



WHO ARE THE CHILDREN AT OUR BORDER?

Recently a national and international spotlight has shown on the humanitarian needs of the children at the United States border who have been fleeing from three countries in Central America known as the “Northern Triangle”—Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. According to the United States Border Patrol, 57,525 unaccompanied minors (children traveling without parents or family members) were detained on the southern border between October 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014. While there can be many reasons for children to seek entry to the United States, including family reunification and poverty, children fleeing the Northern Triangle consistently cite gangs and drug-related violence as their primary reason for undertaking the long and dangerous journey. The issue has triggered local anti-immigrant activists to organize protests against the attempts to process entry for the children at various locations around the country, with much of the protest rhetoric demonizing and dehumanizing the children.

In the lesson, students will learn more about the unaccompanied children at our border, read and reflect on two stories of children who recently came to the U.S. on their own and will consider their opinion about the situation and what to do about it by writing a persuasive letter.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* “[What Is The Dream Act and Who Are the Dreamers?](#),” *Curriculum Connections* “[Huddled Mass or Second Class: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.](#)” and [Children At Our Border: Questions and Answers About Children Fleeing Violence in Central America](#).

Grade Level: grades 7–12

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

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn more about the unaccompanied children at the U.S. border.
- Students will reflect on two stories of children who recently came to the U.S. on their own.
- Students will consider and express their opinion about unaccompanied children at the U.S. border and what to do about the situation by writing a persuasive letter to a public official.

Material:

- [KWL \(“Know, Want to Know, Learn”\) Chart](#), one for each student
- [Children at the Border: Background Information](#), one for each student

- “A child’s harrowing journey to the US” (*The Boston Globe*, July 20, 2014, www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/07/19/migrant-child-flees-salvador-gangs-alone-seeking-join-her-family/WVenpPwO7eF3PY1pLwlbLL/story.html), copies for half the students
- “A 10-year-old immigrant faces risks, doubts on the journey to reunite with his mother” (*The Washington Post*, September 7, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/national/a-10-year-old-immigrant-faces-risks-doubts-on-the-journey-to-reunite-with-his-mother/2014/09/07/169f16d6-3213-11e4-9e92-0899b306bbea_story.html), copies for half the students
- *Persuasive Letter Organizer*, one for each student

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings.

- border patrol
- deportation
- detention center
- estranged
- harrowing
- humanitarian
- homicide
- immigrant
- immunization
- migrant
- refugee
- residence
- smuggler
- unaccompanied minors
- undocumented

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Introduce the KWL (“Know, Want to Know, Learn”) concept by distributing a [KWL Chart](#) to each student. Explain that as we learn about the children at our border, we will complete the chart. Ask students: *Has anyone heard about the unaccompanied children at our border?* If they don’t know anything, explain a little more (using the above summary) to jog their memory. As they share information, record it on the board/smartboard. For each piece of information shared, elicit more from them by asking: *How do you know that? Where did you learn that?* Then have students choose some of the statements to record on their *KWL Chart* under the first column: “Know.”
2. Then ask students: *What do you want to know? What questions do you have?* Have them record their questions under the second column: “Want to Know.” Explain that at the end of the lesson, they will complete the third column with what they learned.
3. Distribute [Children at the Border: Background Information](#) to each student. Read aloud together.
4. Have students take a few minutes to record some of what they learned on their KWL sheet after reading the background information. They may also record new questions that they have in the “Want to Know” column.

READING ACTIVITY

1. Distribute the two different articles about children at the border that tell the story of two children, Dayanna (“[A child’s harrowing journey to the US](#)”) and Alex (“[A 10-year-old immigrant faces risks, doubts on the journey to reunite with his mother](#)”). Distribute one article to half the students and the other article to the other half. Give students 15 minutes to read the articles silently or have them read the article the night before as a homework assignment.

2. As students read their article, instruct them to take notes on the “Learned” column of their KWL charts, adding in new things they learn.
3. After reading, focus on one article at a time by going around the room and asking each student assigned that article to share one thing they learned from their article. Explain to students that they shouldn’t repeat what another student already shared. When all students or all the information has been shared for both articles, engage students in a large group discussion by asking the following questions:
 - How do you feel about what you learned about these children?
 - Why did Dayanna and Alex leave their countries?
 - Did they want to be reunited with their families? Why or why not?
 - What did they encounter in their journey to the United States?
 - How did the author of each article show you Dayanna and Alex were both mature/independent and, at the same time, still kids?
 - How did their parents and families feel about having their children come to the U.S. by themselves?
 - Are the children immigrants or refugees? What makes you think that?
 - Do you think the children should be able to stay? Why or why not?

