



LESSON PLAN

# A Refugee's Story



RELATED FILM

**Welcome To Canada**

BY ADAM LOFTEN AND MARY FOWLES



## A Refugee's Story

### Key Idea

Millions of Syrian refugees are leaving their war-torn home in search of safety and opportunity in other countries. Those who have suffered the challenges of starting anew can have a powerful impact helping others resettle.

### Background

Since the Civil War in Syria began in 2011, millions of refugees have been fleeing violence and searching for new homes in other countries. As of March 2016, an estimated 11 million Syrians have been forced from their homes, and 4.5 million—half of Syria's population—have fled the country.\* More than 250,000 Syrians have lost their lives, 13,000 of them children.\*\*

António Guterres, who served as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from 2005-2015, has declared the situation, “the great tragedy of this century - a disgraceful humanitarian calamity with suffering and displacement unparalleled in recent history. The only solace is the humanity shown by the neighboring countries in welcoming and saving the lives of so many refugees.”

According to the UN Refugee Agency, the European Union welcomed nearly a million Syrian refugees in 2015.\*\*\* The United States committed to welcoming 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016. According to the State Department, 78 percent of those refugees were women and children.\*\*\*\*

The short film, *Welcome to Canada*, documents the story of Mohammed Alsaleh, a young refugee who fled violence and imprisonment by the Assad regime during Syria's Civil War. He was granted asylum in Canada and counsels newly arrived Syrian refugee families with the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSofBC). Mohammed is currently building a new life, striving to bring his family to safety from Turkey. The ISSofBC is a non-profit organization which serves the settlement and integration for newcomers coming into Canada globally. The organization is the same Vancouver-based NGO that aided Mohammed during his own resettlement process. Between November 4, 2015, and October 23, 2016, Canada's government welcomed 33,239 Syrian refugees, and the number continues to grow.\*\*\*\*\*



**Film:** 20 minutes

**Class:** 60 minutes

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- English Language Arts
- Geography
- Modern World Studies
- Psychology
- Sociology

#### COLLEGE

- English
- Geography
- History
- Psychology
- Sociology

### THEMES

- Connection to home
- Cultural displacement
- Human rights
- Resilience

### MATERIALS

- World map
- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing the film

### PREPARATION

- None



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\*Lucy Rodgers, David Gritten, James Offer and Patrick Asare, [“Syria: The story of the conflict.”](#) BBC, March 11, 2016.

\*\*Video: [“Syria’s horrifying statistics.”](#) BBC, February 12, 2016.

\*\*\*[“EUROPE: Syrian Asylum Applications.”](#) UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, October 2016.

\*\*\*\*Jared Goyette, [“Most Syrian refugees coming to U.S. are women, children.”](#) USA Today, August 9, 2016.

\*\*\*\*\*[“WelcomeRefugees: Key figures.”](#) Government of Canada.

### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5. Make use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understandings of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies. D2.Psy.2.9-12. Investigate human behavior from biological, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies. D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies. D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Tell students that Syria, a country in the Middle East, has been engulfed in a civil war since 2011, when the government responded violently to citizens who had taken to the streets to oppose the oppressive Syrian regime under President Bashar al-Assad. To date, refugees have been fleeing Syria in unprecedented numbers. Images and stories of refugees have flood-



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ed the media, which has helped to inform the world about the struggles taking place both within Syria and during refugees' search for freedom and safety outside the country.

Explain to students that an individual's story, told visually either through a photo or a film, can help to comprehend a larger issue, like war, by making it more accessible. Ask students if they have heard or seen any images about the Syrian conflict in the news. One well-known image has been widely circulated throughout the media—a 5-year-old boy in an ambulance after an airstrike in Aleppo. Ask students to view this photo in the following article on NPR.

The photo's powerful impact has helped people around the world empathize with the plight of refugees. Ask students to consider why a personal story through an image like that of the Syrian boy, might be more powerful than facts or statistics? How does an image like this impact you as a viewer?

### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Tell students they will be viewing a film, *Welcome to Canada*, about a refugee, Mohammed Alsaleh, who left Syria to escape torture and imprisonment. He was granted asylum in Canada and works with a Vancouver-based NGO to help other Syrians relocate.

Direct students to watch the film and ask them to take notes based on the following questions: What are the characters' hopes? What are some of the challenges the main character, Mohammed, faces? What challenges do the Syrian families face? Why might Mohammad's assistance be particularly impactful to other refugees?

## Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- What is Mohammed's occupation?
- Where is Mohammed's family? How many years has he been separated from his family? (Answers: Turkey, approximately 3 years.)



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- Based on photographic evidence, Human Rights Watch estimates that 6,786 individuals died in Syrian detention centers or hospitals run by the government between May 2011 and August 2013.<sup>6</sup> What happened to Mohammed at the first of five detention centers where he was imprisoned? (Answer: He was tortured and faced death.)
- Using the film as evidence, make a list of some of the challenges the Syrian refugees are facing as they relocate to Canada. How does Mohammed assist the refugees with these challenges with his job at the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC)? (Answers include: Learning a new language, finding housing, getting jobs, and dealing with concerns about the safety of family members or the loss of loved ones.)
- Each Syrian family, Mohammed said, is thinking about family members left behind. “This is something that I can relate to on a personal level because of the situation with my family,” Mohammed said. Describe the relationship that Mohammed has with the refugees that he assists. How does Mohammed’s personal experience aid and impact his ability to support recently arrived refugees?
- What might it be like to have to leave your home country and quickly adapt to learn a new language, a new culture, and a new place?
- In the film, what role does technology play in the refugees’ lives? What might it be like to see—through social media—your family, culture, and social network in crisis from the distance of another country?
- The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, when asked about welcoming Syrian refugees to Canada said in a 2015 interview, “This is something that we are able to do in this country because we define a Canadian not by a skin color or a language or a religion or a background, but by a shared set of values, aspirations, hopes and dreams that not just Canadians but people around the world share.” What do you think Trudeau means by a “shared set of values”? How does Mohammed live by a set of values?



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- Do you think that we, as humans, have a moral responsibility to respond to other humans in need during a humanitarian crisis? Why or why not? How might a politician or a world leader respond to this question?
- What do you find most compelling about Mohammed's story? Do you think his story, told through the medium of a short documentary film, might provide an important way for people to learn about the Syrian conflict from a humanistic perspective? Why or why not?

\* ["If the Dead Could Speak, Mass Deaths and Torture in Syria's Detention Facilities."](#)

Human Rights Watch, December 16, 2015.

### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. Earlier in this lesson, the class viewed the photograph of a 5-year-old Syrian boy, Omran Daqneesh. This photo caught the attention of the world; it captured Omran after having been pulled from rubble in Aleppo, Syria, after an airstrike. The image, which was originally taken from a video, went viral, and has appeared in international news media and has become a symbol for the devastation of Syria's Civil War. Why do you think so many people found this image so compelling and relatable? How does this photograph convey the Syrian war in ways that text, including facts and figures, might not? Describe your answer in a short essay, 2-3 paragraphs. (C3.D2.Geo.2.9-12)
2. The British author, Rudyard Kipling, said, "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten." What do you think about this quote? Do you agree or disagree with Kipling? Why or why not? What might be the history lesson of Mohammed's story? Do you think the impact of this short film, *Welcome to Canada*, makes a potential effective history lesson depicting human behavior? If so, how? Write a short essay, 2-3 paragraphs, describing your response. (C3.D2.Psy.2.9-12)



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3. The following article, published in The Guardian, lists "[12 Ways to Ensure a More Secure Future for Syria's Refugees.](#)" Read this article and select one of the solutions. Why do you think the solution you selected might have a positive impact? Does your solution relate to Mohammed's story? If so, how? (C3.D2.Geo.6.9-12) (Note: These solutions were presented in 2015 and continue to be relevant.)

### Resources

Organization Website: [Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia \(ISSofBC\)](#).

Melissa Fleming, "[Six reasons why Syrians are fleeing to Europe in increasing numbers.](#)" *The Guardian*, October 25, 2015.

Camila Domonoske, "[A Wounded Child In Aleppo, Silent And Still, Shocks The World.](#)" NPR, August 18, 2016.

"[Teaching with the News: The Conflict in Syria.](#)" Brown University: The Choices Program.

"[Updated: Your Cheat Sheet to the Syrian Conflict.](#)" PBS Newshour, September 2, 2013.

Jodi Kantor and Catrin Einhorn, "[What Does It Mean to Help One Family?](#)" *The New York Times*, October 22, 2016.

Natalie Alcoba, "['You Are Home:' Justin Trudeau Welcomes Syrian Refugees to Canada.](#)" Vice News, December 11, 2015.