



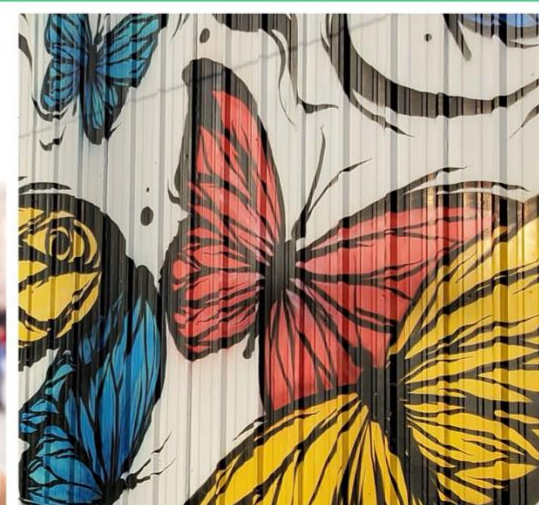
Supporting Resilience and Social-Emotional Learning:

Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students Project - Phase II

Classroom Lesson Module Grades 6-12



In collaboration with:



Lesson 1: Developing Resilience

GRADES 6 – 12 MODULE OVERVIEW

Lesson 1: Developing Resilience (90 minutes)	Lesson 2: Literature-Based Discussion <i>Refugee</i> (120 – 180 minutes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Developing Resilience by Solving Problems • Activity 2: External Resources: Positive Vibe Tribe • Activity 3: Internal Resources: Impulse Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion 1: Decisions • Discussion 2: On the Way • Discussion 3: Stranded • Discussion 4: Staying Afloat • Discussion 5: Lost & Broken Ties • Discussion 6: Taking Action • Discussion 7: Free at Last

Teacher Background

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of [stress](#) – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, war trauma, financial hardships or *other* stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

Research has shown that resilience is ordinary, not extraordinary. People commonly demonstrate resilience. One example is the response of many Americans to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and individuals' efforts to rebuild their lives.

Being resilient does not mean that a person does not experience difficulty or distress. Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

American Psychological Association and Discovery Health Channel (April 2013).
The Road to Resilience. University of Illinois, Springfield (UIS).

https://www.uis.edu/counselingcenter/wp-content/uploads/sites/87/2013/04/the_road_to_resilience.pdf

Preface

The recent wave of migrants seeking to enter the United States arrive at our border after experiencing many different events, including very traumatic experiences. In addition, many of the children enter our schools after suffering deprivation, fear, and separation from their loved ones and everything they have ever known. Recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma and its impact on the cognitive, physical, and emotional functioning of these schoolchildren, this second phase of the Support for Immigrant and Refugee Students (SIRS) Curriculum aims to support students in developing tools that will help them find a sense of safety and the ability to cope in moments of stress when participating in classroom activities.

Experts define trauma as:

“ . . . the result of an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life- threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”¹

Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, Pg. 7

These modules are designed to develop resilience by providing a safe environment of understanding and empathy. By applying the principles of a trauma-informed approach – specifically the principles of safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment/voice/choice, and cultural/historical/gender issues – the goal will be to facilitate or begin the healing process among students who have known trauma. In this regard, lessons are structured to develop a sense of safety in the interactions that take place between and among students by promoting trust and collaboration. The objective is to recognize and give a voice to students' experiences so that understanding is built and biases, beliefs, and stereotypes are challenged.

Phase II of the SIRS curriculum is designed to work in tandem with the modules in Phase I. While Lesson 1, in the [Phase I Modules](#), was designed to build community and empathy by recognizing and communicating thoughts and feelings, Lesson 1 in the Phase II Modules is intended to support all learners' emotional safety, especially students who have experienced trauma. This lesson provides students with basic tools to help them cope with their emotions during stressful situations in the classroom setting. Lesson 2 of the Modules continues with the goal of building empathy and understanding for the experience of refugees and immigrants. This goal is aligned to the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learnings'* (CASEL) framework for Social and Emotional Learning Competencies that promotes the learning of skills and behaviors to enhance students' capacity to deal effectively with daily tasks and challenges².

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014). SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884, Rockville, MD.

² *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2017). Framework for SEL Competencies.* <https://casel.org/selected-framework/>

Before starting this Module: Due to the sensitive nature and topic of this Module, it is strongly suggested that teachers communicate with the students' parents ahead of time. Make the reason for including this curriculum clear and assure families that schools are safe zones and that all classroom discussions and information are strictly confidential and protected.

Lesson 1 is comprised of three activities based on trauma-informed practices. They are intended to provide tools to begin the development of resilience and self-regulation that are an integral part of acquiring social and emotional competencies. The activities may be taught sequentially or independently of each other.

Activity 1: Developing Resilience by Solving Problems

I. Instructional Focus

Begin to develop resilience by recognizing that seeking assistance from others can be an external resource to help us cope with problems.

II. Objective

To explore solving problems and to understand how it can help a person become more resilient.

III. Standards

CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening
Strands 1 and 2
ELD Standards 1.A.1, 3 and 4; 1.B.5

IV. SEL Competencies

Self-Awareness – emotions, thoughts, and value recognition
Self-Management – emotions, thoughts and behavior regulations, goal setting
Social Awareness – understanding, empathizing, cultural awareness
Relationship Skills – communication, cooperation, empathy
Responsible Decision Making – analyzing situations, identifying and solving problems

V. Materials and Resources

- A. Chart paper
- B. Markers
- C. Index cards
- D. [PowerPoint, Lesson 1](#)
- E. [Teacher Resource – "Dear Abby" Letters 1-3](#)
- F. [Student Handout – My "Dear Abby" Advice](#)

VI. Vocabulary

Resilience Coping Advice External Resources

VII. Introduction

- A. Tell students that everyone faces challenges, difficulties, and stress during their lives, but if we develop resilience, we are able to cope and bounce back. See [6-12 Module, Lesson 1, PowerPoint Slide 3](#)
- B. Add that resilient people use internal and external resources as tools to build resilience. Show [6-12 Module, Lesson 1, Slide 4](#) for definitions of both types of resources.
- C. Explain they will be participating in activities that will teach them some ways to learn to develop resilience.
- D. Explain that in this, they will practice how to solve problems. The ability to solve problems is extremely important when we confront challenging or stressful situations in our everyday life.
- E. Explain that the activity will show them how using one external resource - seeking other people's advice- or thinking about what steps to take can help us solve problems.

VIII. Input

- A. Tell students that in this activity, they will pretend to be "Dear Abby." Explain that Dear Abby is a newspaper column where people write letters asking for advice on how to solve a problem. The person who started the column wrote under the name of Abigail or "Abby" Van Buren. Abby's response/advice is published under the person's letter. See [6-12 Module, Lesson 1, PowerPoint Slide 5](#)
- B. Count off students from 1-3. Organize students with the number 1 in groups of 3 (Triads). Do the same for students with numbers 2 and 3.
- C. Tell students that they will be given a problem to discuss and consider what advice to give this person. ([Teacher Resource – Dear Abby Letters](#))
- D. Distribute the letter that matches the group number, e.g., Group 1 – Letter 1 *and* the [Student Handout "My Dear Abby" Advice](#) for students to draft their individual advice.
- E. Review the [Student Handout My "Dear Abby" Advice](#) with students focusing on the three communication steps.
 1. In their triads, ask students to read the directions and discuss the steps to write the advice indicated in the handout.
 2. Debrief.
 3. Make sure students understand that before offering advice, it is important to:
 - a. Restate/retell the problem to let the person know you understand what the problem is.
 - b. Recognize and let the person know you understand how he/she is feeling.

4. Explain that when deciding what to advise, they might want to take into consideration **what would happen** if the person:
 - a. Told a parent
 - b. Told a teacher
 - c. Had a fight or confrontation with the other person
 - d. Told no one
 - e. Did not do anything about the problem
- F. Ask students to share their advice with their triad and choose the one they think would be the best solution. Have them write it on chart paper and display.

IX. Reflective Discussion

<Gallery Walk>

- A. Have each group go around and read the advice to each of the three problems.
- B. With a different color maker, have each group put a check on the version they think would be the best response/advice for each problem.
- C. Discuss the advice that received the most votes. What were their responses?

X. Closure

Debrief by asking the class questions such as:

- A. What did you feel when you read these problems?
- B. What did you learn about what to consider when choosing how best to solve a problem?
Grade 9-12: What did you base it on? Your beliefs/values? Your life experiences?
- C. Did you think about whom you would go to for the best advice if this were you?
- D. How could seeking advice or help about a problem can help you feel more able to cope and be more resilient?

XI. Follow-up Activity

- A. In their same triads, have students write a concern or problem to Dear Abby on a blank index card. Ask them not to write their names on the card.
- B. When finished, collect the cards by group and later redistribute back to group members.
- C. Have group members read the problem/concern they received.
- D. Have the group suggest what they, as "Dear Abby," would advise the person to do.
- E. Discussion:
 1. Ask students if they found that a problem or concern was mentioned more than once.
 2. What did they think about the advice that was offered?

Activity 2: Tapping into External Resources³

Instructional Considerations for Behavior Dysregulation

1. Before the Positive Vibe Tribe Activity
Think about your students and who might struggle with the task presented based on what you know about them
2. During the Activity
 - a. Circulate about the room and monitor for any students that seems disengaged, withdrawn, or exhibiting other possible dysregulated behaviors.
 - Pull them aside for a one-on-one to help them identify support.
 - Offer them time to go take a sip of water. Debrief privately after class.
 - b. In the case where they might be struggling to name anyone, pull them aside and offer suggestions such as naming characters or iconic figures from fiction/non-fiction books. Or, suggest other representations in their lives that give them support such as prayer, particular places, etc.

Recommendations provided by the Los Angeles Education Partnership (LEAP)

I. Instructional Focus

Begin to develop resilience by recognizing that we have a resource in our sources of support that can help with our different social and emotional needs.

II. Objectives

To be able to identify the people in our lives that can provide us with support in times of stress, difficulties, or trauma.

