

Why Are Families Being Separated and Detained at the Border?

Compelling Question: *What is happening at the border and what can we do about it?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1, R2, R4 Writing: W1, W4, W5 Speaking & Listening: SL1 Language: L4, L6
MS	9-12		



Web Related Connections

Lessons

[We Were Strangers Too: Learning about Refugees through Art](#)

[What is the DREAM Act and Who Are the Dreamers?](#)

[Who are the Children at Our Border?](#)

Table Talk

[Family Separations and Detentions at the Border](#)

Other Resources

[ADL Statement on Recent DOJ/DHS "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Policy Announcement](#)

[Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#)

[Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)

["Hidden Children of the Holocaust" Open up about Border Situation, Say Policy Separating Migrant Children from Parents Is Unconscionable](#)

LESSON OVERVIEW

In May 2018, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a new, expanded “zero-tolerance policy” for migrant families seeking to cross the border. This policy indicated that all migrants seeking to cross the border without documentation would be referred to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for prosecution of a crime, rendering their children unaccompanied minors. Children accompanying adults would be separated from their parents to be held at juvenile shelters with the adults at adult detention facilities.

Prior to that and in recent months, the news has been filled with stories of children being ripped from their parents at the border and placed in detention centers and shelters, including at least 2,500 children separated from their parents since the policy was announced. Images of children held in cages in warehouse converted detention facilities and the audio of children screaming for their parents have generated widespread outrage and heartbreak. Many of these families are seeking asylum from violence in Central America.

Because of the public outcry, President Trump signed an Executive Order which claimed to end family separations at the border. However, it did not guarantee that families wouldn't be separated; it allowed for children and families to be detained indefinitely and it did not specify a plan to reunite the thousands of children who have already been separated from their parents. In late June, a federal judge in California ordered an end to family separations at the border and the reunification of all families that had been separated. However, as of the July 26 reunification deadline, hundreds of families remained separated, with the government claiming almost 800 parents not “eligible” for reunification, including hundreds of parents having been already deported without their children. The litigation remains ongoing.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to understand what is happening with family separations and detentions at the border, reflect on quotes about the current situation, learn more about asylum and consider their own opinions through the writing of a persuasive letter.

[Note to Teacher: It is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who are migrants, refugees, immigrants and/or those who have sought asylum. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, taking into consideration the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom and plan accordingly. Further, it is possible that if the students have not shared this previously, they may disclose it during the course of the lesson. That information should only come from the student directly and young people do not always feel comfortable sharing this information with other people. If you

have students in your class who fit into any of these categories, talk with them in advance and determine the best way for them to discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe.]

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the current situation with family separations and detentions at the U.S. border.
- Students will reflect on different perspectives and positions about the issue by reading and discussing a variety of quotes.
- Students will consider their own point of view about the topic and write a persuasive letter that reflects that position.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Background Information on Family Separations and Detentions at the U.S. Border](#)
- [Quotes](#) (cut into individual quotes; one quote per small group)
- “Seeking asylum isn’t a crime. Why do Trump and Sessions act like it is?” article (*The Washington Post*, June 28, 2018, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/seeking-asylum-isnt-a-crime-why-do-trump-and-sessions-act-like-it-is/2018/06/29/dc4cf136-7a7c-11e8-93cc-6d3becdd7a3_story.html), copy for each student
- [Persuasive Letter Organizer](#) (one copy for each student)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing

1. Ask students: *Have you heard anything about what’s been happening at the U.S. southern border with family separations and detentions? What did you hear about it?*
2. Share some or all the information from the [Background Information on Family Separations and Detentions at the U.S. Border](#).

Alternative: Distribute a copy of the background information to each student and have them read silently or read aloud as a class.
3. After sharing this information, ask students: *What do you think about what you learned? What more do you want to know?*



Reading Activity: Quotes

1. Depending on the size of your class, have students get into pairs or groups of three and distribute one [quote](#) to each pair/triad (i.e., if your class has 30 students, divide into triads; if you have 22 or less students, divide into pairs).
2. Explain to students that they will read different quotations about the issue from a variety of people. Give students 3–5 minutes to read the quote aloud and discuss their thoughts about it within their pair/triad. After the time is up, say “switch” and have the pairs/triads—staying together—exchange their quotes with another pair/triad. Continue the process of having the groups read and discuss their thoughts on the quote. Repeat this process a few times or as time allows.
3. Reconvene the class and first have one student from each of the pairs/triads read aloud the quote they have so all quotes are read aloud. Then engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - How did you feel while reading the quotes?

Key Words

(See [ADL’s Education Glossary Terms](#).)

adjudicated
 arbitrarily
 asylum
 credible fear
 detained
 detention
 domestic abuse
 executive order
 immunity
 loophole
 migrants
 persecution
 recruitment
 refuge
 restrictive
 reunification
 unaccompanied minors

- Did you agree with some of the quotes? Did you disagree with some of the quotes? Please explain.
- Is there one quote that you connect with the most? If so, please explain.
- What did you learn by reading these quotes?
- What more do you want to know?



