

SYRIA – A CHILDREN'S CRISIS?

Age range: 11 - 14

Time: 3 x 1 hour lessons

Outline

This resource first asks students to use first hand evidence critically to decide the degree to which the refugee crisis in Syria's neighbouring countries is a 'children's crisis'. It next asks students to examine the experiences of Syrian refugee children and draw conclusions about the extent to which these children's rights outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are being protected. It then asks students to design a project to enhance refugee children's rights. Finally it signposts campaigning and fundraising actions through which students can actively contribute towards easing the crisis.

Learning Objectives

- To apply an understanding of the experiences of refugee children to decide the degree to which the Syria conflict is a 'children's crisis'.
- To use first hand evidence to decide how far refugee children's rights are protected.
- To use the conclusions made above to design an Oxfam project for Syrian refugee children.

Resources

- Powerpoint presentation – Syria: a 'children's crisis?'
- Video <http://vimeo.com/68570720>
- Selected articles of the UNCRC
- Syria refugee cards
- Teacher's guide

Curricular links

Citizenship (Rights & Responsibilities) – National Curriculum for England

Social Studies – Scottish Curriculum for Excellence

ESDGC (Choices and Decisions) and PSE (Active Citizenship) – National Curriculum for Wales

Keywords

Refugee, Refugee Camp, Rights

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Activity Outline

Introduction – Assembly or lesson 1

The **PowerPoint presentation** ‘Syria: a children’s crisis?’ has been designed as a flexible resource that can be used stand alone in assemblies or as the introduction to this sequence of lessons. There are guidance notes embedded in the PowerPoint. Please print the presentation in the ‘notes’ format to access the notes. If you wish to use it as a stand alone information assembly please delete slides 2, 4, 10 and 19.

Slide 2 presents the **starter question** that frames the exercise. It asks students to share their existing knowledge of the Syria conflict and draws out the degree to which their own knowledge is about children caught up in the crisis. This is an open-ended question but, as very little mainstream media coverage focuses on refugees let alone children, it is unlikely many students will prioritise children in their responses.

The presentation then provides background information and case studies, and asks two key questions. You may wish to show it alongside the video with the spoken testimony of residents of Za’atari camp at <http://vimeo.com/68570720>. Only one of the people featured in the video (Ahmed – 16 years old) is a child. The others are adults and the film focuses on the psychological impact of being a refugee

The first key question asks the **degree** to which the Syria refugee crisis is a ‘children’s crisis’. This is best drawn out through class or group discussion with student scribes taking notes on the whiteboard or a flipchart. At the end of the lesson groups could present their conclusions. The question is open ended, subject to interpretation and without a ‘right’ answer. Therefore how students interpret the available evidence to argue a case is a key learning outcome of this lesson.

However, as an indicator, here is the type of evidence students may select to support the two viewpoints:



A children’s crisis	A crisis for all
1,700 children under 10 killed inside Syria.	93,000 people killed inside Syria.
A high level of violence and many human rights violations against children have been recorded by the UN.	A lack of money and jobs in Lebanon. Families are running out of money to pay the rent and buy essential items.
Passageways and stairways of refugees’ housing in Lebanon is unsafe for children.	In Lebanon overcrowding, a lack of privacy and an increase in domestic violence affects women.
Children don’t have a safe place to play.	In temporary housing in Lebanon the smell of rubbish affects everyone.
Children do many household chores that are laborious because of a lack of water and fuel.	In both Lebanon and Jordan many families and friends have managed to stay together – providing friendship and support.
Only 2% of refugee children of secondary age in Lebanon are enrolled in school. Many primary children are missing out on school.	There are few jobs in Za’atari camp.
Parents restrict their children’s activities in case they get hurt or fall in to arguments. Children get bored and restless.	Petty crime, prostitution and drug taking are increasing in Za’atari camp.
Only one in 10 children in Za’atari camp is enrolled in school. The camp schools are large – with 5,000 children taught in shifts. (BBC Newsround – March 2013).	Oxfam provides water and sanitation services in Za’atari camp.
It is often the children in Za’atari camp who do the household chores like collecting water.	Being a refugee has a negative psychological impact (see the film).
Children are being taught about hygiene and sanitation.	
Being a refugee has a negative psychological impact (see the film).	