III. Standards

CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening
Strands 1 and 2
ELD Standards I.A.1, 3 and 4; I.B.5

IV. SEL Competencies

Self – Awareness – emotions, thoughts, and value recognition
Self-Management – emotions, thoughts and behavior regulation, goal setting
Social Awareness – understanding, empathizing, cultural awareness
Relationship Skills – communication, cooperation, empathy
Responsible Decision Making – analyzing situations, identifying and solving problems

³ Adapted from *Cultivating Resilience Stations*, Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP)

V. Materials and Resources

- A. Index cards
- B. [PowerPoint, Lesson 1](#)
- C. [Teacher Resource – Belonging – My Positive Vibe Tribe Sample](#)
- D. [Student Handout – Belonging – My Positive Vibe Tribe](#)

VI. Vocabulary

Emotional/Informational/Practical Support External Resource

VII. Introduction

Tell students that they will participate in an activity that will help them identify the people in their lives that are there for them when they need them, and the kind of support they provide.

Remind them that we all need external resources that help us “bounce back” or build resilience when we are faced with challenges.

VIII. Input

- A. Explain that we usually receive different types of support from different people. Sometimes we have very close/special relationships with some of the people in our lives. They might provide more than one type of support. Tell students that there are three types of support we might receive, depending on our need. Display types of social and emotional support. ([PowerPoint Slide 10](#))

Emotional: This support would be behaviors and words that make you feel cared for, understood, and supported. It can be a kind word, crying together, or holding hands.

Informational: This kind of support can be advice, information, or safe, positive suggestions on how to deal with a particular situation.

Practical: This support can be practical behaviors or objects like giving money, driving you to an appointment, or helping you with your homework or school project.

- B. Display and distribute [Student Handout "Belonging – My Positive Vibe Tribe."](#)
 - 1. Tell students that they will write the names of people for each category and then think about who and what type of support he/she provides for them. Explain that these special people represent what we might call our "Positive Vibe Tribe." Ask them to label the names with an **E** (emotional), **I** (informational), or **P** (practical), depending on the type of support these individuals provide for them.

Note: Please be aware that some students may not have many names in their circles that provide them with support. Treat this sensitively. Stress that this is about quality, not quantity, and that they should name people they feel they can count on when they need help rather than just anyone they know.

2. Model how to complete the circles, or show the [Teacher Resource - "Belonging - My Positive Vibe Tribe" Sample](#) to illustrate how to complete the graphic.

NOTE: If you can create your own sample, it will be more relatable to students as well as help open up channels of communication and trust.

IX. Reflection Discussion

- A. THINK-PAIR-SHARE: Once the students have completed their circles, ask them to discuss with a partner which relationships **are most important** to them and how they feel supported by that person or people.
- B. Debrief by asking the class as a whole if anyone would like to talk about his or her graphic. Then, discuss which relationships in their Positive Vibe Tribe are important to him or her. To support students sharing, you might want to provide sentence frames such as:

*Most of my _____ support reside in the _____ circle.
I rely on _____ support more than any other type of support.
I am grateful to have _____ in my life.*

Model as necessary.

- C. Ask if they found any commonalities between theirs and their partners' Tribe.

Note: Make sure that students know they do not need to share what they have written with others, as they might want to keep their relationships private.

X. Closure

- A. Ask students to review their circles for any discoveries, realizations, e.g., *I have many people I rely on for informational support; I have more people than I realized in my Positive Vibe Tribe.*
- B. If students have participated in Activity 1 - Developing Resilience by Solving Problems, remind students of the problems presented in the Dear Abby Letters. With a partner, ask them to discuss who they would go to in their Positive Vibe Tribe for specific type of advice or support if they were to experience one of those problems. Debrief.

- C. Ask students to think about how much they currently rely/lean on their Positive Vibe Tribe, and if they think there is someone they should connect with more. If so, what would they need to do? How can they maintain the connection?
- D. Conclude by telling students that the point of the activity is to make them realize they are not alone but have a system of support they can rely on during difficult times.

XI. Extension Activity

<Think-Pair-Share>

- A. **Think:** Have students examine their Positive Vibe Tribe Graphic.
Ask, "If you could review your best friend's Tribe, in which circle would you find your name? How would your friend categorize the type of support (emotional, informational, practical) you give him/her?"
- B. **Pair – Share:** Pair students and ask them to share their thoughts as to what type of support they tend to provide to others.
- C. **Debrief** by asking student volunteers to share with the class any insights or affirmations they learned from the exercise.

Activity 3: Internal Resource – Impulse Control

I. Instructional Focus

Begin to develop resilience through an internal resource

II. Objective

- A. Explore different kind of impulses
- B. Understand that knowing how to control our impulses is an internal resource that can help us become more resilient

III. Standards

CCSS ELA Speaking and Listening: Strands 1 and 2
ELD Standards: I.A.1, 3 and 4; I.B.5

IV. SEL Competencies

Self-Awareness – emotions, thoughts, and value recognition
Self-Management – emotions, thoughts and behavior regulation, goal setting
Social Awareness – understanding, empathizing, cultural awareness
Relationship Skills – communication, cooperation, empathy
Responsible Decision Making – analyzing situations, identifying and solving problems

V. Materials and Resources

- A. Markers
- B. [PowerPoint, Lesson 1](#)
- C. [Teacher Resource 1 – Stop-Think-Respond Strategy Chart](#)
- D. [Teacher Resource 2 – Impulse Scenario Cards](#)
- E. [Student Handout – Impulse Response Group Worksheet](#)

VI. Vocabulary

Resilience Impulse Internal Resource

VII. Introduction

- A. Tell students that they will continue to work on developing resilience and that today's activity involves developing an internal resource, which is learning to control our impulses.
- B. <Line Up>
 - 1. Ask students to line up in order of month and date of birth, but they must do so WITHOUT SPEAKING.
 - 2. Debrief by sharing birthday month with a show of hands. Ask - What was your first impulse? Did you find it hard not to speak? If some students do talk, ask them why they felt they had to do it.
 - 3. Use the line to group students in triads.

VIII. Input

- A. <Triads>

Ask students to discuss the meaning of the word "Impulses" and give examples.
- B. Number the triads from 1-5 and distribute the corresponding scenario card.
 - 1. Tell students to read and share the first thing that comes to their mind as to what they will do in that situation.
 - 2. Debrief. Tell students that when we are able to control our impulses it can help us make better decisions. It becomes an internal resource we can tap into when we are facing conflict or other challenges.
 - 3. Provide the definition of "impulse control" - Ability to control our behavior. See [PowerPoint Slide 12](#)
 - 4. Tell students that one strategy to learn to control our impulsive responses involves three steps (display [chart](#) or [PowerPoint Slide 14](#)):
 - a. Stop. Think. (to delay your response)
 - b. Breathe
 - c. Think of Three Responses Before Talking or Acting
 - d. Respond
 - 5. Hand out worksheet ([Student Handout – Impulse Control Group Worksheet](#))

IX. Reflective Discussion

- A. In their triads, students follow the Stop-Think-Respond protocol then:
 - 1. Based on their Impulse Scenario Card, students share ideas and compose three possible responses to the problem.
 - 2. Students come to consensus and choose one out of the three responses they have created.
- B. Each group shares their scenario and chosen response giving the reason for their choice.

Note: Stop-Think-Respond strategy and scenario cards adapted from ReachOut Australia (2013) *Building Resiliency in Young People*, <https://schools.au.reachout.com/resilience/impulse-control>

X. Closure

- A. Ask students how their initial response changed after taking the time to *stop and breathe, and continue to think* about how to respond.
- B. Discuss how often they have experienced situations like these. Have they ever wished they had responded differently in a particular situation?
- C. Point out that being able to control our impulses is an on-going learning that we all try to apply during our lifetime. It is not easy but if we know the strategy, we can learn to apply it as often as we can.
- D. Discuss with students how they felt sharing the reasons for their choice in the whole group.
- E. Ask if their triad listened when someone spoke and how they know, e.g., non-verbal signals.

Lesson 2: *Refugee*: A Literature-Based Discussion About the Immigrant/Refugee Experience

GRADES 6-12 MODULE OVERVIEW

Lesson 1: Developing Resilience (90 minutes)	Lesson 2: Literature-Based Discussion <i>Refugee</i> (120 – 180 minutes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Developing Resilience by Solving Problems • Activity 2: External Resources: Positive Vibe Tribe • Activity 3: Internal Resources: Impulse Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion 1: Decisions • Discussion 2: On the Way • Discussion 3: Stranded • Discussion 4: Staying Afloat • Discussion 5: Lost & Broken Ties • Discussion 6: Taking Action • Discussion 7: Free at Last

Preface

By providing a context of understanding, the Support for Immigrant and Refugee Student (SIRS) Modules aim to help students develop resilience and empathy to facilitate or begin the healing process among students who experience trauma. Each classroom lesson module includes two lessons designed to engage students in (1) developing resiliency, and (2) participating in literature-based discussions centered on social and emotional learning themes. Similar to the [Phase I modules](#), Lesson 1 in Phase II is designed to help build students’ social and emotional skills such as collaboration and communication. It focuses on trauma informed practices to teach students, especially those who have experienced trauma, basic tools to cope with their emotions. It is recommended that educators deliver and engage students in Lesson 1 activities to prepare them for the reflective discussions they will participate in during Lesson 2.

The goal of Lesson 2 in Phase II continues to be building empathy and understanding towards refugees and immigrants. This goal is aligned to the social and emotional competencies presented in the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Framework¹ as critical learnings for students to build their emotional health.

Why Literature Studies?

The study of literature to discuss and understand the human experience is a demonstrable vehicle to share opinions, feelings, and emotions through the characters’ experiences and story events. The acquisition of these competencies is important to students’ well-being and their ability to deal with daily challenges. As students study a particular text to arrive at the understanding of the author’s message and make connections between the characters and their own lives, they can arrive at a better understanding of themselves and others—

¹ Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2017). *Framework for SEL Competencies*. <http://CASEL.org/core-competencies/>

particularly if the classroom has been designated a safe place to share thoughts and feelings. As a result, literature studies align well with the development of social and emotional competencies of social awareness and relationship skills, especially in the area of empathy and understanding. (See CASEL Framework).