Reading Activity

1. Distribute the article "[Seeking asylum isn't a crime. Why do Trump and Sessions act like it is?](#)" to each student. Give students 15 minutes to read the article and have them circle words that are unfamiliar and underline words or sentences they find interesting or ones they want to remember.
2. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What are your thoughts and feelings about what you read?
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - What is the author's position about people seeking asylum and the law?
 - What changes has the Trump administration made to how we approach asylum seekers?
 - What are some examples the author cites for those who are seeking refuge and protection?
 - Did anything you read change your point of view about what's happening at the border?
 - What more do you want to know?



Writing Activity: Persuasive Letter

1. For homework, have students write a persuasive letter about this issue and send it to their representative in Congress, the [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#) or a letter to the editor of their school or community paper about this topic. If they don't know who their representative is, they can use [Find Your Representative](#).
2. Explain to students that they should gather all of the information they learned so far and do their own additional research (therefore, provide enough time for the due date to allow for additional research). They should then write a letter with their thoughts about the family separations and detentions at the border and can also include what they think should be done about it. Have students use the [Persuasive Letter Organizer](#) to help them outline their letters. This can be done in class or for homework. You may also want to provide time in class for conferencing, revising, editing and rewriting.
3. During this class period, give them 5–10 minutes to fill in the first box which asks, "State your opinion/position about the separation and detention of families seeking asylum on the U.S. border."

Closing

Have each student read aloud what they wrote in the first box of the Persuasive Letter Organizer, "What is your opinion/position about the separation and detention of families seeking asylum on the U.S. border?" If they haven't yet filled it out, they can just respond to the question.

ADDITIONAL READING

- [Asylum in the United States](#) (American Immigration Council)
- [California federal judge orders separated children reunited with parents within 30 days](#) (*Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2018)
- [Family separations at the border: How did we get here?](#) (*Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2018)
- [Hundreds of separated children not reunited by court-ordered deadline](#) (CNN, July 27, 2018)
- [Timeline: Immigrant children separated from families at the border](#) (*USA Today*, June 27, 2018)

- [Trump Administration Says It Needs More Time to Reunite Migrant Families](#) (*The New York Times*, July 6, 2018)
- [Trump's separation of families at the border: a visual explainer](#) (Vox, June 19, 2018)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
W5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Background Information on Family Separations and Detentions at the U.S. Border

- Over the past several years, migrants from Central America have been increasingly seeking refuge and protection in the United States from three countries known as the “Northern Triangle”—Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. In large part, they are seeking asylum (government protection and a safe haven after fleeing persecution in their home country). In 2014, there was a surge of unaccompanied minors (children traveling without parents or family) attempting to come to the U.S.
- In May 2018, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a new official government policy, an expanded “zero-tolerance policy” for migrant families seeking to cross the border. This policy announcement indicated that all migrants seeking to cross the border without documentation would be referred to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for prosecution of a crime, rendering their children unaccompanied minors. Children accompanying adults would, therefore, be deliberately separated from their parents to be held at juvenile shelters with the adults at adult detention facilities.
- Both Attorney General Sessions and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen defended this policy. Sessions said, “We cannot and will not encourage people to bring their children by giving them blanket immunity from our laws” and Nielsen remarked, “We have to do our job. We will not apologize for doing our job. We have sworn to do this job.”
- In recent months, the news has been filled with horrific stories of children being ripped from their parents at the border and placed in detention centers and shelters, including at least 2,500 children separated from their parents since the policy was announced. Images of children held in cages in warehouse converted detention facilities and the audio of children screaming for their parents have generated widespread outrage and heartbreak.
- In June 2018, dozens of protest demonstrations were held across the country. Many religious groups also oppose the policy. Two public opinion polls show that most people in the U.S. oppose this policy: a June 18 poll released by CNN found that [two-thirds of Americans oppose the policy](#) and a [Quinnipiac University poll](#) of American voters released the same day found similar results.
- Because of the public outcry, on June 20, President Trump signed an Executive Order which claimed to end family separations at the border. However, it did not guarantee that families will not be separated and it allowed for immigrant children and families to be detained (i.e. in jail) indefinitely. In addition, the Order did not specify a plan to reunite the thousands of children, some as young as three months old, who had already been separated from their parents.
- In late June, a federal judge in California ordered an end to family separations at the border and the reunification of all families that have been separated. The court order specifically required federal officials to stop detaining parents apart from their minor children (unless the parent was deemed unfit or the parent declined reunification). The court ordered reunification of all children under the age of 5 within 14 days and 30 days for children over 5.
- However, as of the July 26 reunification deadline, hundreds of families remained separated, with the government claiming almost 800 parents not “eligible” for reunification, including hundreds of parents having been already deported without their children. The litigation remains ongoing.

