WE WERE STRANGERS TOO: LEARNING ABOUT REFUGEES THROUGH ART

In what has been named the largest refugee crisis since World War II, more than 65 million people have been forced from their homes. Around the world, one in every 122 people is currently a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. There are refugees fleeing Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria, and dozens of other countries.

Roughly 11 million people from Syria have left their homes in search of safety and assistance since the country’s civil war began in 2011. The refugees have been fleeing civil war, persecution and terror—traveling at great lengths and great risk to survive. Instead of being met with compassion and open arms, many of today’s refugees have encountered closed doors and hateful rhetoric.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has been advocating for refugee rights not only because it is the morally right thing to do, but because once we were strangers, too. Understanding the important role of imagery in influencing hearts and minds, ADL has partnered with the Creative Action Network, a network of over 10,000 artists worldwide, to launch a new campaign called We Were Strangers Too. Artists are using their talents to tell stories of refugees from around the world and across time by submitting artwork to this project.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the current refugee crisis, view and analyze related artwork produced by artists all over the world, and reflect on the refugee crisis through reading, writing, art, social media and other activities to deepen their understanding of the refugee crisis and promote empathy for what it means to be a “stranger.”

See these additional ADL resources: Current Events Classroom "Anti-Muslim Bigotry and Being an Ally," "Refugee Crisis in Europe: How Should the World Respond?" and "Who Are the Children at our Border?" Table Talk Family Conversations: "Refugees, Reactions and World Response," ADL’s Immigration Work, Advocacy Alert: Respond to the Refugee Crisis and Support Refugee Resettlement, and Welcoming the Stranger: ADL’s Commitment to Protecting Refugees

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language

Material:

• We Are Strangers Too Artwork (select and print 5–10 prints or prepare to be projected for viewing)
• This Passover Let Us Remember That Once We Were Strangers, Too (one for each student)
INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: What do you know about the refugee crisis? What have you heard, read or discussed with others? Have students share their thoughts.

2. Share the following background information about the refugee crisis:
   - With 65 million people forcibly displaced from their homes, today the world faces the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Around the world, one in every 122 people is currently a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. There are refugees fleeing Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Nigeria and dozens of other countries.
   - In Syria specifically, millions of refugees have left their homes in search of safety and assistance since the country's civil war began in 2011. The refugees have been fleeing civil war, persecution and terror—traveling at great lengths and great risk to survive. According to the U.N., 250,000 people have been killed, more than 6.5 million Syrians have been displaced by the war and 13.5 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria. Hundreds of thousands have also made their way to Europe, often through a dangerous boat trip on the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece, which has resulted in thousands of deaths.
   - Referred to as the "largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II," international headlines last fall carried a heartbreaking image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi’s lifeless body lying face down in the waves in newspapers, on television, and on social media around the world. He drowned as his family desperately attempted to flee extreme violence in Syria. At least in part stirred to action by the heartbreaking photo, international leaders began announcing that their countries would take in more refugees. President Obama soon announced that the United States would open its doors to 10,000 Syrians seeking refuge.
   - Instead of being met with compassion and open arms, many of today's refugees have encountered closed doors and hateful rhetoric around the world. In the aftermath of the tragic attacks in Paris, Nice, Belgium, Germany, Egypt, Iraq and other places, intelligence officials, political leaders and others have raised security concerns about admission of refugees. However, it’s important to note that the United States has one of the world’s most rigorous screening processes for refugees seeking entry. In fact, refugee status is the single most difficult way to enter the U.S. Refugees must pass difficult and thorough screenings by the U.S. Department of State, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, international intelligence agencies, and the United Nations.
   - There is a long history of refugees fleeing their country due to war and persecution. In the 20th century, during World War II the greatest numbers of people (81.6 million) were displaced from their homes. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, 14 million people were displaced by the partition of India and Pakistan. Wars of independence and the civil conflict that followed sent millions flooding out of Algeria, Republic of Congo, Angola, Nigeria and others into neighboring countries. Global displacement levels declined to a historic low in 2005, but started escalating again because of a series of conflicts, including the U.S. invasion of Iraq. By mid-2015, the total number of refugees and internally displaced people had climbed to an all-time high of more than 65 million people, reflecting both the masses of people newly uprooted from war-torn regions of Syria and South Sudan, as well as those displaced years earlier from places like Pakistan and Afghanistan.