The book, *Refugee* by Alan Gratz, was selected because of its strong connection to the realities that many of our newly arriving (as well as past) immigrants have experienced. But what is a refugee? What forces people to leave all they have known? Thousands of people arriving at the U.S.-Mexican border are hoping to be granted asylum and to enter the United States with refugee status. Likewise, thousands of Syrians arrive daily at Europe's shores hoping for asylum to escape the ravages of war. The hope is that by reading the stories contained in this text, students might understand the dilemma and the pain that are almost as old as humanity itself.

Book Summary

Refugee tells the story of the harrowing journeys of three young people in search of refuge through three parallel narratives. The characters face unimaginable dangers and although separated by time and space, from a 1930s Nazi Germany to the 2015 Syrian civil war, surprising similarities can be found between the stories. Josef, a young Jewish boy, escapes Germany with his family aboard a ship bound for Cuba. Isabel, a young Cuban girl, runs away from Fidel Castro and hunger riots with her family aboard a homemade boat bound for Florida in 1994. Mahmoud, a young Muslim boy, flees the Civil War in Syria for Germany by car, boat, train, and foot with his family. Courage, survival, and a quest for a safe, better tomorrow tie all three.

The text lends itself very well to an integrated unit on WWII, Latin American history, or current events to meet History and Social Science Standards (HSS). See list of standards in Section II.

As discussed earlier, it is important for teachers to recognize that, because of the sensitive nature of the topic and theme of this book, it might trigger strong emotional reactions on the part of the students, especially if they have family, friends, or they themselves have gone through a similar experience. For that reason, it is strongly recommended that students participate in the activities included in Lesson 1, which have been designed specifically to begin the development of resilience by supporting students to grow in their ability to cope with challenges, change, and emotional stress (dysregulation).

Planning for Instruction

When planning for Lesson 2, it is important to remember that *Refugee* is comprised of three distinct stories organized not by chapters, but by sections under each character's name. Therefore, this organization allows for two different approaches to reading and engaging students with the book content. One approach is to read all three stories collectively (Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud). The other is to read them independently (Josef, Isabel, OR Mahmoud). If reading only one of the stories, it is recommended to read Mahmoud's as it is connected to current events, pertinent to the 21st-century. The table below indicates the pagination of each story.

Table 1. Location of story for each character

Character & Country of Origin	Josef - Germany	Isabel - Cuba	Mahmoud - Syria
Sections (Approximately 5 - 7 pages each)	1- 6	7 - 11	12 - 17
	18 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 33
	34 - 39	40 - 48	49 - 55
	55 - 59	60 - 65	66 - 73
	74 - 80	81 - 86	87 - 92
	93 - 98	99 - 103	104 - 109
	110 - 115	116 - 120	121-128
	129 - 135	136 - 140	141 - 146
	147 - 152	153-156	157 - 163
	164 - 170	171-178	179 - 182
	183-186	187-191	192 - 196
	197 - 202	203 - 209	210 - 215
	216 - 222	223 - 228	229 - 235
	236 - 242	243 - 246	247 - 252
	253 - 258	259 - 262	263 - 269
	270 - 274	275 - 278	279 - 284
	285 - 291	292 - 298	299 - 305
	306 - 309	310 - 317	
	Total=102 pp.	Total = 107 pp.	Total = 108 pp.

Regardless of which approach is taken, the details of Lesson 2 in this Module are designed to provide guidance and recommendations for how to engage students in a learning cycle that: (1) introduces the learning objective and sets the context; (2) provides options for input to help students process story elements relevant to the objectives; and (3) details possibilities for reflective discussions. Part IX. Reflective Discussion (see also Module Overview) is divided into seven discussion segments organized by character (Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud) to indicate the sections to be read and discussed. Some sections, less critical to the understanding of the plot or character, are summarized to make reading the entire book more feasible. Each discussion segment contains a Guiding Question section intended to frame the discussion, whether you choose to read one OR all three stories.

When appropriate, there are also questions for each story that address specific elements important to the understanding of that particular story and character.

I. Instructional Focus

- A. Understand that people are willing to make great sacrifices for their loved ones in order to be safe and free.
- B. Provide a window into the dangers and difficulties refugees endure to escape their situation and gain acceptance.
- C. Build empathy for the plight of the oppressed, the powerless, and the dispossessed
- D. Use the story as a springboard for students to share their fears and thoughts about danger, migration, and deportation.

II. Objectives

- A. Students will be able to define what it means to be a refugee.
- B. Students will be able to explain the challenges refugees face.
- C. If reading all three stories, students will be able to identify the similarities and connections among them.

III. Standards

ELA Reading Standards: Strands 1, 2, 3 6 and 7

ELA Speaking and Listening: Strands 1 and 2

ELD Standards: I.A.1, I.B.5 & 6, I.C.11

HSS Standards: 7.2.3 & 4; 8.12.5, 8.12.7; 10.7.3, 10.8.5, 10.10; 11.7.6, 11.8.2, 11.9.3, 11.9.6-7, 11.11.1, 11.11.7; 12.1, 12.3.1, 2 & 4, 12.9.1, 2, 4, 5 & 7

IV. SEL Competencies Focus

Social Awareness – understanding, empathizing, cultural awareness

Relationship Skills – communication, cooperation, empathy

V. Materials and Resources

- A. Literature Book – *Refugee* by Alan Gratz, Scholastic Press, New York, NY, 2017
- B. World Map
- C. [PowerPoint Lesson 2](#)
- D. [Teacher Resource – Sample Refugee – Story Comparison Tables](#)
- E. Student Response Journal
- F. [Student Handout 1 – THINK link – Video Viewing Guide](#)
- G. [Student Handout 2 a-c: Refugee – Story Comparison Tables](#)
- H. [Student Handout 3 – Poem: Refugee Blues](#)
- I. [Student Handout 4 a-c – Pass the Poster](#)
- J. [Student Handout 5 a-c – Jigsaw Articles](#)
 - 1. Asylum Seekers at the US-Mexican Border Being Flown to Guatemala
 - 2. Central American Migrant Crisis
 - 3. Today's Migrant Flow is Different

VI. Vocabulary

Swastika Refugee Tyrant Refrain Cadence Throng Tedious Dinghy
Transgressions Distraught Coda

VII. Introduction

- A. Tell students that they will read a book titled *Refugee* by Alan Gatz ([PowerPoint Slide 1](#)). Explain that the book tells the story of three young persons, Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud, from different times and places – Germany, 1939, Cuba, 1994, and Syria, 2005 ([PowerPoint Slide 2](#)). Show countries on a world map.
- B. Four Corners – Tapping Prior Knowledge
1. Have 4 charts labeled as follows: 1) *The Nazis and the Holocaust*, 2) *Syria and Syrian Civil War*, 3) *Cuba and Castro*, and 4) *Refugees*. Display a chart on each corner of the room. After introducing the characters, add the name of the character to its corresponding chart.
 2. Divide the class into 4 groups. Give each group a different color marker. Ask them to go to the chart in each of the 4 corners and write down what they know about the topic.
 3. Have them move clockwise until they have visited all 4 corners.
 4. Tell students that as they read the book, they will learn more about these topics and the connection to the characters.

Note: This activity is intended as an informal assessment of what students know about the topics in order to ascertain what background knowledge might need to be built in prior to reading the book.

- C. Show the book [trailer https://bookunitsteacher.com/wp/?p=5858](https://bookunitsteacher.com/wp/?p=5858). Ask what they learned about the main characters, e.g., Had to leave suddenly and with few possessions.
- D. Tell students that when they left their town, Josef, Isabel, and Mahmoud became refugees. Announce that they will view a video that will help them have a common definition of what it means to be a refugee and the difference from being a migrant.
- E. Ask students if they or any family or friends are migrants or refugees.
1. Distribute and review the THINK Video Viewing Guide ([Student Handout 1](#)). Make sure students understand they are to listen for the information. <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-refugee-benedetta-berti-and-evelien-borgman>
 2. Show the video (5:48 min link above). If needed, show it twice to familiarize students with the content.
 3. Go to the THINK link on the screen to display multiple-choice questions and responses aligned to the questions 1 and 3-5 in the THINK link-Video Viewing Guide. Discuss as a class and come to an agreement as to the answers. (For the official definition of *refugee*, display [Lesson 2 PowerPoint, Slide 3](#))

4. <Think-Write Pair-Share>

Have students respond and discuss their answers to the open-ended questions in the [THINK link – Video Viewing Guide](#) (Questions 6-8 on the video). Show [PowerPoint, Slide 4](#) to introduce students to the dictators ruling each character's country. Debrief as a whole class.

*Both videos were originally identified in The Book Sommelier @ <https://www.thebooksomm.com/home/refugee>

5. <Mini – Lecture>

- a. Refer to the 4-Corner Charts and remind students that Mahmoud is Syrian.
- b. Use Lesson 2 PowerPoint Slide 5-8, and slide notes to introduce students to the reasons for the Syrian Civil War and the character's plight.

Note: In preparation for the mini-lecture, view the video (Item 7 below) explaining the causes for political and humanitarian crisis in Syria. This activity can also take place before starting reading Mahmoud's story (pp. 12-17).

- c. In pairs, have students recap the information giving the reasons for the Syrian Civil War and the Syrian refugee crisis.
6. Optional: Explain that they will view a video that will give them more information and help them better understand the conflict.
7. View the 5-minute video explaining the war in Syria.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5H5w3_QTG0&list=PL1O3BPJVMY6OJgBPiJ3j2I9NRSSLf3Y4j&index=13

VIII. Input

- A. Explain that the book is not divided into chapters but rather sections with the character's name as the header. This is how they will be able to follow each character's story.
- B. Explain that as they go through the book, they need to notice important moments that will help them understand the author's message.
- C. <Notice and Note>
 1. Tell students that in most works of literature, there will be places where they could ask themselves any of 6 key or anchor questions to better understand the work of literature. Show PowerPoint Slide 9 and go over each one offering examples from familiar/previously read stories.

