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# REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE: HOW SHOULD THE WORLD RESPOND?

Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria have been leaving 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 poverty—traveling at great lengths and great risk to survive. As of September 2015, it is estimated that over 200,000 Syrians have been killed, 7.6 million people have been internally displaced within the country and another 4.1million have dispersed across the Middle East. 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. Further, people fleeing other parts of the Middle East and Africa due to instability and poverty have added to the large numbers. Referred to as the “largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II,” it made international headlines recently when a photograph of a drowned three-year-old Syrian boy went viral. The image of Aylan Kurdi’s dead body on the shores of Turkey seems to have awakened our collective sense of urgency.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the refugee crisis through reading and viewing photographic images and exploring what nations around the world are doing in response to the crisis and what they can do to help.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* “[Who Are the Children At Our Border?](#),” [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#), [The Syrian Conflict](#) and [ADL Deeply Concerned by Escalating Migrant Crisis in Europe](#).

**Grade Level:** grades 9–12

**Time:** 90 minutes (or two 45 minute periods)

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

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will learn about the reasons for the Syrian refugee crisis and how it is impacting European nations.
- Students will gain a deeper and more emotional understanding of the crisis by looking at and reflecting on photographs.
- Students will explore the world’s response to the crisis and identify what they can do to help.

**Compelling Question:** As global citizens, what responsibility do we have to do something about the refugee crisis?

**Material:**

- [KWL \(“Know, Want to Know, Learned”\) Chart](#) (one for each student)
- [Background Information](#) (one for each student)
- 6–10 photos from UNHCR’s photo gallery titled “Arriving in Europe, refugees find chaos as well as kindness” ([www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c25d.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c25d.html)) or from International Business Times’ “Migrant crisis: Photos of Syrian refugees’ long journey to safety. Part 2: Greece to Hungary” ([www.ibtimes.co.uk/migrant-crisis-photos-syrian-refugees-long-journey-safety-part-2-greece-hungary-1518886](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/migrant-crisis-photos-syrian-refugees-long-journey-safety-part-2-greece-hungary-1518886))
- “What Can Countries Do to Help Refugees Fleeing to Europe?” (*The New York Times Room for Debate*, September 15, 2015, [www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/09/15/what-can-countries-do-to-help-refugees-fleeing-to-europe](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/09/15/what-can-countries-do-to-help-refugees-fleeing-to-europe), include copies of the accompanying five debater opinion articles)
- Large pieces of paper or chart paper (10 pieces) or projector to show photos
- Magic Markers (10–15)

**Advanced Preparation:** Print the selected photos indicated above and hang them around the room, mounting each photo on a larger piece of paper/chart paper. Write on each piece of paper below the photo, the following questions and place magic markers near each paper: (1) What do you see? and (2) How do you feel? (See Photo Gallery Walk activity below.)

**Vocabulary:**

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- |                 |               |                |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| • asylum        | • global      | • obstacles    |
| • bureaucratic  | • homogeneity | • paltry       |
| • controversial | • immigrant   | • refugee      |
| • dignity       | • migrant     | • resettlement |
| • expatriates   | • moral       | • robust       |

**WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS?**

1. Distribute a [KWL Chart](#) to each student and ask what they have heard or know about the refugee crisis in Europe. Depending on their response, briefly explain that since the civil war in Syria in 2011, hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria and other parts of the Middle East and Africa have been fleeing their homes and have recently been pouring into Europe. Explain that as they learn about the refugee crisis throughout the course of the lesson, they will complete the KWL (“**K**now, **W**ant to Know, **L**earned”) chart.
2. As students share what they know, record their thoughts on the board/smart board. For each piece of information shared, elicit more from them by asking: *How do you know that? Where did you learn that?* Have students choose some of the statements to record on their KWL Chart under the first column: “Know.”

**Optional:** You may want to explain that there has been some controversy about use of the term “refugee” or “migrant,” both of which have been used in the media. A **migrant** is someone who seeks better living conditions in another country and a **refugee** is someone who flees persecution, conflict or war. To learn more about the debate over these terms, read and discuss [Refugees or Migrants? Debate Over Words to Describe Crisis](#). For the purpose of this lesson, the term “refugees” will be used.

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3. After determining what students already know, ask: *What do you want to know? What questions do you have?* Have students turn and talk with a person sitting near them to share additional questions they have. After sharing with their partner, have students record their questions under the second column of their KWL Chart: “Want to Know.” Explain that in the middle and end of the lesson, they will fill in the third column with what they learned.

