

The South Sudan Refugee Crisis

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do groups who are threatened by crimes against humanity respond to these injustices?
- What impacts does mass migration have on regions where crimes against humanity take place?
- In what ways is the treatment of refugees a human rights issue?
- How do stereotypes and misconceptions impact policies that affect refugees?

Overview

In this activity, students will analyze USC Shoah Foundation testimony of a refugee from South Sudan to draw conclusions about the meaning of the terms “refugee,” “internally displaced,” and “asylum seeker,” and brainstorm a list of challenges confronted by people who are forced to leave their homes because they are threatened by violence and/or persecution. Students will also review or familiarize themselves with the terms “internally displaced” and “asylum seeker.” Students will then discuss why the treatment of refugees is a human rights issue. After documenting key events in South Sudan’s civil war and the resulting refugee crisis, students will analyze fact sheets about the world’s refugees, identify barriers to protecting refugees’ human rights, and identify popular misconceptions about refugees. Finally, students will draft action plans for educating the public to correct these misconceptions.

Target Audience

High School Social Studies

Activity Duration

Two 45–60 minute class periods.

Enduring Understandings

- A common response of groups threatened by war and crimes against humanity is mass migration resulting in refugee crises.
- The experience of refugees fleeing civil war and crimes against humanity in South Sudan provides a case study on how refugee crises compound the humanitarian costs of human rights abuses.
- International laws and norms, including the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention, recognize the legal rights of refugees.

Handouts

- The South Sudan Crisis: Testimony Notetaking Guide
- Excerpts from UN Declaration of Human Rights
- Country profile graphic organizer for South Sudan
- Notetaking Guide: The South Sudan Civil War and Refugee Crisis
- Notetaking Guide: Fact Sheets and Sources of Refugees
- Notetaking Guide: Gallery Walk
- Misconceptions and Facts about Refugees

- Stereotypes and misconceptions about refugees, including refugees from South Sudan, threaten the implementation of effective policies protecting refugees and the recognition of refugees' human rights.

Background Information/Links

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Refugees have no choice but to flee their homes because they are threatened by conflict and persecution. They often encounter immense challenges, including exposure to extreme weather conditions; lack of access to proper food, shelter, education, or job opportunities; and a future that is often dependent on conditions improving in the areas they needed to flee. Because of this, refugees are protected by international laws, including the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention. Refugees cannot be sent back to their home countries if doing so places them at risk. International law also guarantees the rights of refugees to enter and remain in other countries.

Like refugees, internally displaced people flee their homes to escape violence and persecution. However, internally displaced people remain in their home countries either because they hope conditions will improve, because they are physically or financially unable to travel to a different country, or because they are blocked from seeking safety elsewhere. Although internally displaced people are also protected by international human rights laws and norms, they are often the most difficult to protect. Aid organizations often cannot reach them to because of their proximity to armed conflicts.

Asylum seekers are refugees who have officially applied to relocate to a host country to be protected from armed conflict or persecution. Once asylum seekers begin the application process they are protected by international law. The process of seeking asylum includes a detailed interview, presentation of identity documentation, and a vetting of information. Asylum seekers are legally entitled to food, shelter, and health care in their host countries while they wait for their applications to be processed.

Use of the inaccurate term “illegal” instead of “undocumented” or “irregular” dehumanizes refugees and migrants and results in the denial of their internationally recognized rights to due process and legal protections. It also stigmatizes individuals and groups who seek to provide them with humanitarian and legal assistance. The term “illegal” has been used on many occasions



in history to deny disadvantaged groups of legal protections, including to refer to Jews fleeing the Holocaust and African Americans fleeing slavery on the Underground Railroad.

Crisis in South Sudan

South Sudan is a Sub-Saharan African country bordered by Sudan to the north; Ethiopia to the east; Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the south; and the Central African Republic to the west. In 2011 its citizens voted to declare independence from Sudan after generations of conflict dating back to British colonial rule. At the time of its independence celebration in 2011, the new nation of South Sudan faced a variety of complex challenges. These included a lack of infrastructure; an economy that relied on a single resource, petroleum; continued differences with Sudan; and tensions between the country's Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. In 2013, power struggles between the country's first president, Salva Kiir, and vice president, Riek Machar, led to an outbreak of violence between Dinka forces aligned with Kiir and Nuer forces who supported Machar. During the brutal civil war that followed, armed groups targeted civilians by ethnicity and committed widespread atrocities, including sexual violence, destroying villages, and forcing children to enlist in their ranks. The civil war in South Sudan disrupted the nation's farming and food production industries, resulting in nationwide food shortages. At the outset of the civil war, the UN Security Council deployed security forces to South Sudan to protect the civilian population. Despite efforts by the UN Security Council, over 2.2 million refugees have been displaced to other countries by violence and famine, while another 1.5 million have been internally displaced. According to reporting by the New York Times, more than 383,000 South Sudanese have been killed in the civil war.