Table 2. Notice and Note Six Anchor Questions

1. What is the character doing that? *Why is the character feeling this way?*
2. How might this change things?
3. Why does this keep happening?
4. Why is this memory important?
5. What does this make me wonder about?
6. What is the life lesson here? How will it affect the character?

From *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading* by Kyleen Beers and
Robert E. Probst

2. Display a chart with the anchor questions for students' reference.
- D. Distribute [Student Handout 2, a-c Refugee – Story Comparison Tables](#). Explain that they will be entering information in these graphic organizers throughout the reading of the book as a way to summarize each character's story. See [Teacher Resource – Sample Story Comparison Tables](#) for a model.

IX. Reflective Discussion

Note: The Reflective Discussion section is divided into seven discussion segments organized by character (Josef, Isabel, Mahmoud) to correspond with the sections in the book (see Table 1 above). Some sections, less critical to the understanding of the plot or character, are summarized to make reading the entire book more feasible. Each discussion segment contains a Guiding Question section intended to guide the discussion. It can be used whether you choose to read one OR all three stories. When appropriate, there are also questions for each story narrative that address specific elements important to the understanding of that particular story and character.

<Discussion 1 (pp. 1-55): Decisions>

Guiding Question(s): *What is the decision the characters and family made, and why? If reading all story narrative: What are the similarities and differences?*

- A. Tell students that as they read about each character, they need to think about the answer to the guiding question.
- B. After reading about each character, allow time for students to enter information under the appropriate category in their [Student Handout A-C Story Comparison Tables](#). See Input-Item D.

Continue this throughout the lesson (Discussions 2-7)

C. Read

1. Josef – Berlin

- a. Read pp. 1-6
- b. Give a brief summary of pp.18-24:
Josef, his mother, and sister left for Hamburg, on the north coast of Germany to meet the father, who has been released from the concentration camp and board a ship going to Cuba.
- c. Read p. 34-39

2. Isabel – Havana

- a. Read pp. 7-11; 25-29; 40-48

Note: To get a sense of what these homemade boats looked like, you might want to show a clip from this video taking from a Key West exhibit of Cuban refugees' boats and rafts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWS2hidgBs0>

3. Mahmoud – Aleppo

- a. Read pp. 12-17
 1. Journal Entry: What do these lines mean to you? "*The trick was to be invisible. Blend in. Disappear.*"
Debrief.
 2. Have you ever felt like Mahmoud? If so, why?
- b. Read pp. 30-33
Think-Pair-Share
How might this change things for Mahmoud? (Refer to Notice and Note anchor question #2 in [PowerPoint Slide 9](#))
- c. Read pp. 49-55

- D. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding question(s) to discuss character/family decisions to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences. *What is the decision the characters and family made, and why? What are the similarities and differences?*

<Discussion 2 (pp.56 – 92): On the Way>

Guiding Question: *What is happening as they begin their trip? What do you think will happen next?*

*Reminder: After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key points: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Tables](#))

A. Read

1. Josef – Atlantic Ocean

a. Give a brief summary of pp.55-59:

Onboard the ship, all 908 passengers, among them Josef and his family, are being treated with kindness and respect and not made to feel different or frightened for being Jewish. Josef makes friends with the other children and is having fun and laughing for the first time in a long time. They even have a bar mitzvah, a ceremony at which 13-year-old boys become men under Jewish religious law. Josef is taking part in it.

b. Read pp. 74-80

Ask: When Josef's father refuses to attend the bar mitzvah, Josef thinks perhaps "becoming a man means not relying on your father anymore." What does this tell us about Josef?

2. Isabel – Strait of Florida

a. Read pp.60-65

b. Give a brief summary of pp.81-86:

Isabel and the group have been sailing for a day. To pass the time, they are telling jokes, singing, and talking about what they look forward to in the U.S. Suddenly and without warning the motor stops.

<Think-Pair-Share>

Predict what you think will happen next.

3. Mahmoud – Turkey

a. Read pp. 66-73

b. Read pp. 87-92

B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding questions to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

What is happening as they begin their trip? What do you think will happen next?

<Discussion 3 (pp. 93-140): Stranded>

Guiding Question: *What is happening now, and how are the characters feeling about their decision to leave? Why?*

*Reminder: After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key topics: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Tables](#)).

A. Read:

1. Josef – Atlantic Ocean

a. Read pp. 93-98

b. Read pp. 110-115

Ask: What does Josef learn below deck? How does it change his view of their situation on the ship?

c. Read pp. 129-135

2. Isabel – Strait of Florida

a. Read pp. 99-103: Give a brief summary.

El Sr. Castillo says the motor overheated so they try to cool it down with seawater. The boat starts drifting north in the Gulf Stream. Lito, Isabel's grandfather, complains that leaving Cuba was a mistake and that they should have waited for things to get better instead of allowing Ivan to risk the lives of his loved ones without any plans. The rest of the family does not agree. Out of nowhere, they see an enormous tanker heading towards them.

b. Read pp. 116-120

<Think-Pair-Share>

Why is the memory of her grandmother important? (Refer to the Notice and Note question 4 in [PowerPoint Slide 9](#))

c. Read pp. 136-140

3. Mahmoud – Turkey

a. Give a brief summary of pp.104-109:

After two days of travel, Mahmoud and his family arrive in Izmir, Turkey. The smugglers tell his father that the boat will come the next day. Having no luck finding accommodations for the night, they head for a park where they might need to spend the night. That, too, is packed with refugees. It's cold and rainy, Mahmoud wishes they would stay at a refugee camp, but his father is determined to get to Germany. A boy selling tissue takes them to a shutdown mall where other refugees are squatting and offers them a space to rent in an empty yogurt shop for a lot of money. The boy also convinces them to buy life vests for the journey.

b. Read pp. 121-128

- B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding question to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

What is happening, and how are the characters feeling about their decision to leave? Why? (Refer to the Notice and Note anchor question #1 in [PowerPoint Slide 9](#))

<Discussion 4 (pp. 141-156): Staying Afloat>

Guiding Question: *What are they doing to try to achieve their goal? What do their actions say about them?*

*Remember: After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key topics: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Table](#))

A. Read

2. Josef – Havana Harbor
a. Read pp. 147-152

3. Isabel – Caribbean Sea
a. Give a brief summary of pp. 153-156
Two days from home, Isabel and her group are bailing water out of the boat. As the storm powers rain, Isabel recalls the day her grandmother died during a powerful storm in Cuba when giant waves destroyed their home by the sea.

4. Mahmoud – Mediterranean Sea
a. Read pp. 141-146

- B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding questions to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

What are they doing to try to achieve their goal? What do their actions say about them?

<Discussion 5 (pp. 157-228): Lost & Broken>

Guiding Question: *In each of the stories, the characters lose someone. How do the main characters feel? Why?*

*Reminder: After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key topics: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Tables](#)).

A. Read

1. Josef – Havana Harbor

a. Read pp. 164-170

b. Give a brief summary of pp. 183-186 and 197-202

Josef cries for help, and the ship's siren sounds the alarm indicating man overboard. A Cuban policeman onboard the St. Louis jumps in the water and grabs Josef's father. A boat coming from shore rescues the policeman and Mr. Landau, who is trying to get away crying, "Let me die!" The men on the boat restrain Me. Landau and quickly return to shore.

Josef feels his world is falling apart. His father has never been the same since his experience in the concentration camp, and now that he's gone mad, they will never be allowed in Cuba.

The policeman who rescued Josef's father comes to visit and is given a hero's welcome by the passengers. Mariano Padron, the policeman, tells Mrs. Landau that her husband is alive and being taken care of at the hospital. When Mr. Padron unintentionally brings up the questions of "When will they get off the ship?" He looks anguished as he and Josef respond at the same time, "Mañana!"

c. Read pp. 216-222

2. Isabel – Between the Bahamas and Florida

a. Give a brief summary of pp. 171-178 and 187-191:

The storm ended and Isabel's mother has a high fever. Lito and Mrs. Castillo are trying to cool her down while Luis and Papi keep the motor cool now that they restarted it. Ivan and Isabel worry about what they'll find in the U.S. based on their teachers' description of the U.S. Suddenly, Ivan spots land. They reach it only to find out it is not Florida but the Bahamas. A policeman warns them that if they stay they will be returned to Cuba. Lito, worried about his daughter, wants to stay, but Mami refuses to go back to Cuba. The tourists, gathered at the shore, toss them water bottles and food. Isabel asks them for aspirin, and one of the tourists throws them a bottle full of pills as they turn around and continue their journey.

Unfortunately, the boat is starting to fall apart despite their efforts to bail, and they are afraid they will drown. When Ivan asks when they will get to Florida, Lito answers, Mañana, looking very sad as it seems to bring back memories.

Tempers are flaring, and everyone is arguing until Amara pleads for cooler heads to prevail. They decide to take turns floating alongside the boat in an effort to take some of the weight, hoping to keep the boat afloat longer.

- b. Read pp. 203-209
<Think-Pair-Share>
When the group is trying to pick a name for the boat, Isabel's grandfather says, "The St. Louis." Why is this important? What does it make you wonder about?
- c. Read pp. 223-228
Ask: Isabel wishes she was dead too. What does it say about Ivan and Isabel's relationship?

3. Mahmoud – Mediterranean Sea/Greece

- a. Read pp. 157-163
Note: You can have students listen to the author read pp. 160-163
([PowerPoint Slide 11 – Time passed...](#))

Ask:

- The family's life jackets proved to be fake. Is taking advantage of people ever justified?
- What do you think happened to Hana?
- Do you know of anyone who has suffered or is suffering from family separation? How did it happen? How are they coping?

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- b. Read 179-182
- c. Read 192 – 196

- B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding questions to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

In each of the stories, the characters lose someone. How do the main characters feel? Why?

