

Unit: CRISIS

Lesson: **Refugee Life**

Time:

4-5 hours

Objectives & Skills:

By simulating population densities and addressing hypothetical obstacles to meeting basic human needs, students will use their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills to help lead them to a more vivid understanding of the conditions of refugee life.

Materials:

Tape or other material to mark off "camp" areas

Chalkboard, overhead, or butcher paper

Computer

Reading selections from *Refugee* links

Actual materials (e.g., bucket, blankets) listed on Supplies Handout or ways to simulate these. You might ask students to bring these items to class prior to the activity.

[Brainstorming Handout](#)

[Supplies Handout](#)

Preparations:

Teachers: Read all of the relevant articles from *Refugees* Issue 105 link.

Print out 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees definition of "refugee" from UNHCR: www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm

Internet Links:

Refugees Issue 105 Table of Contents www.unhcr.ch/pubs/rm105/rm105toc.htm

UNHCR-Who Is A Refugee? www.unhcr.ch/un&ref/who/whois.htm

Other Interesting Links:

www.unhcr.ch/refworld

www.encyclopedia.com (look up "refugee")

www.amnesty.org

www.c-r.org/acc_moz/contents_moz.htm

Students:

Watch for newspaper and news magazine articles that show evidence of the displacement of large numbers of people.

NOTE: You might consider following this recommended schedule:

Day 1: Premeditation and Activity I

Day 2: Finish Activity I. Look at photos of refugee camps or read a young person's story of a camp. Introduce the camp simulation in Activity II. Designate the space you'll use, set the "ground rules," establish the family groupings, etc. Ask students to consider how they might feel upon their arrival at a refugee camp; how would their life have been already uprooted?

Day 3: Start simulation right away, and plan to spend entire period on it.

Day 4: Depending on your students interest, spend half the period on continuing the simulation. Spend half a period for discussion.

The culmination of the STA safari was a brief stay in the Chifunga refugee camp. Although several of the young people had been to Africa before, none but Dan and Lengai had seen first-hand the way refugees live: the quarters were close, food was scarce, medicine was difficult to obtain. Yet the travelers were continually impressed by the organized and positive way people conducted their lives even under such difficult conditions.

This camp in Malawi was well-established, having been in existence since the beginning of the civil war in Mozambique seven years earlier. Many children had been born and raised there. But new refugees still arrived on a regular basis. The ongoing struggle for both the aid workers and the refugees was to accommodate this ever-growing population. In the United States, even in densely populated cities, there is generally an infrastructure (e.g., law enforcement, courts, welfare, Medicaid, low-income city services) that supports the basic needs of citizens. In a refugee camp, where land is finite, running water, electricity and basic plumbing are not part of daily life, and there is no centralized system of government to oversee the lives of citizens, how can people live together and manage their resources? This lesson helps students to think through some of the problems inherent to such a chaotic and limited living situation.

Premeditation:

Review the definition of "refugee." Give students time not only to understand the dictionary definition and/or the UNHCR definition of the word, but also to discuss the connotations and associations the word has for them (i.e. homeless? sad? poor?). You might alternatively ask students to put the word "refugee" at the top of a piece of paper and draw or write what comes to mind for them.

Activity I: Life in a Refugee Camp

Step 1:

- Break students into small groups and assign each group to read one of the articles from Life in a Refugee Camp (www.unhcr.ch/pubs/rm105/rm105toc.htm).

As students read, they should make notes about the following on their [Brainstorming Handouts](#):

- What characterizes a refugee camp?
- What factors limit the ability of refugees to live like they would if they were in their own country?
- What basic needs are refugees and aid workers most concerned with addressing?
- Note any other main points or issues raised by the reading.

Step 2:

- The group should discuss the reading and their responses together.

Step 3:

- Have each group present their article to the class. As the groups present, add their Brainstorming Handout responses to a class list that everyone can see, either on the chalk board, overhead, or butcher paper.