3. Share the following information about the We Were Strangers Too partnership and ADL’s campaign with the Creative Action Network:
   - The Anti-Defamation League has partnered with the Creative Action Network, a global community of over 10,000 artists and graphic designers around the world harnessing their talents for good, to launch a new campaign called We Were Strangers Too. Artists are using their talents to tell stories
of refugees from around the world and across time by submitting artwork to this project. Explain that students will see some of this artwork, talk about it and do other projects related to it.

**ARTWORK GALLERY WALK**

1. Select 5–10 prints of the *We Are Strangers Too Artwork* (or more if you have classroom space and time) submitted by artists to the Creative Action Network. Print the artwork and post around the room with a large piece of chart paper next to each print so that students can write down their thoughts.

   **NOTE:** You can also project the prints, one-at-a-time, on the board/smart board and give students time to jot down their thoughts.

2. Post the following three questions on the board/smart board. As students walk around the room looking at the pictures, they should respond on the blank paper (or jot down notes if you are projecting the prints) to some or all the following questions:
   - What's going on in this picture?
   - What is the message of the picture? What is the artist trying to say?
   - If you could ask the artist a question, what would you ask?

3. After viewing all of the prints, have students choose one that is particularly meaningful or poignant to them. Have them stand next to the print and take an additional few minutes to allow students to discuss the print with others standing next to the one they chose.

4. After the small group discussions, have students come back to the large group and share some of their thoughts, feelings and observations from looking at the prints.

**READING ACTIVITY**

1. Have students read the article "This Passover Let Us Remember That Once We Were Strangers, Too" to reflect upon the similarities between refugees during World II and today.

2. After reading, engage students in a group discussion by asking the following questions:
   - What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
   - What comparison is the writer making and why do you think he’s making it?
   - How does the writer’s point of view shape what he says in the article?
   - Did reading the article influence your thinking and if so, how?
   - What is the message the article is trying to convey?

3. You may also want to have students read the article “Anne Frank Today Is a Syrian Girl” and engage them in a discussion to compare and contrast the two articles.
Other Teaching Activities to Extend the Learning

TURN AND TALK
1. Have students reflect upon times that they felt like a stranger (e.g. new student in school, new to club or program, feeling different in some way) and other times when they welcomed someone who might be considered to be a stranger.
2. Have students turn and talk with a partner by responding to the following questions:
   - Did you ever feel like a stranger and if so, what happened?
   - What feelings did you have about leaving somewhere and coming to someplace new?
   - Did you ever help someone feel welcome who would be considered to be a “stranger?”
   - What did you do and how did you feel?
3. Have students share both ways and then have a class discussion with students sharing what they discussed in their pairs. Consider having students turn their thoughts/feelings about being a stranger or welcoming someone into a short essay, letter, poem or drawing.

ARTWORK
Have students create their own piece of artwork that expresses their thoughts, feelings and opinions about the refugee crisis and the theme of We Were Strangers Too. They can use the We Were Strangers Too artwork (or real photos of the refugee crisis, see Additional Reading and Resources section) as inspiration or create something completely new and different. Have them think broadly about what kind of artwork they want to create, whether it’s a piece of visual art (drawing, photography, painting, collage, sculpture, graphic art) or performing art (music, song, dance, theater, spoken word, performance art).

After students have completed their artwork, organize an art opening where parents and community members are invited to participate. Another idea is to take photos of the artwork and create an online gallery of their work. You can also invite students to submit their artwork to the Creative Action Network We Were Strangers Too campaign.

RESEARCH
Give students an opportunity to learn more about the current refugee crisis in Europe as well as a chance to learn about refugee crises’ of the past. They can do this by conducting research, listening to interviews, watching video and relevant films and first-person testimony. They can use some of the resources in the Additional Reading and Resources section below and decide on an area of study for which they will investigate further. The culmination of their research can result in a research paper, Power Point presentation, timeline (current or refugee crises over the years) or a persuasive or argumentative essay that espouses their point of view.