<Discussion 6 (pp. 229-284): Taking Action>

Guiding Question: *How will the actions of the characters change things?*

***Reminder:** After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key topics: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Table](#))

A. Read

1. Josef – Atlantic Ocean/Europe

a. Read 236-242; 253-258

Give a brief summary of pp. 270-274

Belgium, Holland, France, and England have agreed to accept the 900 refugees. Josef learns they are giving to France. They land there after 39 day abroad the St. Louis. Unfortunately, with months after their arrival, Germany invades France and Josef, his mother and sister are on the run again.

2. Isabel – Off the Florida Coast

a. Read 243 – 246

Give a brief summary of pp. 259-262

Near the coast, the Coast Guard appears to have found them; at the same time Isabel's mom going into labor. When the refugees realize the Coast Guard is trying to catch another boat of refugees nearby, they start rowing as hard as they can hoping to escape detection. They are still far from shore even though they can clearly see the lights of the hotel rooms. Teresa screams in pain. The Coast Guard ship has found them and is trying to catch them before reaching Miami. All seems lost.

b. Read pp. 275-278

Ask: Lito makes a decision involving the word "mañana" – tomorrow. How does this decision help or hurt the others on the boat?

3. Mahmoud – Macedonia to Hungary

a. Give a brief summary of pp. 229-235

b. Mahmoud and his family had not waited to get travel permits in Athens. Instead, they travel to a Greek town near the border with Macedonia. They hope to catch a train to Serbia and then to Hungary. Now they have to sneak across the border since they have no papers. Mahmoud felt dirty, unwanted, illegal. They walk two hours to the border through a forest to avoid the Greek police. Then they find a taxi that takes them to the Serbian Border. After crossing, his father finds them a bus to Belgrade. They arrive almost a day later only to find out they cannot stay because the police are raiding hotels for illegal refugees. They get another taxi.

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c. *The driver promises to take them the two hours farther to the Hungarian border. Instead, the exhausted family wakes up to find him aiming a pistol at them in the middle of nowhere.*

d. Read pp. 247-252; 263-269; 279-284

Ask: Why is it better to be visible as a refugee instead of invisible?

B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding questions to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading all three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

How will the actions of the character(s) change things?

<Discussion 7 (pp. 285-317): Free at Last>

Guiding Question: *What did the characters learn and how did it inform the decisions they made? What can they teach us?*

*Reminder: After reading all sections for each character, have students continue to fill in information around three key topics: Problems, Mode of Travel, and Losses ([Student Handout 2a-c: Comparison Tables](#)).

A. Read

1. Josef – France

a. Read pp. 285-291

"I think there is only enough here to buy freedom for one of your children...The Nazi soldier smiled at Josef's mother: "You choose."

Think-Pair-Share: Put yourselves in Rachel's shoes. Predict what you think will happen next.

2. Isabel – Miami Beach

a. Read pp. 292-298; 306-309

Ask:

- What happened after the Coast Guard picks up Lito?
- What did Isabel learn and what did she decide?

3. Mahmoud – Germany

a. Read pp. 299-305; 310-317

Ask:

- Like Isabel, what did Mahmoud decide? What did he learn?
- How did the choice given to Mrs. Landau have a lasting effect on hers and Mahmoud's family? What does it teach us about the decisions we make?

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-Understanding
-Empathizing

B. Discussion Closure: Return to the guiding questions to discuss character/family experiences to elicit understanding and empathy (SEL competencies). If reading three stories, discuss similarities and differences.

What did the characters learn and how did it inform their decisions? What can they teach us?

X. Lesson Closure

<Expert Groups>

- A. Divide the class into 3 Expert Groups. Each group will focus on one of the characters and will be in charge of presenting the Story Comparison Table for its chosen character as a way to summarize the character's story. You might want to let students choose the group they want to be part of, as long as they have more or less the same number of participants.
1. Give each group time to share the information they have collected before presenting to the class.
 2. Have each group share then ask, "How are the 3 stories linked?" What similarities and connections can be made across stories regardless of time and space? What surprised you the most?

Before discussing the following questions as a whole class, allow students to discuss in triads or as Think-Pair-Share.

3. What sacrifices were made and what was the result? Why were the characters willing to endure them?
4. What traits do you find in common among the characters in all three stories? What traits did you find that determined the character's actions?
5. What did you learn from the book that you did not know before? How does it make you feel? Encourage students to share their own knowledge and experiences regarding fears, worries, and thoughts about deportation, asylum seekers, and dangers.
 - a. At some point in the story, the character(s) tried to either become or felt invisible. Have you or your family ever felt this way? Why?
6. How has this book impacted your ideas about immigrants and refugees?
7. Do you find similarities between immigrants and refugees? What are they?

Note: Make sure that the discussion based on these questions guides and helps students make the connections necessary to meet the objectives and instructional focus:

- | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">A. Understand that people are willing to make great sacrifices for their loved ones in order to be safe and free.B. Provide a window into the dangers and difficulties refugees endure to escape their situation and gain acceptance.C. Build empathy for the plight of the oppressed, the powerless, and the dispossessed. |
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XI. Text to Text Analysis (CCSS RL Strand 9)

In addition to finding commonalities, reading this book offers an opportunity to have an open discussion of Central American asylum seekers at the California and Texas-Mexico Border, and their continuing plight. Students can compare and contrast through analysis of newspaper articles and videos the experiences of the characters and the suffering of real-life people.

A. Introduction

1. Have students read the poem "[Refugee Blues](#)" aloud, preferably in two voices. See [Student Handout 4](#).

- a. Debrief by asking, "Is the message of Auden's poem relevant to any events in the U.S., especially in California and Texas, today? If so, which ones, and why?"

B. Tapping Prior Knowledge

1. <Think-Pair-Share>

- a. Ask students to share what they know about asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) – Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

- b. Debrief

C. Input

1. Tell students that they will watch two short videos and read articles that talk about the reasons for this migration and the challenges these refugees face. Ask them to also keep in mind similarities with the refugees in Gratz' book.

D. Reflective Decision

1. <Pass the Poster>

- a. In triads, give each student a question to answer after they watch the first video. Ask the students to pass their answer sheet to the right for the other two members of the triad to answer the other two questions after watching the video two more times. See [Student Handout 4](#).

Video 1: Stuck in Mexico: Central American Asylum Seekers in Limbo (2:58 min) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jASvgXX22c>

2. <Jigsaw Reading>

- a. Prior to the jigsaw reading activity, show the second video in the link below to scaffold the ready by building vocabulary and prior knowledge regarding the reasons for asylum seekers from Central America.

Video 2: Why People Are Fleeing the Northern Triangle (3:01 min) - <https://www.newsweek.com/nearly-half-central-american-asylum-seekers-relative-suffered-violent-death-last-two-years-1487006>

- b. Count students off 1-3 and form groups of 4-6 students according to number.

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- c. Distribute the following three articles ([Student Handout 5a-c: Jigsaw Articles](#)) according to group number:

Article 1: Asylum-Seekers Reaching U.S. Border Are Being Flown to Guatemala

Article 2: Fleeing for Our Lives: Central American Migrant Crisis

Article 3: Today's Migrant Flow Is Different

- d. Display [Lesson 2 PowerPoint Slide 19](#). Have each group choose a scribe and have them answer the following questions

Group 1: Why are the asylum seekers being flown to Guatemala?

Group 2: Why are they fleeing to Central America?

Group 3: Why is this migration different in that of previous years?

All Groups: What similarities and differences did you find between this group of people and those in the book *Refugee*?

All Groups: How do you feel about the situation? What responsibilities do we have and what could be the consequences if we stay unconcerned?

- e. Ask each group to share.

XII. Follow-up/Extension Activities

The following activities may be carried out as extension activities or at different points during the reading of the text, depending on the background knowledge of the students.

A. Follow the Characters' Journey

B. Divide the class into 3 Expert Groups. Each group will focus on one of the characters to construct a timeline of the journey on a map. You might want to let students choose the group they want to be part of, as long as they have more or less the same number of participants.

1. Copies can be made of the maps with each character journey trajectory found at the back of the book (after p. 317) or if available, students can create the maps to follow the characters' journey and timeline using "Google My Maps."

C. An interview with Alan Gratz

The author answers students' questions about the book. (Time 44:36). Since the interview is broken down by questions, a teacher can choose those to show or, better yet, give the students the list of questions and choose those they would like to hear the author answer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tszVbvGdhik&list=PL1O3BPJVMY6OJgBPiJ3j2I9NRSSLf3Y4j&index=8>

D. Resources for research:

1. The story of the MS St. Louis and Captain Gustav Schroeder:
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005267>
2. U.S. immigration policies during World War II:
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094>
3. Images of people leaving Cuba in 1994
<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/11/20-years-after-the-1994-cuban-raft-exodus/100852/>
4. A beautiful animation of a harrowing story – A video of a Palestinian family escape from Syria.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0HWYcFIY8&index=2&list=PL1O3BPJVMY6OJgBPiJ3j2I9NRSSLf3Y4j>
5. A video of a Cuban American recounting her rescue by the Coast Guard and how she used her violin to be understood and stopped the coast guards from forcing her to leave her instrument behind.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=828OscG11jA>
6. Life in a refugee camp
<https://www.oxfam.org/en/crisis-syria/life-zaatari-refugee-camp-jordans-fourth-biggest-city>
7. Text to text analysis – Comparing Jewish Refugees of the 1930s with Syrian refugees today.
The lesson plan was based on a NY Times article about the historical parallels of today's Europe's refugee crisis comparing it with an excerpt from the documentary "Defying the Nazis" that chronicles Martha and Waitstill Sharp's relief and rescue mission in 1939. The lesson considers how individuals and governments choose to respond to those in need.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/learning/lesson-plans/text-to-text-comparing-jewish-refugees-of-the-1930s-with-syrian-refugees-today.html>
8. An article about a Twitter account created to remember Jewish refugees sailing in the St. Louis, who later died in concentration camps.
<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/as-refugees-turned-away-holocaust-experts-note-history-repeating-itself>

9. Additional readings

Migrations by the International Center for the Picture Book Society, Candlewick Studio, 2019. Beautiful, lyrical reproduction of original images and messages on postcards created by illustrators from 30 countries that celebrate human migration and the power of bravery and hope to overcome bans and walls.