### INFORMATION SHARING

1. Distribute a copy of the [Background Information](#) handout to each student. Go over the handout by reading it aloud as a class, having different students take turns reading each section.
2. After reading the handout together, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
  - What surprises you about what you learned about the refugee crisis?
  - How do you feel about what you read?
  - What other questions do you have?
3. Have students spend a few minutes recording what other questions they still have (“Want to Know”) and what they learned (“Learned”).

**Optional:** If you want to and have time to engage your students in a more in depth study of the refugee crisis, use the articles in the Additional Reading and Resources section below for reading, reflection and writing.

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### PHOTO GALLERY WALK

1. Have students take a “photo gallery walk” in the classroom by walking around the room, looking at each photo, reading the caption (if one is provided) and sharing their reflections on the paper. Give students 10 minutes and instruct them to respond to the questions with words, phrases or full sentences that convey their thoughts and feelings.

**Alternative:** Project each photo on the board/smart board and have students jot down their reflections on their own sheets of paper as you look at each photo together as a group.

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2. After students have done their “photo gallery walk,” engage them in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - Would anyone like to share any of their thoughts or feelings about the photos?
  - What stories do the photos tell that perhaps words do not capture?
  - What is the benefit of looking at photos of the refugee crisis?

## READING ACTIVITY

1. Divide students into five small groups. Distribute a different debater opinion article from "[What Can Countries Do to Help Refugees Fleeing to Europe?](#)" to each small group so that each group will be reading an article from a different debater. Instruct groups to read their assigned article. Give students 10 minutes to read the article silently while sitting in their groups.
2. Have students spend another 5–10 minutes discussing their article among themselves. As a group, they are to answer the following questions and take notes:
  - What is the perspective of the article?
  - What evidence does the author provide to make their point?
  - Are you persuaded by their position or not (i.e. do you agree or disagree)?
3. Have each small group come to the front of the room, summarize their article and share their responses to the questions.
4. Engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What different perspectives are represented in each of the articles? Where do those perspectives come from?
  - Do all the articles share a similar perspective or not? Please explain.
  - Do you think all countries have a responsibility to provide financial assistance or take in refugees? Please explain.

## WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT THE REFUGEE CRISIS?

1. Explain to students that we are going to discuss what can be done about the refugee crisis. Tell them that around the world countries are helping in a variety of ways—some are taking refugees in and at varying levels; some are providing financial assistance; some international as well as national organizations are providing advocacy to take in larger numbers of refugees, give more financial assistance and provide assistance and strategies in getting to some of the root causes of the crisis.
2. Ask students: *What can we—as individuals, a class or a school—do about the refugee crisis in Europe?* You may want to use [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#) as an additional resource to generate ideas. Brainstorm a list of ideas, which may include some of the following.
  - Donate money.
  - Organize a fundraiser and donate to an organization that is providing support such as [USA for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#), [Oxfam America](#), [Jewish Coalition for Syrian Refugees](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), [United States Fund for UNICEF](#), [Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees](#) or [HIAS](#).
  - Write letters to President Obama (or local legislators) to encourage them to increase aid or take in more refugees.
  - Hold an information session at school to teach other students and school staff about the crisis.
  - Volunteer with an organization that is assisting refugees or advocating on their behalf (i.e. [International Rescue Committee](#)).
  - Conduct a public awareness campaign about the issue using social media.

- Organize and/or sign a [petition](#).
3. If time permits, identify one of the projects to work on as a class and spend several weeks or more developing the idea and bringing it to fruition.

## CLOSING

Have students complete their KWL charts, adding to the section “What I Learned.” Do a go round where each student shares the most important thing they learned.

## ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [6 charts and a map that show where Europe's refugees are coming from - and the perilous journeys they are taking](#) (The Independent, September 21, 2015)
- [“European migrant crisis: A country-by-country glance”](#) (CNN, September 5, 2015)
- [“European Union Ministers Approve Plan to Distribute Refugees”](#) (*The New York Times*, September 22, 2015)
- [“Europe’s Refugee Crisis, Explained”](#) (Vox, September 5, 2015)
- [Mapping a Syrian refugee's danger-filled journey to Europe](#) (International Rescue Committee)
- [“Syrian refugees: Which countries welcome them, which ones don't”](#) (CNN, September 10, 2015)
- [“The right to asylum: Why Europe has to take in people fleeing persecution”](#) (Vox, September 18, 2015)
- [“The Syrian refugee crisis, in 4 maps and charts”](#) (Vox, September 5, 2015)
- [“This is our last hope’: Six Syrians on the hardest part of their journey to Europe”](#) (*The Washington Post*, September 7, 2015)
- [“U.S. Will Accept More Refugees as Crisis Grows”](#) (*The New York Times*, September 20, 2015)
- [“War has forced half of Syrians from their homes. Here’s where they’ve gone”](#) (CNN, September 11, 2015)
- [“What You Need to Know About the Syrian Refugee Crisis and What the U.S. is Doing to Help”](#) (White House Blog, September 15, 2015)
- [“Which countries are taking in Syrian refugees?”](#) (Los Angeles Times, September 21, 2015)

# COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</p>
<p><b>Speaking and Listening</b></p> <p>Standard 1: 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.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p> <p>Standard 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>Standard 6: 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.</p>

# KWL (KNOW, WANT TO KNOW, LEARNED) CHART

<b>Know</b>	<b>Want to Know</b>	<b>Learned</b>

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### WHO are the refugees?

Since the civil war began in Syria in 2011, 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced inside their country and another 4.1 million have fled the country looking for a place to settle. This means that over half of Syria's total population (11.7 million of the 23 million people) have fled the country or have been driven from their homes. In addition, there are refugees from other war-torn countries in the Middle East as well as people in parts of Africa fleeing dire conditions. Many refugees fleeing civil wars like the one in Syria end up living in adjacent countries in massive, semi-permanent refugee camps because governments in those countries don't have the infrastructure to fully resettle them into communities.

### WHY are they fleeing Syria?

In March 2011, anti-government demonstrations began across Syria against the dictatorship of President Bashar al-Assad, which were part of the broader regional Arab Spring protests. Sunni Muslims, who make up approximately 70% of the Syrian population, have long been disenchanted with President Assad, an Alawite Muslim. Alawites represent 12% of the Syrian population but have dominated the country's political leadership for the past fifty years. The Syrian regime responded to the demonstrations in brutal ways and began an indiscriminate violent campaign of targeting citizens opposed to Assad's rule. President Assad has launched rockets in the highly populated suburbs of Damascus and has attacked Syrian civilians with chemical weapons. Many innocent men, women, and children have been gassed to death by their own government. The Syrian civil war between the government and rebel forces, which also includes ISIS and the Nursa Front, has created a severe humanitarian crisis. As of September 2015, it is estimated that over 200,000 Syrians have been killed in the conflict.

### WHERE are they going and HOW are they getting there?

Several neighboring countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq) have taken in a total of 3.6 million refugees over the past few years. Recently, more refugees than ever before have been arriving in Europe as war, persecution and poverty continue to drive people from their homes. For the most part, the refugees are taking dangerous boat voyages over the Mediterranean and Aegean seas or traveling through the Balkans. The European Union border agency reports a tenfold annual increase in people travelling from Greece on the Western Balkans route; it is estimated that so far this year there have been 350,000 refugees in Europe. Dozens of people, including children, have been killed walking on railway lines on the long trek through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia and Hungary, which is building a controversial 100-mile long fence to keep them out. A huge proportion of people are continuing to cross the Mediterranean in voyages that have killed more than 2,000 so far this year. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) also reports that during that time, Germany received the most asylum applications with 188,486 and Hungary received 65,415 applications. Overwhelmed by an influx of refugees, Germany recently set up temporary border restrictions and Austria, Slovakia and the Netherlands have announced similar measures. (It may be helpful to project a map to show their route: a map can be found on the following website: [6 charts and a map that show where Europe's refugees are coming from - and the perilous journeys they are taking](#))

### WHAT is being done about the crisis?

The process of resettlement and integration of the refugees into new countries is not an easy proposition. Over the past few years, neighboring countries—including Turkey (1.9 million), Lebanon (1.1 million), Jordan (629K), Iraq (249K) and Egypt (132K)—have taken in a bulk of the refugees. A number of non-

Middle Eastern countries have accepted or agreed to take in smaller numbers of Syrian refugees, including, to date: Germany (100K), Sweden (50K), the UK (20K), Australia (12K) and Canada (11K). About 1,500 Syrian refugees have been admitted to the United States since the start of the conflict in 2011 and the U.S. had agreed to take in an additional 10,000. However, many groups and organizations have called on the U.S. to take in more refugees and the Obama administration recently announced that they will increase the number of worldwide refugees to 100,000 by 2017. To date, the U.S. has provided \$4 billion in humanitarian assistance.