match.
- When the timeline is complete, draw a timeline on the board. Have students tape their events to the timeline in the correct order. Share that this timeline will stay on the board for the duration of the class period.

2. Pass out the excerpts and analysis worksheet. Ask students to read excerpt one from Sufyan's interview, "Moving to the United States". Individually in small groups, have students fill out the worksheet. As a class, discuss:

- Why did Sufyan leave his home country?
- Does Sufyan want to return to Iraq? Justify your response.
- Sufyan says, "People are people everywhere." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- Israa feels unhappy because she has trouble communicating in her new host country. Have you ever been in a place or environment when you didn't understand what was being said around you? How did that make you feel?

Main Activities | Excerpt 2: Memories of Iraq – 20 minutes

1. Ask students to think about their family heritage. You may have students write their thoughts down, discuss in pairs, or as a class:

- What is your family heritage?
- Do you identify with a certain city, state, region, or country? Multiple places?
- What components make up your identity? Race, ethnicity, culture, age, other factors?
- What makes you unique and different from others?
- Do you think identity is static (unchanging), or dynamic (changing over time)?
- Do your parents or grandparents have a similar sense of identity to you? Why or why not?

2. Play excerpt two from Sufyan's interview, "Memories of Iraq" for the class

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=217&v=7TcrzKo48ME, 2:06–3:35), or have a student from

the class read the excerpt out loud. This excerpt illustrates challenges that refugees may face regarding their families and identities. As a class, discuss the following:

- Why are Sufyan and Israa teaching their daughters Arabic?
- What challenges is the family facing with communicating?
- Noor and Aisha are growing up with multiple identities. How can they be both Iraqi and American at the same time?
- What does this story reveal about the lives of refugees?

Assessment | Exit Ticket – 5 minutes

Have students complete the following exit ticket:

1. Write down one thing that you learned about the history of Iraq.
2. Write down one characteristic that might contribute to a person's identity.
3. Write down two challenges that Iraqi refugees may face in adjusting to life in a new country.

Excerpts of interviews with Sufyan A. by Adia Coley and Maria Luisa Frasson, Duke University

Source: <http://sites.duke.edu/arabiccommunities/2015/04/01/uprooted/>

Listen to the audio of the interview in English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TcrzKo48ME>

The following is the transcript from an interview with Sufyan and his wife, Israa. Sufyan and Israa are originally from Iraq, and they now live in North Carolina.

EXCERPT 1: MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES

I used to work in the US Army, starting May 2003, right after the start of the war. Since my job was working with American forces, some people in my village and in my society knew that I'm working with Americans. This made me in a dangerous position for me and my family so I have to move to another place in Baghdad, relocate myself and my family to another place. Even that wasn't 100% safe, so I had to leave with my family. I was wishing to take my whole family here to the US because it's safer for them.

...I wish, and I think every refugee wishes, to go back to their home where they have their families. I'm not saying it is bad here, no, there are nice people here. We like the weather, and there are a lot of similarities between the American people and the Iraqi people. I mean, people are people everywhere. It's just safer for us. It's just like taking a flower and replanting in another place. There's still some kind of roots - I still have roots there. I wish I can go and visit and come back here, I think this is safer for my family.

...I still see people struggling you know, it's a big challenge for them. I have noticed even my wife sometimes, she cries because she told me that she cannot communicate with people because she doesn't know their language and she's afraid to talk to them because they might misunderstand her or maybe laugh at her. I told, try to have the courage. Try, at least try.

EXCERPT 2: MEMORIES OF IRAQ

For my two daughters Aisha and Noor, they were born in Iraq, and when we came here in 2012 they were only three and four years old. They don't have too much to remember about Iraq, maybe only their grandpa and grandmothers. Sometimes we do show them pictures of family back home, so they can remember and realize—like this is your uncle, this is your aunt or your grandma from your father's or mother's side. It's a big change for them, yes, because lifestyles is different, culture is different, but, like I said, they don't have a lot of things to remember from back home. That's why we try to teach them first our language, which we would like them to keep, and also try to tell them who they are and where they came from.

...We've noticed that she [Noor], that actually both of them now, they are trying to speak English and are using English words more than Arabic language or Arabic words, and sometimes I even find my wife, because she doesn't speak much English, she'll tell me, "What does this mean? She told me something I don't know what it is," and I ask my daughter what she told her mother, and then she'll say it in English. So I try to explain to my wife what did she say or what did she mean.

Sufyan's Story | Analysis Worksheet

EXCERPT 1:

1. Why did Sufyan leave his home country?

2. Does Sufyan want to return to Iraq? Justify your response.

3. Sufyan says, "people are people everywhere." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

4. Israa feels unhappy because she has trouble communicating in her new host country. Have you ever been in a place or environment when you didn't understand what was being said around you? How did that make you feel?

Sufyan's Story | Analysis Worksheet

EXCERPT 2:

1. Why are Sufyan and Israa teaching their daughters Arabic?

2. What challenges is the family facing with communicating?

3. Noor and Aisha are growing up with multiple identities. How can they be both Iraqi and American at the same time?

4. What does this story reveal about the lives of refugees?

Iraq Timeline Cards

1932

Iraq gains Independence from Britain.

1958

First in a series of coups d'état in Iraq.

1979

Saddam Hussein becomes president of Iraq.

1980-1988

1990

1991

Iran-Iraq war. The causes of the war stem from a number of territorial and political disputes between Iraq and Iran.

Iraq invades Kuwait, prompting what becomes known as the first Gulf War.

A war waged by coalition forces from 34 nations led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. The operation was codenamed Operation Desert Storm.

1991

UN Security Council adopts Resolution 661 which imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, providing for a full trade embargo, excluding medical supplies, food and other items of humanitarian necessity, these to be determined by the Council's sanctions committee. From 1991 until 2003, the effects of government policy and sanctions regime led to hyperinflation, widespread poverty and malnutrition, causing many Iraqis to flee the country.

1990s

During the 1990s, ordinary Iraqis suffer hardships due to UN sanctions. Saddam Hussein remains in power as president.

2001

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the George W. Bush administration begins planning the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's government.

2003, March

A United States-organized coalition invades Iraq, under the pretext that Iraq had failed to abandon its weapons of mass destruction program in violation of U.N. Resolution 687.

2003, April

Baghdad falls to U.S.-led forces on April 9, marked symbolically by the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue. This marks start of years of violent conflict with different groups competing for power.

2005

Iraqis vote for the first, full-term government and parliament since the US-led invasion.

2006

A wave of sectarian violence is sparked. Hundreds of people are killed.

2009

US troops hand over security duties to Iraqi forces, though they continue to work with Iraqi forces after the pullout.

2011

The final contingent of US troops is withdrawn from Iraq – they ceremonially exit over the border to Kuwait.

2011

Following the withdrawal of US troops in 2011, the insurgency continues and Iraq suffers from political instability.

2012

Levels of violence increase and armed groups inside Iraq are increasingly stirred up by the Syrian Civil War.

2013

Terrorist organizations like the Islamic State have taken advantage of the chaos and violence to establish a presence in Iraq.