Stories about Refugees Across the Globe

90 Miles to Havana by Enrique Flores-Galbis. Roaring Brook. 2010
Based on the author’s experiences when he was sent away from Cuba during Operation Pedro Pan in 1961, this is a heart-wrenching account of families torn apart and the terror of a boy alone in a refugee camp.

Nowhere Boy by Katherine Marsh, Roaring Book Press, 2018
After losing his father on the journey to Europe, Ahmed struggles to get by on his own in Brussels, Belgium. He meets Max, an American boy struggling to fit in at school. Their friendship grows, and together they defy the odds while learning how hope can change your destiny.

Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga, Harper Collins, 2019
A middle-grade novel written in verse about a young girl who leaves her father and older brother behind in Syria and comes with her mother to live with relatives in the US. A story about finding yourself in new and different circumstances.

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey (Arabic and English edition) by Margriet Ruurs, Orca. 2016
Illustrated with stone images by a Syrian artist, this is one family’s story of fleeing their war-torn country for refuge in Europe.

Lost and Found Cat: The True Story of Kunkush’s Incredible Journey by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes, Crown Publishing, 2017
A refugee family that has fled the Iraqi city of Mosul is miraculously reunited with their beloved pet after it is lost on their boat to Greece.

Inside Out & Back Again by Thanhha Lai. HarperCollins. 2011
In this story, based on the author’s experience as a refugee from Vietnam, a young girl eventually finds a new home in Alabama, but also experiences the cruelty of her classmates who make fun of her.

A Long Walk to Water: Based on a True Story by Linda Sue Park. Clarion. 2010
Salva, one of Sudan’s “lost boys,” spends years in a refugee camp before finding a new home in America. He later returns to Sudan, where his story intersects with Nya’s, whose life revolves around carrying water for her family.

Now Is the Time for Running by Michael Williams. Little, Brown. 2013

Deo and his brother Innocent flee the dusty soccer field in their village in Zimbabwe when the soldiers arrive. Hoping for a safe-haven in South Africa, they face the prejudice that many refugees suffer.

Outcasts United: The Story of a Refugee Soccer Team That Changed a Town by Warren St. John. Delacorte, 2012

Determined to help a diverse group of refugee children, a female soccer coach establishes a team called the Fugees in the Georgia town that is their new home.

The Red Pencil by Andrea Davis Pinkney. Little, Brown. 2014

Life in Amira's peaceful Sudanese village is destroyed by war, sending her on an arduous journey to a refugee camp where the simple gift of a red pencil opens new possibilities in her world.

Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Scholastic. 2000

Forced to flee their privileged life in Mexico in the 1930s, Esperanza's family lands in a migrant workers' camp in California.

Stories about WWII – Nazi Regime

Darkness Over Denmark: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews by Ellen Levine. Holiday House. 2000

These factual stories chronicle the remarkable efforts by the Danish people to help the Jewish population escape from the Nazi regime in 1943, based on interviews with survivors.

Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank. Bantam reissue edition. 1993

When Anne's Amsterdam family goes into hiding from the Nazis in 1940, she records her most private feelings to her diary, a factual record of the difficulties of living life in hiding for over two years.

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry. HMH Books for Young Readers. 2014 (25th anniversary edition)

Annemarie's family joins the successful effort to help the Jewish population of Denmark to escape the country after the Nazi invasion. Based on a true story.

Prisoner B-3087 by Alan Gratz with Ruth and Jack Gruener. Scholastic. 2013

As a boy of ten when the Nazis invade Poland, Yanek loses all he holds dear. During the course of World War II, he survives ten different concentration camps in a remarkable true story of survival.

Lesson 1

Handouts

Activity 1 – Teacher Resource

“Dear Abby” Letters

Letter #1

Dear Abby,

I feel really let down. My friend and I are from the same primary school, and we moved up to secondary school together. We used to be really good friends, but now somebody else has started hanging around with us. He lives nearer my friend. They went out last weekend without me and were talking about it at school today. I feel really mad and upset that I wasn't invited. I don't know what this new friend thinks of me. I get the feeling I'm not wanted. What should I do?

Letter #2

Dear Abby,

I've got a friend who keeps being bullied at school. She lives near me, and we sometimes walk to school together. She never mentions the bullying because I think she is ashamed. They pick on her because of her family and the way her house looks. I like her but, I am very scared of the bullies. When they bully her, I walk away because I am scared of being bullied, too. It is confusing. I want to stick up for her, but I know that I will get bullied too. What do I do? If I tell my teacher, my friend might say that I said something, and then, they might bully me. I hate seeing my friend being bullied and having a really hard time. I don't know what to do.

Activity 1 – Teacher Resource

Letter #3

Dear Abby,

Jorge is one of the excellent students in my class. Other students ask him for his homework so they can copy it, but he always refuses. Jorge has asthma, and this makes it difficult for him to participate in sporting activities. Ever since he had an asthma attack during P.E., the other kids make fun of him every day and call him a ‘weakling.’ Recently, Jonathan pushed him to his knees and took a picture of him on his phone. Jonathan asked me to have a look at his Facebook page. He had uploaded Jorge’s picture with the caption, “This is what failure looks like.” Jonathan told me that several students in the class had ‘liked’ the photo already. He asked me to tell as many people as possible to ‘like’ the photograph. I’m worried he’ll do the same thing to me. What should I do?

Activity 1 – Student Handout

My “Dear Abby” Advice

Carefully read the letter to understand what the person is saying. Then, in your writing, follow the steps below.

1. **Restate** the problem briefly and in your own words.
 2. **Validate** the person’s feelings without judgement.
 3. **Respond** by offering advice that will support this person to solve his/her problem.
-

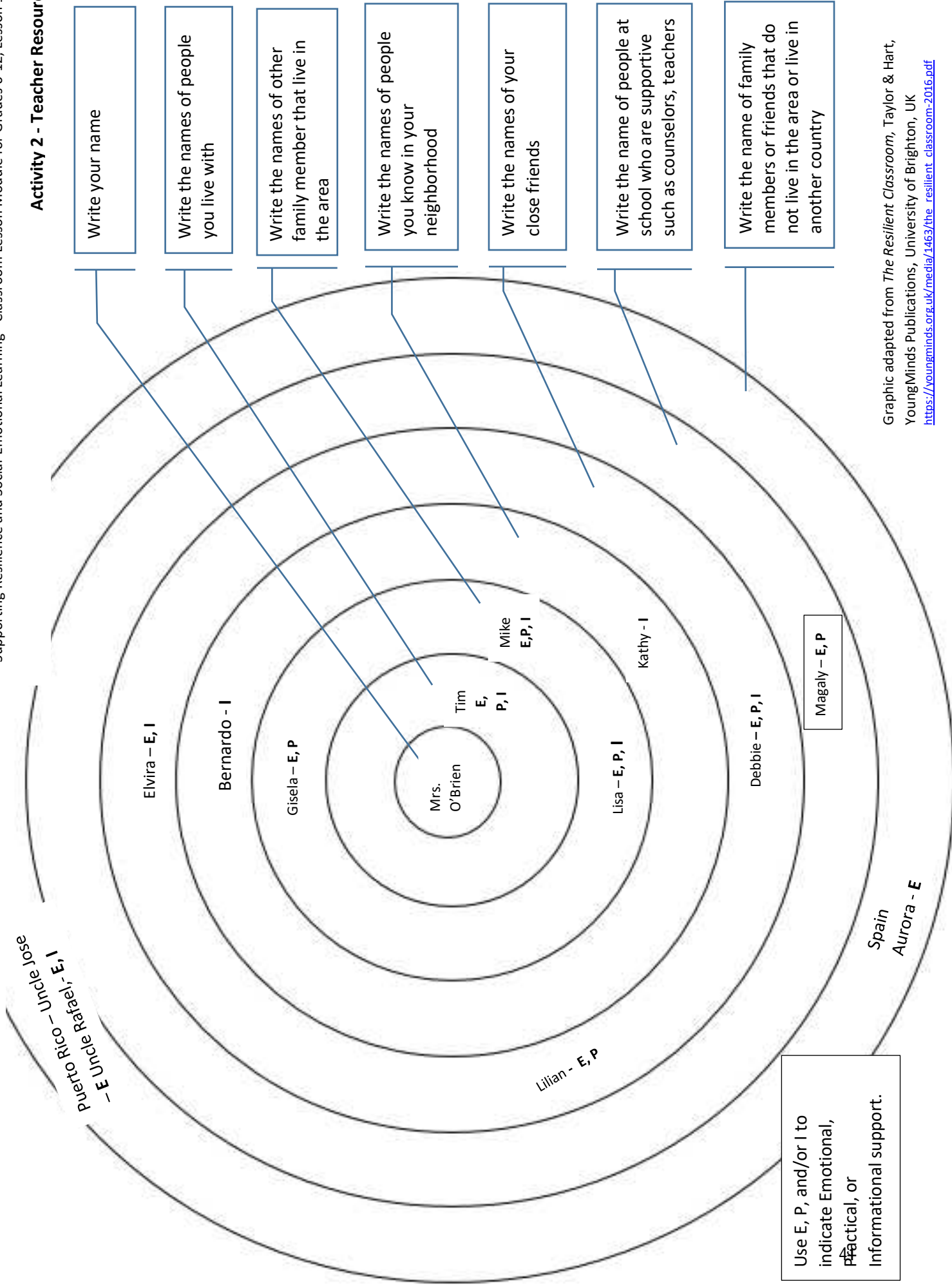
Possible sentence stems

1. I understand/I hear you say/It sounds like you are feeling _____ because _____.
2. I can understand/appreciate how you feel.
3. I suggest/ It might be a good idea/You might consider _____.

My Advice

Belonging – My Positive Vibe Tribe Sample

Activity 2 - Teacher Resource



Write your name

Write the names of people you live with

Write the names of other family member that live in the area

Write the names of people you know in your neighborhood

Write the names of your close friends

Write the name of people at school who are supportive such as counselors, teachers

Write the name of family members or friends that do not live in the area or live in another country

Use E, P, and/or I to indicate Emotional, Practical, or Informational support.

