

Lied Discovery Children's Museum



5th Grade Lesson Plan: “Through the Eyes of a Refugee”

Introduction

What does it mean to be a refugee?

A visit to ***Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee*** helps to answer this question for students as they consider how it would feel to leave everything behind when forced to flee one's home. Using the perspectives of refugee children, the exhibition guides visitors through various interactive components which facilitate an understanding of refugee experiences: losing home, living in a camp, securing food and water on a daily basis, going to school, and resettling.

Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee provides 8 to 12-year-old students with an introduction to the plight of refugees and the importance of human rights. Students explore the human side of today's refugee crisis and gain an understanding of the hardship and hope experienced by nearly 30 million refugees worldwide. The exhibition was developed in collaboration with international and local refugee aid organizations.

This lesson plan is designed to support student learning both in the classroom and in conjunction with an in-depth visit to the interactive exhibit, *Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee*. Developed for 5th graders, this lesson facilitates student understanding of, and empathy for, the circumstances and lives of refugees. Activities also encourage students to consider some of the reasons why refugees have to leave their homes and native countries, and how their lives are affected. It is designed to encourage tolerance, understanding and empathy with children and teens in refugee situations.

Educational Objectives

As a result of participating in this lesson plan, students will consider and discuss the following questions:

- What is a refugee?
- What conditions cause refugees to flee their homelands?
- What are some of the countries refugees come from?
- How does being a refugee impact one's relationships family?, economic status, home life, health, and education? How does this compare to the lives of students?
- How important are symbols in educating the world about the plight of refugees?

Learners

This lesson plan is designed for 5th grade students, although it can be adapted to support or suit individual student needs and interests.

The Importance of the Topic for This Age Group

Intolerance can be learned from a very early age and adult attitudes can be difficult to change. It is therefore very important to support & implement multicultural human rights education as early as possible. It is only through exposure, familiarity, and safe and open discussions that students can feel sameness and appreciate differences of the many cultures our society needs to embrace in an effort to promote unity and aid in conflict resolution. By giving students the background they need, we can expect our students to be tolerant and responsible citizens. They will be more willing to choose constructive problem solving over conflict and violence and be more empathetic and motivated to help those in need.¹

Materials

- Computer(s) with internet access (for viewing video clips) is ideal. Computer labs could be used. (This is ideal, but not required, as printed materials could be obtained in advance.)
- Student copies of BEYOND THE FIRE “Life Experience Comparison Sheets” (see **Activity Attachments**).
- If using, a copy of the UNHCR video **To Be A Refugee**. (See ordering information below.)
- VCR & Monitor
- A copy of the June 1985 issue of *National Geographic* featuring Sharbat Gula on the cover to show to students. The image is also available here:
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/09/refugee.html>
- The follow-up article in the April 2002 issue of *National Geographic*: “A Life Revealed,” available at: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/index-text>
- Books (See information below.)
- Globe or world map

Resources

¹ Excerpted and adapted from Amnesty International Lesson “We are One Family”:
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/lesson-plans/we-are-one-family-my-family--your-family--our-families/page.do?id=1051076&n1=4&n2=79&n3=225>

Vocabulary: For a list of pertinent vocabulary words, see the **Glossary of Terms** provided on the Education page at www.TornFromHome.org or in educator materials available through host museums.

"**Refugees** are people who flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. A refugee either cannot return home, or is afraid to do so."²

Books: A **Recommended Reading** list is provided on the Education page at www.TornFromHome.org or in educator materials available through host museums.

Teaching Resources:

The **UNHCR** (The UN Refugee Agency) website is a rich resource for teachers preparing lessons for students about refugees.

<http://www.unhcr.org/help/4072c8174.html>

UNHCR Educational Kits, Teaching Guides and Videos are available, free of charge, upon request. To view selection, go to:

<http://www.unhcr.org/help/4083cb6c4.html>

Public Affairs Unit
UNHCR
94, rue de Montbrillant
1202 Geneva
Switzerland
E-mail: hqpa01@unhcr.org
Fax: + 41 22 739 7367

USA for UNHCR Teacher's Corner

<http://www.usaforunhcr.org/educationalresources.cfm>

BEYOND THE FIRE

BEYOND THE FIRE introduces the real-life stories of 15 teenagers, now living in the U.S., who have survived war in seven war zones. These stories tell of loss, hope, fear, strength and despair—and most of all, resilience. Educator resources include: an interactive world map, teen refugee stories (using audio and Flash-animated movies), conflict timelines, information about countries from which refugees fled, lesson plans and additional resources. See website for educators:

<http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/education.html>

National Geographic Expeditions

General Lesson Plan Search Results using “refugee” “lessons” “all grades” “geography”

² Definition of refugee from the 1951 Refugee Convention:
http://www.unhcr.org.ua/main.php?article_id=8&view=full

http://thinkfinity.org/PartnerSearch.aspx?Search=True&orgn_id=4&subject=geography&partner=all&resource_type=lessons&q=refugee&grade=all

“Through the Eyes of a Refugee” activity:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/09/refugee.html>

Video segments about the search for Sharbat Gula (see below):

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/sight-and-sounds-interactive>

National Geographic article “A Life Revealed”:

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/index-text>

Amnesty International

Human Rights Education Lesson Plans

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/educate/lesson-plans/page.do?id=1102163&n1=4&n2=79&n3=225>

Lesson plans are targeted to elementary through high school students.