Activity II: Forming a Camp

Step 1:

- Depending on the size of your class, identify a space (your classroom, an outside area, the cafeteria) that will allow students to simulate a population density of approximately 5 people per 400 square feet. This will mean that 5 people would share the space equivalent of a room that is 20 feet by 20 feet. You might also figure your simulation space backwards: identify a good space, and calculate how many people can participate in the simulation in that space by using the ration of 1 person per 80 square feet (a 9x9 foot space). The exact ratio is not the essential part of the lesson here, but you do want to attempt to approximate the living area for refugee families. This could become a brief math assignment.

Step 2:

- If they have not participated in choosing and calculating the space for your activity, make clear to students the space that is being considered as the "refugee camp" for the exercise. Assign fewer than five students to be aid workers who will be responsible specific tasks that benefit the entire camp. Then break the rest of the class into varied family groupings-single people, small families, and large families. Each person should know his or her age, gender, and role in the family. Distribute the limited resources from the [Supplies Handout](#) to the families.

Step 3:

- Using the space allowed, ask students to determine and tape off the areas in which they will conduct their lives. Where will each family live? Where will they bathe and take care of personal hygiene? Where will they raise livestock and/or

grow food? Where will they get clean water? Where will they get medical care? Where will the children play and/or receive an education? Etc. The class will have to answer some of these questions together in order to come to the most agreeable answers. Try to let them figure this out on their own, however, since initially chaos might rule prior to a few people seeing the need for a more orderly division of space. As they organize the camp, they will probably discover the need to prioritize their needs. Sacrifices will have to be made. Each aid worker should also be assigned one job/area that will benefit the entire camp (i.e., medical treatment, water and well, community garden, etc.). These things should be decided by the group.

Step 4:

- Start students on a "day-in-the-life" of the refugee camp in which meals must be cooked, water collected, gardens tended, sick children treated, etc. Students should decide among themselves how labor and resources will be divided. As students get comfortable with this—after perhaps 10 minutes—begin to introduce [additional obstacles](#). Call these out to the class, even if they apply to only a few people there will often be ripple effects for everyone. See list of obstacles. Ask students how they will make adjustments in order to accommodate these changes. As the camp deals with each obstacle, give them some time to think through the effects the obstacle before presenting another one. You might speed up the obstacles to simulate the chaos that can occur when one thing goes awry and is followed quickly by another problem.

Step 5:

- Conclude the lesson with a discussion of what the role-playing revealed. Talk about the following (you might assign this as an essay rather than a group discussion):
 - Was the camp well organized to respond to obstacles? Why or why not?
 - What did you need that you didn't have?
 - What are the biggest challenges facing a refugee camp? Facing the refugees specifically? Facing the aid workers specifically?
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Extending the Lesson:

Research a place in the world where there is a refugee population, and keep a journal of news clippings that reveal how the situation there is developing, improving, or deteriorating.

Create a map of Africa that reveals the areas that contain high population densities due to refugee populations.

Invite visitors to your class who have been refugees at some point in their life to discuss their experience with students. Perhaps there are some former Vietnamese or Cambodian refugees now living in your community, or refugees from Latin America. Local religious officials may be able to help you identify groups and individuals.

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Brainstorming Handout

Directions:

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions as you read the United Nations overview on AIDS in Africa.

1. What characterizes a refugee camp?
2. What factors limit the ability of refugees to live like they would if they were in their own country?
3. What basic needs are refugees and aid workers most concerned with addressing?
4. Other points and issues raised by the reading....

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Supplies Handout

FOR WHOLE GROUP TO SHARE:

These are some suggested "services" and areas the refugee camp may want to consider having. It is up to the group to choose which ones they want, or to suggest others. An aid worker must be in charge of each area or service.

One plot of land, 8x8', on which to cultivate vegetables.

One well, from which each family may draw one bucket of water per day

5 goats and/or chickens

Bathroom area

Medical Clinic & Pharmacy

School

FOR INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES:

Each family is entitled to the following:

One hut (have them determine the sizes of the huts themselves, making sure they create cooking and sleeping space)

One bucket

One box of matches

One bundle of firewood

One blanket per adult, and one for every two children

One pot to cook with

Two plates

Four plastic cups

One bag of flour