Belonging – My Positive Vibe Tribe

Californians Together/ Loyola Marymount University | Center for Equity for English Learners
SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE STUDENTS PROJECT – PHASE II
Classroom Lesson Modules for Grades 6-12

Activity 2 – Student Handout

Write your name

Write the names of people you live with

Write the names of other family member that live in the area

Write the names of people you know in your neighborhood

Write the names of your close friends

Write the name of people at school who are supportive such as counselors, teachers

Write the name of people of family members or friends that do not live in the area or live in another country

Next to their name, write E, P, or I to indicate Emotional, Practical, or Informational support they provide to you.

Graphic adapted from *The Resilient Classroom*, Taylor & Hart, YoungMinds Publications, University of Brighton, UK
https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1463/the_resilient_classroom-2016.pdf

STOP – THINK RESPOND

1. Stop. Think.
(to delay your response)
2. Breathe.
3. Think of 3 Responses
(before talking or acting)
4. Respond.

<p>Scenario One</p> <p>At lunch, you line up at the cafeteria. Someone pushes in front of you.</p>	<p>Scenario Two</p> <p>The person behind you keeps kicking the leg of your chair during a test.</p>
<p>Scenario Three</p> <p>The person you are talking to has a different opinion than yours.</p>	<p>Scenario Four</p> <p>You are online and notice a friend on Facebook has "unfriended" you.</p>
<p>Scenario Five</p> <p>You are saving up to buy a video game, but see a new pair of shoes to buy that will cost \$40.</p>	

Activity 3 – Student Handout

Impulse Response Group Worksheet

Group Members _____ Scenario Number _____

Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Chosen Response	Why this option?

Lesson 2

Handouts

Student Handout 1

***What Does it Mean to Be a Refugee?* THINK link Video Guide**

As you view the video, listen for the answer to these questions.

1. Worldwide, approximately how many people have been forced to leave their home to escape violence and war? _____

2. According to the international definition, a refugee is someone who _____

3. An asylum seeker is _____

4. What are the obligations of a host country toward refugees? _____

5. What are the differences between refugees and migrants? _____

6. What do refugees and migrants have in common? _____

7. What obstacles and challenges do refugees fleeing war face along the way? _____

8. What can we do to help refugees? _____

Refugee by Alan Gratz– Story Comparison Table

Characters	What?	Where?	Why?
Josef	Problem		
	Mode of Travel		
	Losses		

Student Handout 2a - c

Characters	What?	Where?	Why?
Isabel	Problem		
	Mode of Travel		
	Losses		

Student Handout 2a - c

Characters	What?	Where?	Why?
Mahmoud	Problem		
	Mode of Travel		
	Losses		

Refugee by Alan Gratz – Sample Story Comparison Table

Characters	What?	Where?	Why?
Josef	Problem	Germany	For being Jewish
	Father was taken away to a concentration camp		
	Had to leave if they want to survive.	Germany	
	When they arrive, they are not allowed to disembark.	Cuba	
	Have been granted asylum but now the Nazis have invaded the country.	France	
	Mode of Travel	Germany	Forced to leave their home and country.
	Train		
	Cruise ship – St. Louis	Cuba	Seeking asylum to escape the Nazi prosecution
	Foot	France	Trying to avoid capture and being sent to a concentration camp
	Losses		
Father	Cuba		
Josef and mother	Poland		Sent and killed in a concentration camp

Characters	What?	Where?	Why?
Isabel	Problem - Her father had been in jail for trying to leave the country and is now in danger again for participating in a protest. - The family doesn't want to be separated and wants to follow her dad.	Cuba	
	Mode of Travel Self-made boat	U.S.	There are no legal means to leave the country. Government does not allow emigration or free travel.
	Losses Ivan Lito	Atlantic Ocean Miami Beach	Shark attack Gives himself up to Coast Guard – sent to Guantanamo U.S. Naval Base in Cuba
Mahmoud	Problem -Civil War destroyed the city and is constantly under attack. -People are being beaten up to steal their food or for being of a different ethnic/religious group.	Syria	- Fearing for their lives they decide to leave when their house is destroyed.
	Mode of Travel Own Car Foot	Syria Turkey Serbia	- Their car gets shot at and have to abandon it and start walking. - Cross the border to Turkey - Without documents, cross the border to Serbia at night

Teacher Resource

<p>Mahmoud (Cont.)</p>	<p>Foot (Cont.)</p>	<p>Hungary Austria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walk to the Hungarian border when abandoned by the taxi driver. - Taking advantage of a visit by a UN delegation, leave the refugee camp and walk to the Austrian border and cross it in reaction to the treatment from the Hungarian authorities.
	<p>Taxi</p>	<p>Turkey Macedonia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leave the refugee camp for Izmir hoping to get to Greece. - To the border with Serbia
	<p>Dinghy</p>	<p>Greece</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smugglers take them to a Greek island across from Izmir
	<p>Ferry</p>	<p>Greece</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authorities send them to Athens to be processed and to apply for documents to travel to Germany.
	<p>Train</p>	<p>Germany</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrive in Munich and granted asylum
	<p>Losses Hana</p>	<p>Mediterranean Sea</p>	<p>Fearing she will drown, Mahmoud begs the passengers on another dinghy to take his baby sister. The family is unable to locate her when they arrive in Greece.</p>

Student Handout 3

Refugee Blues

by W. H. Auden (1939)

Selected Stanzas

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

The consul banged the table and said:
"If you've got no passport, you're officially dead";
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go
today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread";
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and
me.

Went down the harbor and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

Pass the Poster

Triad: _____

Question 1 – Why are the asylum seekers in Mexico?

Pass the Poster

Triad: _____

Question 2 – What are the living conditions? Do you find similarities to Mahmoud’s experience in the camp in Kilis or when they were in Izmir?

Pass the Poster

Triad: _____

Question 3 – What are the possibilities for asylum of these Central American refugees? Why?

Article 1 –Jigsaw Activity

Asylum-Seekers Reaching U.S. Border Are Being Flown to Guatemala

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/11/814602596/asylum-seekers-reaching-u-s-border-are-being-flown-to-guatemala>

March 11, 2020 4:09 PM ET

Hundreds of asylum-seekers who reach the Texas-Mexico border aren't getting a chance to make their case in U.S. immigration court.

Instead, the migrants — **mostly women and children** — are put on planes to Guatemala and told to ask for asylum in that country.

Alicia, who asked that we not use her last name, is one of more than 800 migrants from Honduras and El Salvador who have been sent to Guatemala under an **Asylum Cooperative Agreement**.

After traveling for weeks from Honduras with her teenage son, Alicia said she was floored when a U.S. border official raised the possibility that they would be sent to Guatemala.

"I told him I had nothing to do with Guatemala and that I didn't know anyone in Guatemala, so what could I possibly do there?" she said.

The interview lasted five minutes, Alicia said. She never got a chance to fully explain why she was seeking protection in the U.S. or that she was trying to reconnect with family.

Afterward, she and her son waited a week in immigrant detention.

Alicia said the facility was extremely cold, and the guards yelled at them, saying "ugly things." One morning before sunrise, they were escorted onto a bus headed to a nearby airport.

"We weren't sure if they were sending us to Guatemala, if they'd send us to Mexico, or if they'd send us to El Salvador or Honduras," Alicia said. "We had absolutely no clue."

A life-changing decision

The Trump administration says the Asylum Cooperative Agreement helps drive down the number of migrants asking for asylum in the U.S.

"For the ninth straight month in a row, we've continued to make incredible progress along the southwest border," Mark Morgan, the acting commissioner for Customs and Border Protection, said at a press conference last week.

Student Handouts 5a-c

But critics say the U.S. is sending asylum-seekers back to dangerous places.

In January, the [ACLU filed a lawsuit](#) against the Trump administration's Asylum Cooperative Agreement with Guatemala. The country is grappling with gang violence and economic hardship.

Alicia said she had been threatened by gangs in her home country, and that's why she and her son left Honduras.

According to the [Guatemalan Institute for Migration](#), some of the flights sending asylum-seekers to Guatemala under this policy are coming from an airport in Brownsville, Texas.



LAW

Court Blocks Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' Policy Along Part of the Border

Protesters, such as Joshua Rubin with [Witness at the Border](#), gather every weekday outside the Brownsville-South Padre Island International Airport.

Student Handouts 5a-c

"These people fled a situation, most likely that threatened their lives and we're flying them back into those places where their lives are in danger," Rubin said.

From beyond a chain-link fence, the protesters watch shackled migrants as they are escorted onto planes.

Diane Sonde, an activist from Brooklyn, N.Y., said airport officials have parked vehicles in front of them to block their view and even sent police officers to move them.

"I asked them how they could sleep at night and how would they feel if this was their children and their families," Sonde said. "They wouldn't even look us in the eye."

Once in the air, many of the migrants still don't know where they're going, said Charanya Krishnaswami with [Amnesty International USA](#). "Not even understanding that that's where you're going and only realizing it upon landing and that complete lack of orientation, that complete lack of counseling, I think exacerbates existing traumas and creates new ones," Krishnaswami said.

She recently traveled to Guatemala to document how this agreement is playing out on the ground there. She found disoriented migrants who were given very little time to make a life-changing decision.

"They're told they have 72 hours to decide whether they want to seek asylum in Guatemala, or whether they want to accept voluntary return," Krishnaswami said.

"They don't feel safe there"

Ariana Sawyer, a researcher with [Human Rights Watch](#), also traveled to Guatemala recently, to document how the Asylum Cooperative Agreement is being implemented.

"Nobody I spoke to felt like seeking asylum in Guatemala was a viable option for them," Sawyer said. "As a result, it's really difficult to locate these people, to keep track of them, to find out what they're going through, to give them any kind of support because they're not staying in Guatemala. They don't feel safe there."

Only about 16 migrants have decided to apply for asylum in Guatemala, according to officials there. The others are mostly unaccounted for. Some have gone home, while others, such as Alicia, plan on trekking north again.

Alicia still hopes to make it to the U.S. one day to reunite with family.