Approximate Time Needed

This lesson will take two to four 45-minute class periods.

Preparation

- If using this lesson plan as preparation to see *Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee*, teachers are encouraged to review background material provided at www.TornFromHome.org to become familiar with refugee issues and the content of the exhibition.
- Teachers are also encouraged to think about the subject of refugees, and consider how their students will absorb and process the information. Certainly, being forced to leave one’s home, military conflicts, death, and the possibility of being separated from family members are frightening possibilities. The emphasis of this lesson plan is twofold: to encourage students to consider 1) the reasons why refugees have to leave their homes and native countries, and 2) how their lives are affected. The goal is to familiarize students with underlying ideas to provide a base for comprehending more complex, and more difficult issues. Teachers must determine the comfort level of their students and adapt this lesson plan as appropriate.
- Visit the school or local library to select books for the classroom about refugees and children and families around the world. (See **Resources**.)
- Request a copy of the UNHCR video **To Be A Refugee** (available, free of charge, from the Public Information Section UNHCR – see contact information above <http://www.unhcr.org/help/4083cb6c4.html>)

- Obtain a copy of the June 1985 issue of *National Geographic* featuring Sharbat Gula on the cover to show to students. The image is also available here: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/09/refugee.html>
- Review the section of the BEYOND THE FIRE website for educators (<http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/education.html>) to determine the best way to present its features and learning experiences in your classroom, depending on equipment availability and time. (If computer access isn't available, transcripts of refugee stories may be used: <http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/transcripts.html> .)
- Make copies for students of BEYOND THE FIRE “Life Experience Comparison Sheets.” (Text is provided below in **Activity Attachments**.)

Procedure

Introductory Activity: Watch **To Be A Refugee**

- Ask students: "What do you think a refugee is?" Encourage the students to listen to each other's response to this question and then watch the video **To Be A Refugee**.
- The video is short (about 15 minutes) so there should be sufficient class time to stop the video from time to time to explain something, check the world map or globe, ask questions to check student comprehension, and to stimulate and encourage empathy for children who have had to flee their homes.

Activity 1: “BEYOND THE FIRE”

(Approximately 1 to 2 class periods, with Introductory Activity above)

Background for Teacher

This activity gives students an opportunity to look at the world of war refugees and explore the life experiences of refugee pre-teens and teens. On the website, students can listen to and watch the stories of war refugees featured on the BEYOND THE FIRE website and look for common themes in these stories. At the same time, students will be asked to look at their own life experiences, comparing and contrasting them with the lives of their peers who have survived war and immigrated to the United States. While there will clearly be many differences, students may be surprised to learn that they also have some things in common with these teens—whether it is a shared interest in sports, or a shared experience of family hardships.

Students will fill out “Life Experience Comparison Sheets” comparing the experiences of teen war refugees with their own experiences, and use this chart for group discussions and presentations.

- I. Open the lesson by having students listen to one or two of the refugee stories from the BEYOND THE FIRE website. (If computer access isn't available, transcripts of refugee stories may be used: <http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/transcripts.html> .) Ask students

to consider what social and political conditions caused these teens to flee their homeland and come to the United States.

2. Next, ask students to consider the type of life experience that the typical American pre-teen/teen might have compared to that of the refugees featured.
3. Break students into small groups and distribute copies of “Life Experience Comparison Sheets.” (See text below in Activity Attachments.)
4. Explain each part of the comparison sheet to students:

Name:	The name of the refugee and his/her nationality.
Home life:	How conditions in the refugee’s home country, or here in the U.S., have affected the family structure and relationships within the family.
Education:	How being a refugee has impacted schooling, regular attendance at school, types of educational opportunities.
Economic conditions:	How the experience of living through war and being a refugee has impacted the family’s financial situation, access to jobs, etc.
Social life:	How the refugee’s experience has affected his/her friends, boyfriend or girlfriend, social life or social status (for example, rights of females in Afghanistan as controlled by the Taliban).
Other information:	This space can be used if the student finds other topics they wish to compare.

5. Instruct students listen to (or read) at least **three stories** from the BEYOND THE FIRE website and complete the sheet to the best of their ability.

(NOTE: Space for three nations/refugees is included on the sample sheet provided here. The teacher may wish to increase or decrease the number of comparison countries based on time allotted for the lesson or depth of the lesson desired.)