WRITING
Have students engage in other writing projects that give them an opportunity to express the thoughts, feelings and opinions that have been evoked about the refugee crisis and/or the theme of We Were Strangers Too. This can be done through poetry, prose, short story/realistic fiction, imagined journal
entries of refugees, letters to elected officials or letters to the editor of their local newspaper on their point of view, or persuasive essays about what they think the United States or other countries should do about the refugee crisis. Consider how to share these pieces of writing with the class, school and community.

**VIDEO PSA**

Have students create a video public service announcement (PSA) about the refugee crisis and/or the theme of We Were Strangers.

1. First, have them watch other sample PSAs to understand the important elements of a PSA and what is most effective. Ask what they notice, what works and doesn’t work.

2. Point out the important aspects to consider when developing their PSA including: timing; focus on one issue; include key/relevant facts; provide a “call to action,” and the optional components the PSA might include such as people, music, voiceover, special effects.

3. Give students the parameters and some time in class to work on the details and have them work individually or in pairs to bring the project to completion over the course of a few class sessions or weeks.

4. Have students present the PSAs in class and consider sharing online.

**REFUGEES’ STORIES**

Have students learn more about the experience of being a refugee by reading firsthand accounts at UNHCR or the Humans of New York websites. You can also connect with a local refugee organization by looking at the Office of Refugee Resettlement website which lists local organizations. Through them, you can arrange for someone to speak to the students in your class, either a person who works for the organization or a refugee connected to the organization. Be sure to prepare the students in advance by brainstorming appropriate questions. Students can then write up the interview or use what they learned and apply it to some of the other projects.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Have students develop a social media campaign about the refugee crisis and/or the theme of We Were Strangers Too. This can include the use of photographs, video, writings, posts/blog posts, articles and interviews (with refugees and non-refugees) about the crisis. Students should develop an action plan that takes place over a defined period of time (several days, weeks or months) that has an overall goal and also includes benchmark goals along the way. They can include one social media platform or a variety of platforms but students should be thoughtful about using the platform that makes the most sense given their content and goals.

**ACTIVISM**

1. Engage students in a discussion about what they can do about the refugee crisis and the different kinds of advocacy and activism in which they can participate or initiate.

2. Have students reflect on the We Were Strangers Too Project and ask: How does art bring attention to the issue and make a difference?

3. As a class, brainstorm different ways they can get involved using some of the ideas from 10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism to construct some initial ideas.
4. Have students come up with 4–5 possible actions they can take to do something about the current refugee crisis.

5. When you have a few ideas that everyone feels good about, divide the students into groups and have each group take on one of the ideas. Alternatively, you can choose one idea as a class and have students work in small groups on different aspects of the idea.

6. Consider ways to involve the rest of the school and community in these efforts.

**ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES**

- [Europe’s migration crisis in 25 photos](https://www.cnn.com/2016/05/31/europe/eu-refugees-migration-photos/) (CNN, May 31, 2016)
- [Refugees](https://usaforunhcr.org/) (USA for UNHCR)
- [The European Refugee Crisis and Syria Explained](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJjzO4GyVQI) (YouTube, September 17, 2015)
- [We Were Strangers Too Campaign](https://creativeactionnetwork.org/campaigns/we-were-strangers-too) (Creative Action Network)
# COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area/Standard</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1:</strong> 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.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 2:</strong> Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 6:</strong> Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 9:</strong> Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area/Standard</th>
<th>Writing</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1:</strong> Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2:</strong> Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 3:</strong> Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 4:</strong> Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 6:</strong> Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 7:</strong> Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 8:</strong> Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 9:</strong> Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Content Area/Standard</th>
<th>Speaking and Listening</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1:</strong> 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.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 2:</strong> Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</td>
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| **Standard 4:** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line
of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Standard 5:** Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

**Language**

**Standard 4:** 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.

**Standard 6:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**Standard 7:** Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

ON THE BRINK OF SALVATION 2
By Mikkel Henssel
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

NEW LIFE
By Roberto Lanznaster
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

LOST CHILDREN IN THE WOODS
By Jose Luis Agreda
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE REFUGEE
By Anthony Foronda
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

AT SOME POINT WE WERE STRANGERS TOO
By Karl Tani
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE FAMILY IN THE SNOW
By David Gross (child drawing)
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE RIGHT TO HAVE A HOME

By Anna Masini
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

REFUGEES TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE
By Diana-Andreea Bahrin
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN GERMANY
By Matt Rota
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