"I'm hiding in my country while I try to gather some money to try and return," she said.

Student Handouts 5a-c

The U.S. wants Guatemala to accept even more migrants. The administration also hopes to start sending migrants back to Honduras under a similar agreement.

ICYMI: New numbers about how many people (823) have been sent to Guatemala under the Trump administration's Guatemalan Asylum Cooperative Agreement. Numbers still show it's mostly women and children.

The Honduran ACA is expected to start being enforced soon.

 **GOBIERNO de GUATEMALA**
UN PAIS LIBRE Y SOBERANO

 **INSTITUTO GUATEMALTECO DE MIGRACIÓN**

Traslados Acuerdo de Cooperación de Asilo -ACA-

De noviembre 2019 al 06 de marzo 2020

Honduras	
Hombres	132
Mujeres	178
Niños	91
Niñas	116
Total	517

El Salvador	
Hombres	65
Mujeres	127
Niños	54
Niñas	60
Total	306

Total: 823 personas trasladadas

Solicitudes de refugio en FAG: 50
Solicitudes formales en ORMI: 16

*Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca
*Oficina de Relaciones Migratorias Internacionales

Student Handouts 5a-c



NATIONAL

[This Migrant Won in Immigration Court, and the U.S. Sent Him to Mexico Anyway](#)

Article 2 – Jigsaw Activity

FLEEING FOR OUR LIVES: CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRANT CRISIS

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/fleeing-for-our-lives-central-american-migrant-crisis/>

Migration from Central America to the U.S. is not a new phenomenon, however the reasons, or push factors that are causing people to migrate or flee have changed. The Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), composed of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is considered one of the most dangerous places on earth, which has caused unprecedented levels of migration. The United Nations High Commissioner for refugees has called this a humanitarian crisis. Many Central Americans are refugees who like Syrians, are **fleeing for their lives.**

While the United States has seen a record in asylum applications in recent years, Central American countries are dealing with larger migratory flows from the NTCA within their borders. According a 2014 UNHCR report, **Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama have had a 432% increase in asylum applications.**

Enforcing borders over humanitarian protection

In Mexico there is a concerning trend: the Mexican government's focus is one of border enforcement rather than humanitarian protection.

- Detention of immigrants went up 71% in 2014. Then in 2015 it deported 150,000 Central Americans from the Northern Triangle.
- The Mexican government also reported that only 24.7% of asylum applications were approved. The U.S. is much more restrictive, for in 2014 its asylum grant rate was 3.7%

Horrific Levels of Violence Against Women

Women and children are the most vulnerable in this crisis as they can easily become victims of rape, kidnapping, torture, or murder. Within the NTCA, gender-based violence is used as a means of intimidation or coercion.

- According to a report on the Global Burden of Armed Violence, in the period between 2007 to 2012, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala had the highest average annual female homicide rates in the world.

An increase in crime has spilled over into neighboring countries as well. According to the UNHCR, the rate of women from these countries applying for asylum in the U.S. has increased five times over.

Protecting Unaccompanied Children Fleeing for Their Lives

Student Handouts 5a-c

What is most shocking is the number of unaccompanied children who are seeking refuge outside their country. According to the Federation for American Scientists in 2014 alone, U.S. Authorities documented 68,500 unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle at the U.S./Mexico border. When interviewed, children predominantly cited the following reasons for fleeing the region:

- Fleeing violence in their community and/or home
- Actively avoiding recruitment into gangs
- Avoiding exploitation in the form of prostitution or human trafficking

While the rates of unaccompanied children have decreased since its peak in 2014, authorities and policy makers continue to struggle with the number of children already at U.S. borders and within the system.

What sets this crisis apart from others around the world?

While the violence occurring within the Northern Triangle is indisputable, the legal classification of migrants from the region sits within an area of ambiguity within international law as the violence in NTCA is not classified as a state/interstate conflict. All the while, research shows that migrants are identifying key indicators that suggest they are in need of international protection. For example, 82% of women indicated that if returned to their home country they would likely face torture or persecution (UNHCR).

As a result of this, the U.S. government has announced an expansion of the current refugee resettlement program for migrants fleeing from NTCA. This expansion is a definitive step in the right direction, but it is a far cry from the measures that need to be taken internationally toward resettling those displaced.

Article 3 –Jigsaw Activity

Today’s Migrant Flow Is Different

Poverty has driven many previous waves of migrants from their homes. What’s new now is the rise of the gangs.

Sofia Martinez

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/central-america-border-immigration/563744/>

The killing of a loved one. An attempt at gang recruitment. A rape. Harassment by a police officer. A death threat over an outstanding extortion payment. Amid the justified uproar at the Trump administration’s policies on America’s southern border, often lost are the reasons many Central Americans leave their homes, and are prepared to brave the perils of the journey north in the first place. Families arriving at the border from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala leave behind a myriad of stories, many of them connected to their homelands’ plague of armed violence.

Historically, Central Americans have tended to migrate for economic reasons. Since the end of the internal armed conflicts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua which together displaced almost 2 million people in the 1970s and 1980s—thousands of Central Americans travelled to the U.S. to escape economic misery in their war-torn states. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the U.S. saw record numbers of apprehensions of migrants along its border with Mexico.

Today’s migrant flow is very different. Yes, there are still male heads of household seeking to pursue the “American Dream” in the U.S. so as to send home a couple of hundred dollars each month to their families. But the crux of the recent crisis at the border is that there are fewer male migrants in their 20s or 30s making the crossing, and many more families, newborns, children, and pregnant women escaping life-or-death situations as much as poverty.

Previous U.S. policies contributed to the extreme insecurity in their home countries. In 1996, U.S. authorities approved the “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act,” which led to the deportations of tens of thousands of convicted criminals to Central America in the early 2000s. This in turn led to the expansion of gangs like the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street gang (*Barrio 18*)—originally born in the U.S.—across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The region’s civil wars left behind tens of thousands of young people from broken families. That reality, combined with extreme inequality, policies of mass incarceration of suspicious youth, and weak judicial and security institutions created the new monster that is today’s gang problem. Over the past 15 years, they have taken over both rural and urban areas across North Central America, setting up roadblocks in poor neighborhoods, and imposing their own law.

Student Handouts 5a-c

While poverty remains the principal cause of Central American families traveling north, desperation to escape gang violence also motivates many.

In countries like El Salvador and Honduras, parents living in what are popularly known as “red zones”—usually communities plagued by gangs—have to spend hard-earned money on private transport or after-school programs to avoid their kids coming into contact with criminal groups. “It’s really complicated for us [the parents] ... because we need to work more hours to pay for the security of our children and also spend enough time at home to talk with them and make sure they are not hanging out with the wrong people,” a Honduran social worker and mother of two told me recently. I am withholding her name, and those of others quoted in this story, for security reasons.

For some families, it is too late to keep their kids away. In El Salvador, where there are around 65,000 active gang members with a social support base of half a million people, boys from 12 years up are prime targets for recruitment. Girls can also be targeted at an early age, either to be sexually abused or to become gang members. The eventual fate of a girl—whether she is left alone, harassed into joining the gang, or forced into becoming a sex slave—depends entirely on the local leaders, or *palabrer*os, who run the local cells or *clicas* (cliques) of the two largest gangs, MS-13 and *Barrio 18*.

The recruitment process is gradual and lasts from a couple of months to a few years. It can start with a present from the local gang, such as expensive sportswear or an invitation to come to a party in a *casa loca* (literally ‘mad house’), with sex workers included. If you spend enough time with internally displaced people in Central America, more than one will tell you that their old homes became one of these *casas locas* because the gang wanted it “for strategic purposes” in their turf wars with other groups. If a family refuses to leave, all its members are threatened.

Despite decades-long prevention efforts by local authorities and foreign-backed law enforcement, gangs remain defiant and undefeated. The phenomenon has grown so rapidly since the 2000s that it has penetrated deep into the social fabric of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, meaning police operations alone aren’t enough to defeat the gangs. Top state officials in the region are aware of the magnitude of what they face, and behind closed doors agree that they are “fighting a war they cannot win.”

Nevertheless, the governments from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras continue to rely almost solely on security crackdowns to tackle gangs. This has indirectly created yet another reason for the local population to flee. As an NGO worker in El Salvador told me recently: “The situation is so bad that sometimes people are more scared of the police than the gangs.”

While law enforcement is an inevitable part of the fight against violent crime, the impact in communities where gangs are present can be hugely counter-productive. Especially in El Salvador and Honduras, residents get caught in daily armed confrontations caused by gangs’

Student Handouts 5a-c

turf wars, as well as operations by security forces in their communities to combat them. This is on top of the usual harassment that the gangs inflict on local families, like trying to recruit their children or extracting weekly extortion payments. “In my previous neighborhood I couldn’t trust anybody, it is like not knowing who the enemy is,” a man displaced from his community in central Honduras by gang violence told me when I met him in Tegucigalpa. In El Salvador, it is very common that teenagers living in “red zones” are harassed by security forces, who consider them usual suspects of gang membership.

This situation has left thousands of Central American families stuck between a rock and a hard place. They know how dangerous the trip to the U.S. is, but are forced to leave to save their lives. “If I stay here, I will die,” a Honduran woman told me in tears during a group interview with victims of forced displacement in Tegucigalpa. Her fear was retaliation from gangs after her son and mother had been killed in the same week.

When I have asked displaced people over the past few months if U.S. migration policies deter them from fleeing, they usually reply that the prospect of being caught by U.S. migration officials makes them anxious, but that “there is no scarier place” than their home countries. This is why, no matter how hard and sometimes inhumane this administration’s anti-immigration policies might be, many Central American parents and their children will be determined to make the trip north anyway.

Many don’t leave much behind, not even their houses. This is why, as a friend from Guatemala who once considered making the trip recently told me, they are still willing to go through the perilous journey: “We know you can get killed, and how dangerous it is especially for women [to try entering the U.S. without papers] ... but when it’s a life or death situation, I bet you would do the same.”

Student Handouts 5a-c



Police patrol a low-income neighborhood in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in 2015.