With millions of refugees fleeing violence and famine, settlement camps have been established to support the massive influx of refugees. The Bidibidi settlement in Uganda, home to more than 230,000 refugees from South Sudan, is the second largest refugee settlement in the world. There, refugees confront mental health issues resulting from the trauma of exposure to violence and resource shortages from inadequate funding. More recently, the global coronavirus pandemic has impeded refugees' access to mental health services and job opportunities after Uganda's government banned gatherings.



Sources

- [South Sudan Refugee Crisis Explained](#)
- <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/>
- <https://www.csis.org/independence-movements/south-sudan>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/26/why-south-sudan-won-war-lost-peace/>
- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/09/9-years-south-sudan-still-nation-waiting>
- <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-south-sudan>

Procedure

Ask

- 1 To begin the activity, share with students a brief background on the history of South Sudan in order for students to have context on the ongoing civil war and refugee crisis. For reference, it may be helpful to use the Crisis in South Sudan section of the background information found at the beginning of this activity.
- 2 The teacher will play a video of the USC Shoah Foundation testimony of an [anonymous refugee](#) from South Sudan. As they watch, students will complete a notetaking organizer documenting reasons she left home and the challenges she was or will be forced to confront before, during, and after her journey to the refugee camp.
- 3 Pairs of students will share notes from the testimony and clarify or revise responses as needed. Pairs will brainstorm definitions of the terms “refugee,” “internally displaced person,” and “asylum seeker.” As needed, the teacher can show members of the class video segments about the terms from the UN Refugee Agency:
 - “Who is a Refugee?” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvzZGplGbl8>
 - “Internally Displaced People” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCzpVQkencw>
 - “Asylum Seekers” video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1E_tiagn8Q
 - The teacher will distribute/display the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensuring that students realize the document was written in the aftermath of World War II, and review with students atrocities from World War II that prompted the writing of this document.
- 4 The teacher will display Article 14 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights:
 1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

- 5 The teacher will pose to the class the question, “Why do you think the treatment of refugees is a human rights issue?” Pairs will discuss and share ideas with the full class, with the teacher recording a list of reasons on the whiteboard/blackboard.

Analyze

- 6 The teacher will announce that the refugee crisis in South Sudan is one of the largest in the world. The teacher will ask students what, if anything, they might know about the country of South Sudan in Sub-Saharan Africa and introduce students to the country by locating it on a map of the world and providing some basic information from [CIA Factbook](#). Students will complete a graphic organizer to document basic information about the country.
- 7 The teacher will provide a reputable explanation of key events from the Sudan refugee crisis, such as the account from the Council on Foreign Relations’ [Global Conflict Tracker](#). Students will complete notetaking graphic organizers identifying separately *underlying factors* and events that led to the refugee crisis in South Sudan. The teacher will ask students to share ideas about what events in South Sudan might reveal about the global refugee crisis and refugees in general. Anticipated responses: they are often caught in conflicts between ethnic groups; they are often caught in civil wars; refugee crises create humanitarian and resource issues in destination countries.
- 8 The teacher will announce that the class will take a closer look at data and information about the world’s refugees. The teacher will divide the class into groups, with each analyzing a selection of fact sheets, teacher notes, and other sources from the UN Refugee Agency (and one news article from Al Jazeera):
- Group 1: [How many people displaced?](#); [Where do refugees come from?](#); [Where are refugees?](#)
 - Group 2: [25 persons per minute](#); [37,000 per day](#); [More than 70 million](#); [Refugee for a long time](#)
 - Group 3: [Refugee rights](#) (video segment); [When it comes to refugees, terminology matters](#)
 - Group 4: [Primary enrollment rates](#); [secondary enrollment rates](#); [higher education enrollment rates](#)
 - Group 5: [Children fleeing by themselves](#); [Where do most refugee children live?](#); [Where would you go to school in another country?](#)
 - Groups will use organizers to take notes on the information provided in their assigned resources, and then create poster presentations for sharing the information with classmates. *Note:* Some of the resources are teacher notes that were developed by the UN for teachers. Students can use instructional tips in these resources for planning their poster presentations.
- 9 The teacher will post completed posters around the entire room to make room for groups of students to view them. The teacher will then facilitate a gallery walk activity in which student groups will visit and take notes on each poster for no more than 5 minutes each, prompting students to rotate until all have been visited.

Teaching with Testimony

High School Activity | The South Sudan Refugee Crisis



- 10** When students have finished, the teacher will direct pairs of students to discuss the question, “Based on what you’ve learned from all of the sources you consulted, what are the most significant barriers to protecting the human rights of refugees?” Pairs will share responses with the full group, with the teacher recording examples of barriers on the whiteboard/blackboard.

Apply

- 11** The teacher will distribute a T-Chart graphic organizer listing misconceptions about refugees in the right-hand column. Using data from the gallery walk activity, students will refute the misconceptions with facts.