In order to comprehend the life experience and problems facing refugees with some depth, it is recommended that the teacher require students to look at refugees from at least **three different nations**. It is possible that not every story will address every category on the comparison sheet.

6. Have groups present summaries of their sheets, perhaps role-playing each of the teens in order to discuss their experiences.

Activity 2: Missing Person

(Approximately 1 to 2 class periods)

1. Show students the cover photo from the June 1985 issues of *National Geographic*, and inform them of the class mission: to find the refugee girl whose photograph was first taken 25 years ago.
2. Provide students with the following background:

In 1983, National Geographic photographer, Steve McCurry, captured the image of a girl from Afghanistan who had walked for more than two weeks before arriving at a refugee camp in Pakistan.

(Teachers may want to ask students to locate Afghanistan on the world map or globe.)

The photograph became a **symbol** of the strength and the pain of refugees, people who must leave their homes to escape danger or persecution. Due to strict rules in the girl's culture about taking photographs, especially of women, McCurry was never able to contact this girl to tell her that her picture was on the cover of National Geographic magazine. In fact, he never even knew her name.

The photographer and other people from the National Geographic Society tried for years to find this girl again, even though they knew that the older she got, the harder it would be—especially because Muslim women in this region often wear *burkas*, traditional garments that cover their faces and most of their bodies. To add to the challenge, when they returned to the refugee camp where the photo was taken, it was completely deserted.

3. Discuss the following questions with students:
 - *How would you go about locating a missing person who is also a refugee?* Have students make a list of people who might have known this girl and think about what they would ask them. For example, what might her teacher know about her? What clues could you get from her former neighbors? If you found someone that looks like he or she could be her brother or sister, what might you say?
 - Think about how a person's appearance changes when they get older. Encourage students to think about themselves or family members growing older. What distinguishing features remain the same? What will change? Think about what life might be like as a refugee and how that would affect one's health. What impact could this have on one's appearance?
4. Inform students that the refugee girl was eventually found, 17 years later. Her name is Sharbat Gula. Show students the video of the story at: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/sight-and-sounds-interactive>
Or have them read the article “A Life Revealed,” available at: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2002/04/afghan-girl/index-text>

(the video link is on the left side).

5. Discuss the following questions with students:

- *Why do you think this photograph took on so much significance? Why was the image so captivating to so many people?*
- *What does Sharbat Gula's life story tell us about the refugee experience? What are some of the issues she faced and overcame?*

Extensions: Suggested Pre- and Post-Visit Activities

Teachers are encouraged to alter the activities described above as needed. Units can be streamlined or extended according to educational goals and time available.

This lesson is most appropriate as preparation for a visit to the *Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee* exhibit, but it could be used to reflect on students' thoughts and experiences following a visit.

Connect the lesson plan to Geography curriculum by assigning students, or groups of students, countries to study. (As preparation to visit *Torn From Home: My Life as a Refugee*, groups can focus on some of the countries featured, including: Afghanistan, Chechnya, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, and Sudan.) Have students prepare presentations about recent events which have caused people to flee. Encourage them to include information about the numbers of people affected, and if possible, their current status.

The Doctors without Borders Refugee Camp online interactive exhibit provides photos and information about life inside the camps: <http://www.refugeecamp.org/home/refugeecamp.htm>

Connect the lesson plan to the Health curriculum by assigning students, or groups of students, medical and health-related issues in refugee camps. Visit the Doctors Without Borders site above. Topics could include: contaminated water, water-borne diseases that cause diarrhea (such as dysentery & cholera), emotional trauma, weakened immune systems, malnutrition, malaria, or measles. Have students prepare presentations to share with the class. Encourage them to include information about the numbers of people affected by these health-related issues, and what is being done by organizations like Doctors Without Borders.

Teachers might also search for organizations in their area that serve war refugees, and inquire about having a guest speaker come to the class. Some organizations working with refugees may also have volunteer opportunities for students to extend the lesson outside of the classroom. (Check with the museum hosting the exhibition, as they may have already developed connections and will be able to assist.)

Credits

The activities in this lesson plan are adapted and/or excerpted from units developed by the BEYOND THE FIRE project and National Geographic:

BEYOND THE FIRE's "Comparing Life Experiences" Lesson Plan:

http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/Lesson_planI.html

National Geographic's "Through the Eyes of a Refugee" activity:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/09/refugee.html>

Activity Attachments

(See below.)

Sample “Life Experience Comparison Sheet”

Name/Nationality	Refugee #1	Refugee #2	Refugee #3	Me
Home Life (Family structure and relationships)				
Education (access to and conditions of schools)				
Economic Conditions (access to jobs, financial stability)				
Social life (Relationships with friends, quality of social life, social status)				
Other information (Anything else that is interesting to compare)				