NEW ORLEANIANS WERE STRANGERS TOO
By Laura Montgomery
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

TATTOOED
By Joshua Sierra
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE COURAGE TO LEAVE
By Michela Buttignol
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

MORMON OVERLAND TRAIL
By J. Beth Jepson
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE TRAP
By Erin Schuetz
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

BARREL BOMBS
By David Gross (child drawing)
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

THE JOURNEY
By Frances Steinmark
WE WERE STRANGERS TOO ARTWORK

WE ARE THE PEOPLE
By Frances Steinmark
THIS PASSOVER LET US REMEMBER THAT ONCE WE WERE STRANGERS, TOO

By Jonathan Greenblatt, National Director and CEO, Anti-Defamation League

Originally published in *The Huffington Post's The World Post, April 21, 2016*

This Friday night, Jews around the world will gather at Seder tables with friends and family to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We are commanded to tell the story as if we had personally fled slavery, transforming the experience from the simple recounting of an ancient tale to an exercise of empathy and reflection on the suffering of others.

Today, as 60 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes around the world, we face the worst refugee crisis since World War II. Many are caught between the terror of the Islamic State and the barrel bombs of Assad’s regime and his Iranian backers in Syria. Others flee the terrifying grip of Boko Haram in Nigeria, or extreme gang violence in Central America. Still others flee other countries where they are persecuted and tortured because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. There is one thing that unites all these refugees: No matter their home country, they are fleeing for their lives and seeking safety in new lands.

In place of compassion and open arms, however, too often refugees have been met with hateful rhetoric and closed doors. More than half of U.S. governors have either said they will not accept refugees in their states or have asked the federal government to shut our doors. A bill pending now before Congress, the ill-named “Refugee Program Integrity Restoration Act” (H.R. 4731), would drastically reduce and cap refugee admissions and create new procedures that would substantially delay resettlement for many refugees whose lives are in danger. It would also allow state and local governments who “disapprove” of a group of refugees to veto resettlement in their communities.

Shutting our doors to those fleeing extreme violence is un-American. It flies in the face of our values as a nation that has served as a beacon of hope for those around the world seeking a better life. But, sadly, it is not the first time we have seen this kind of ugly response to a refugee crisis.

For those of us in the Jewish community who have family members, like my grandfather, who fled Nazism in Europe, this narrative is all too familiar. In July 1938—three years after the Nuremberg Laws had stripped Jews of German citizenship, deprived them of most political rights, and left hundreds of thousands of Jews seeking international refuge—Fortune magazine asked Americans, “What is your attitude toward allowing German, Austrian, and other political refugees to come to the U.S.?” Shamefully, more than two-thirds said we should keep the refugees out.

The following year the St. Louis, carrying 937 German refugees—mostly Jews fleeing Nazi Germany—set sail for Cuba. Most had applied for U.S. visas. Turned away from Cuba, as the St. Louis sailed so close to Florida that the passengers could see the lights from Miami, they appealed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt to give them safe harbor. With public opinion opposed to lifting the stringent immigration quotas or to making an exception for the ship’s passengers, the St. Louis returned to Europe. Almost a quarter of the passengers perished in the Holocaust.

It was unconscionable to turn our backs on Jewish refugees fleeing Europe in the 1930s, just as it is unconscionable today to seal our borders to those fleeing extreme violence around the world.
The temptation may be to give into fear and fear-mongering claims that terrorists will slip into our midst disguised as refugees, but America has put up the highest hurdles in the world for refugees seeking entry. In fact, refugee status is the single most difficult way to enter the United States. Refugees must pass difficult and thorough screenings by the U.S. Department of State, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, international intelligence agencies, and the United Nations. Refugees are not terrorists. There may be even more that can be done to educate refugees as they seek to integrate into our society, but we must remember that they are people fleeing the very same brutality we fear.

As we gather around the Seder table, and we tell the story of the Exodus as if we too were fleeing Egypt, may we also have compassion for those fleeing brutality today. The Passover story is the story of people fleeing slavery. It is the story of people seeking safety abroad. It is the refugee story. This Passover, may we open our doors to refugees and grant safe harbor to those fleeing for their lives. For once we were strangers, too.