- 12** The teacher will ensure that students have correctly addressed each misconception on the T-Chart, and then facilitate a full class discussion around the question “What impact could public misconceptions about refugees have on efforts to protect their rights and address their needs? Why?”

Act

- 13** The teacher will ask pairs of students to share with one another examples of successful advertising or public information campaigns from any field and identify attributes that made the campaigns so effective. In full class discussion, students will share a few examples they discussed in groups and the teacher will record a list of attributes that make public information or advertising campaigns successful.
- 14** The teacher will announce that the students will design action plans for public information campaigns to educate the public and correct misconceptions about refugees. The teacher will then ask students to identify attributes from the previous discussion that will be most important to ensuring the success of a campaign of this nature, and also to identify attributes that will be less important or not appropriate (for example, humor).
- 15** The teacher will then provide the following steps for creating public information action plans. Using the steps, students will draft their plans for educating the community about refugees.
- How will you know when your goals have been achieved?
 - List the steps of your public awareness campaign. For each step, provide a date range and describe how you will know when it’s time to advance to the next step.
 - What materials and/or partners will you need to implement your project?
 - What are the goals of your public awareness campaign?
- 16** If possible, students could announce or publicize their plans at a larger form, such as a student assembly.

Connections

Connection to Student Lives	Connection to Contemporary Events	Connection to the Future
Students will read about steps and strategies for designing and implementing a public awareness campaign and create action plans for their own campaigns.	Students will analyze secondary sources to trace and document key events in the South Sudan refugee crisis and connect a USH Shoah Foundation testimony to these events.	Students will gather information about the global refugee crisis for the purpose of correcting misconceptions and advocating for more effective policies.

Clips of Testimony

■ Anonymous

In this testimony, a survivor of the South Sudan civil war describes her life working for a non-governmental organization before the outbreak of war, explains why she was fled to Uganda during the war, and describes life in a refugee camp.

National Standards

College, Career and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D2.Civ.7.6-8 Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings.

D2.Civ.10.6-8 Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

D4.2.6-8 Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations.

D.4.4.6-8 Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

D4.7.6-8 Assess the individual and collective capabilities to take action to address local, regional, and global problems, taking into account a range of possible levers of power, strategies, and potential outcomes.

D4.8.6-8 Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions and take action in their classrooms and schools, and in out-of-school civic contexts.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

RI.8.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

The South Sudan Refugee Crisis: Testimony Notetaking Guide



STUDENT HANDOUT

<p>1. Identify the speaker Name, Age/DOB, Experience Group.</p>	
<p>2. Before the crisis Based on the testimony, what was the subject's life like before she was forced to flee? What evidence supports your analysis?</p>	
<p>3. The decision to flee What events contributed to the subject's decision to flee home? What challenges did she and her family face during the journey</p>	
<p>4. Life as a refugee What information does the subject provide about life in the camp as a refugee? What challenges does she face?</p>	
<p>Why is this segment of testimony an important source of information for learning about the challenges faced by refugees worldwide?</p>	
<p>What questions does the testimony raise?</p>	

Excerpts from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights



STUDENT HANDOUT

1. Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law...

...Now, therefore, The General Assembly (of the United Nations),

Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

2. Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

**Where is it?**

In what region of the world is it located? What countries and/or bodies of water border it to the North, South, East, and West? How large is the country?

What are the most important physical characteristics?

Describe the climate and vegetation. Are there any prominent landforms or bodies of water?

How do people make a living there?

What are the most important natural resources and industries?

Who lives there?

What language(s) is/are spoken there? By percentage, what are the most prominent ethnicities and religious groups?

What questions do you have about the country?

What would you like to know more about to understand the country better?

Notetaking Guide: The South Sudan Civil War and Refugee Crisis



STUDENT HANDOUT

What underlying conditions led to the conflict?	What were the most important events of the war and refugee crisis? List in order and date.
What impact have the conflict and refugee crisis had on the region?	

Notetaking Guide: Fact Sheets and Sources on Refugees



STUDENT HANDOUT

As you analyze the sources on the global refugee crisis, take notes in the spaces below.

What broad theme or topic do your sources speak to? Use this to come up with a title for your poster.

What FACTS and/or STATISTICS were most revealing about the global refugee crisis?

Facts:

Statistics:

Based on the information you analyzed, identify challenges faced by refugees and other displaced people.

Notetaking Guide: Gallery Walk



STUDENT HANDOUT

Station	Topic/Theme	Important Facts and Figures	Challenges
1st			
2nd			
3rd			
4th			

Misconceptions and Facts about Refugees



Misconception	Facts and Evidence
Refugees come from many different places around the world. Most try to settle in the U.S. or Europe.	
For most refugees, displacement is temporary.	
Countries can send refugees back to their homes.	
Refugees who lack documentation are illegal migrants.	
The vast majority of refugees are adults.	
Many refugee children enroll in colleges in their new countries.	
Refugee children maintain school enrollment rates as they get older.	