Quotes

“In the six weeks between April 19 and May 31, the Department of Homeland Security has sent nearly 2,000 children to mass detention centers or foster care. More than 100 of these children are younger than 4 years old. The reason for these separations is a zero-tolerance policy for their parents, who are accused of illegally crossing our borders. I live in a border state. I appreciate the need to enforce and protect our international boundaries, but this zero-tolerance policy is cruel. It is immoral. And it breaks my heart. Our government should not be in the business of warehousing children in converted box stores or making plans to place them in tent cities in the desert outside of El Paso. These images are eerily reminiscent of the internment camps for U.S. citizens and noncitizens of Japanese descent during World War II, now considered to have been one of the most shameful episodes in U.S. history.”

— Laura Bush, former First Lady of the U.S.

“Our government has the discretion in our laws to ensure that young children are not separated from their parents and exposed to irreparable harm and trauma. Families are the foundational element of our society and they must be able to stay together. While protecting our borders is important, we can and must do better as a government, and as a society, to find other ways to ensure that safety. Separating babies from their mothers is not the answer and is immoral.”

— Bishop Michael Mulvey, Diocese of Corpus Christi

“If you take a child away from the parent, from the home, from everything that they know, they are never the same. You don’t separate families. You don’t take children away from their parents. My hope for these kids is that they will be reunited with their families. Soon. The long they are away from their families, the greater the harm. When we see evil, we must call it out.

— Rachele and Jack Goldstein (separated from their parents during the Holocaust, Hidden Children Foundation)

“I don’t find any prohibition to this. There’s nothing cruel about this. These are children that are cared for with better care than they get in their home countries. They get everything they need. They get a warm and comfortable place to sleep. They get medical care, which a lot of kids in this country don’t get. They get three squares a day. They get exercise, fresh air. I don’t know how you could ask for more than that.”

— Steve King, U.S. House of Representatives

“Ripping children from the arms of their parents is heartless, cruel immoral and counter to the American values of belonging. The U.S. government needs to stop this injustice and reunite these families. We are a better country than this.

— Airbnb co-founders Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, and Nathan Blecharczyk

"If you cross the border unlawfully, even a first offense, then we're going to prosecute you. If you smuggle an illegal alien across the border, then we'll prosecute you for smuggling. If you're smuggling a child, then we're going to prosecute you, and that child will be separated from you probably, as required by law. If you don't want your child to be separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally. It's not our fault that somebody does that."

— Jeff Sessions, U.S. Attorney General

“Ten days ago, I visited a federal prison south of Seattle that holds 174 women. I met with all of those women. They are seeking asylum. One woman had three children. The first child was shot and murdered by gangs. The second child was shot and paralyzed by gangs. And the third child was the child she tried to bring her to safety. These are the stories of the people that are coming across the border and all of the mothers in the 174 people that were at the federal prison had not even been able to say goodbye to their children. They did not know where their children were. They had been subjected to the worse conditions at the border.

What is this country coming to? These children are sitting in cages on the border in tent cities. This President created this crisis and this President can stop this crisis right now with a phone call. This is the bottom. This is abuse. It is a human right violation and we must end it.”

— Pramila Jayapal, U.S. House of Representatives

“The administration’s current family separation policy is an affront to the decency of the American people, and contrary to principles and values upon which our nation was founded. The administration has the power to rescind this policy. It should do so now.”

— John McCain, U.S. Senate

“The practice of separating families amounts to arbitrary and unlawful interference in family life, and is a serious violation of the rights of the child. It runs counter to human rights standards and principles. It is therefore of great concern that in the U.S., migration control appears to have been prioritized over the effective care and protection of migrant children.” Detention is never in the best interests of the child and always constitutes a child-rights violation.”

—Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the United Nations Human Rights Office

“Children fleeing violence and unrest don't deserve to be ripped from their families. They have come knocking on America's door asking for a safe haven and they deserve better. If we can't imagine our own children being torn from our arms, how can we allow our government to use their powers to rip apart immigrant families? We must stand up for these families.”

— Gina Rodriguez, Actress

“It's impossible to feel anything but compassion for these kids, who must be dealing with a great deal of pain and confusion. But the origin of that pain and confusion isn't US law or the Trump administration. That burden lies with their parents who knowingly put them in this position.”

— Tony Perkins, President, Family Research Council

Persuasive Letter Organizer

Directions: Use this organizer to outline your persuasive letter before writing.

State your opinion/position about the separation and detention of families seeking asylum at the U.S. border.

Provide background information about the issue.

List at least three (3) main reasons that would convince someone of your position (use examples, statistics, quotes, etc.).

Indicate what those who have a different point of view might say.

Indicate what you might say in response.