The second key question asks students to plan some programme priorities for Oxfam in Lebanon and Jordan. The purpose of this question is for students to think critically about the **similarities** and **differences** in refugees’ experiences in the two countries. In Lebanon most refugees live among host communities while in Jordan large numbers live in UN administered refugee camps, of which Za’atari is the largest. Slides 21 and 22 summarise Oxfam’s projects in Lebanon and Jordan and can be compared with students’ ideas. However, this is another open-ended question, without a ‘right’ answer.

Teachers may omit one or both questions by deleting the relevant slides.

Lesson 2 – are Syrian refugee children adequately protected by the UNCRC?

Lesson 1 asked students to relate the experiences of refugee children to the wider refugee crisis in Lebanon and Jordan. Lesson 2 focuses on refugee children and the degree to which their internationally recognised legal rights are being met.



The **starter** question should ask students what they think their most important rights are. Then introduce the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC was signed by all but three member states of the United Nations in 1989 and was subsequently ratified by Syria and the neighbouring countries. Therefore its articles *should* apply to all children affected by the Syria conflict.

The UNCRC is a lengthy document of 54 articles or rights. The full text is [here](#) and UNICEF has produced a poster of the UNCRC [here](#). This lesson uses a simplified text of the UNCRC written for children by the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia and available [here](#). For the purposes of this lesson the UNCRC has been edited down to 23 articles. However, teachers may wish to add or remove articles according to the time they have available and/or the ability levels of students or use alternative versions of the UNCRC.

Students should next work in groups to select and rank what they believe are the 9 most important rights of child refugees in a '**diamond nine**' formation. Instructions on how to construct a diamond nine are on page 15 [here](#).

When each group has selected nine rights they should begin working through the 32 **Syria refugee cards** and, in each case, ask critically: 'To what extent does this child or these children enjoy any of the rights my group has selected?' A group scribe should take notes including supporting evidence. If time is short the number of cards could be reduced.

The cards provide only partial evidence and several are deliberately ambiguous. They are designed to promote critical thinking and deep questioning. If students believe a card to be irrelevant to discussing the rights they have selected they should disregard it.

By the end of the exercise each group should have agreed an answer to the question 'to what extent are the rights of child refugees protected by the UNCRC?' and the lesson should **conclude** with groups presenting their answers supported by selected evidence with reference to specific rights. This should be retained for the final lesson.

Lesson 3 – design a project for refugee children

The lesson **starter** should ask students which rights they think are **least** protected and why. Once they have identified these rights they should ask: 'What project(s) could Oxfam, or another organisation or government, introduce to ensure these rights are protected?'

Students should have an idea of the types of projects Oxfam and other organisations run in the region from the **PowerPoint presentation** in lesson 1 and the **Syria refugee cards** in lesson 2. However, creative and 'out of the box' thinking should also be encouraged.

Groups should design a presentation on sugar paper to illustrate their project idea. The presentation should include;

- A name for the project

- The rights the project is designed to protect
- Some evidence for why these rights are not currently being met
- The key points of the project and what it will achieve

Students could illustrate their work by cutting up **Syria refugee cards** and complete the lesson by presenting their project to the class. The lesson could conclude by students voting for the best project.

Follow up ideas

The resource includes an **action guide** with ideas for students to get involved in campaigning and fundraising activities for Oxfam projects supporting Syrian refugees. The action guide is primarily targeted at Oxfam's Youth Ambassadors but its active citizenship activities are also ideal for a curriculum project.

To learn more about Oxfam Youth Ambassadors go to <http://bit.ly/13TLwA7>

The campaigning action guide suggests three possible activities. The activities are designed to be progressive, either acting as an end in themselves or leading to the next activity. They are suitable for Oxfam Youth Ambassadors, citizenship and similar curriculum areas.

The fundraising activity should follow on from the learning and peer teaching activity (Activity 1). If time permits, all four activities could be completed or different groups of students could work on different activities.

Activity	Title	Complete
1	Organise and present a Syria assembly at your school	Activity 1
2	Write to your MP	Activities 1 & 2
3	Spread the word in the media	Activities 1, 2 & 3
4	Fundraise	Activities 1 & 4

The **teachers' notes** provide brief background notes to the Syria refugee crisis, summarise the action guide and suggest further sources of information and curriculum making resources.

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