WRITING ACTIVITY

As a culmination to the lesson, have students gather all of the information they read and do some additional reading and research using the articles listed in the “Additional Reading” section below. Then have students write a persuasive letter to President Obama or a local elected official (Congressperson or Senator) in which they express their opinion about the children at our border and back it up with evidence-based reasons. They can use the [Persuasive Letter Organizer](#) to help them outline their letters. This can be done in class or as a homework assignment going through the process of revising, editing and rewriting.

CLOSING

Ask students to reflect on everything they learned as a result of the lesson. Have them record some of those thoughts on the third column (“Learned”) of the KWL chart. Ask for volunteers to share aloud what they learned.

ADDITIONAL READING

- [Children At Our Borders](#) (New American Law Radio Show, August 4, 2014)
- [“Q and A: Children at the Border”](#) (*The New York Times*, August 7, 2014)
- [“New U.S. Effort to Aid Unaccompanied Child Migrants”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 2, 2014)
- [Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America](#) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR)
- [“Fate for Most Kids Who Cross the Border? Staying in the U.S.”](#) (NBC News, July 14, 2014)
- [Unaccompanied Children: A Humanitarian Issue](#) (First Focus)
- [“14 facts that help explain America's child migrant crisis”](#) (Vox, September 14, 2014)

- [Back To School - Even In Texas Immigration Prison](#) (*The Huffington Post*, September 15, 2014)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: 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.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

KWL (KNOW, WANT TO KNOW, LEARNED) CHART

Know	Want to Know	Learned

CHILDREN AT THE BORDER: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

How many children are fleeing to the United States?

According to the United States Border Patrol, 57,525 unaccompanied minors (children traveling without parents or family members) were stopped on the southern border between October 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014. In June 2014, Border Patrol predicted that it might stop a total of 90,000 children on the southern border between September 2013 and September 2014 but it has since reported decreasing numbers each week.

Three quarters of the children who have recently arrived in the United States are from three countries in Central America known as the Northern Triangle: Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (show students where these countries are on a map). The United States is not the only country seeing an increase in children seeking refuge from the Northern Triangle. Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize have all seen a 435% increase in asylum applications from these countries. That means that the children are most likely fleeing their countries, not simply seeking entry into the United States.

Why are these children leaving their home countries?

While there can be many reasons for children to enter the United States, including family reunification and poverty, children fleeing the Northern Triangle consistently cite gangs and drug-related violence as their primary reason for undertaking the long and dangerous journey. According to the 2012 data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Honduras has a homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 people; El Salvador has a rate of 41.2 per 100,000 people and Guatemala has a rate of 39.9 per 100,000. As a point of comparison, the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo, from which nearly half a million refugees have fled in recent years, has a homicide rate of 28.3 per 100,000.

Youth are frequently targets of violence in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Gangs in the Northern Triangle begin recruiting members in adolescence or younger and they often threaten children and their families if they refuse to join. Many youth report beatings by police who suspect them of gang membership.

What happens when the children arrive in the United States?

When dealing with children other than from Mexico or Canada, Border Patrol must take the children into custody, screen them and transfer them to the Office of Refugee Settlement, part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is responsible for finding a suitable relative with a home in which the child can be placed while awaiting an immigration hearing or a placement in long-term foster care. Eighty percent of the children are placed with family members. The majority of the children are in states where immigrants have traditionally settled, like Texas, New York, California and Florida. A large number have also been sent to Maryland, Virginia, Georgia and Louisiana.

How are anti-immigrant activists reacting to the humanitarian crisis at the border?

Local anti-immigrant activists have organized protests against the attempts by the federal government to process the children at various locations around the country. In Murrieta, CA, activists prevented buses carrying the children from entering their town. In Vassar, Michigan, protesters carried handguns and rifles during a Rally against housing some of the children in their town. In July, activists helped to organize hundreds of small rallies around the country in an event called "National Day of Protesting Against Immigration Reform, Amnesty and Border Surge." There was low turnout at the rallies but attendees held up signs that dehumanized the children, calling the crisis at the border an "invasion" and said that the children crossing the border carried diseases. Further, there have been a number of politicians and public figures who have demonized the children by falsely linking them to diseases and crime.

Adapted from ADL's Civil Rights "[Children at Our Border](#)."

PERSUASIVE LETTER ORGANIZER

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

State your opinion/position about the unaccompanied children on the border. (*Should they be able to stay and what should be done about the situation?*)

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.