

Citizenship Education

Refugees are a painful living reminder of the failure of societies to exist in peace. People should be able to lead productive and independent lives in their home communities. Sadly, they are sometimes forced to flee because of abuse, violations of their rights and various forms of social breakdown, including war. These issues are linked to concepts such as justice, equality, tolerance, freedom, minority rights and the formation of community.

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

Refugees can be the subject of work units on human rights, nationalism, racism, immigration, persecution and war – units well suited to the citizenship curriculum:

- **the legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society, basic aspects of the criminal justice system, and how both relate to young people**

People become refugees because one or more of their basic human rights have been violated. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlines the strong connection between refugees and human rights in Article 14 which states that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." In the words of the late Cardinal Basil Hume, "the reception given to those applying for asylum is an illuminating indicator of the state of a society's moral health".

Students could study the international conventions and how this relates to domestic legislation on asylum and immigration. Are refugees' rights upheld?

- **the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding**

The current debate over asylum tends to ignore the multi-cultural heritage of Britain and refugees are certainly not a recent phenomenon, even though the UNHCR was only started up in the 1950s. Students could study the historic settlement of refugees over the centuries in Britain and the contribution they have variously made to Britain as it is today. See UNHCR's 'Refugee Myths' (available from the UNHCR London office or at www.unhcr.org.uk/info/briefings/asylum_issues/myths.html), UNHCR's Gallery of Prominent Refugees (www.unhcr.ch/promref/index.html) or Refugee Council's 'Credit to the Nation' for examples of successful refugees.

- **central and local government, the public services they offer and how they are financed, and the opportunities to contribute**

Similar to the rights and responsibilities that underpin society, students could study the passage of asylum legislation through Parliament and the role of central government in shaping the legal framework and level of support available to asylum seekers. Similarly the role of local government could be studied in relation to provision for asylum seekers in the local community and how local councils tackle the issues.

- **the work of community-based, national & international voluntary groups**

Under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, new asylum seekers are being dispersed to local authorities around the country in order to ease the disproportionate burden on support services in London and the South East. Therefore more now than ever before there are opportunities for most school children in the UK to find out about how a local community-based group provides for asylum seekers and refugees. Study of refugees also offers many opportunities to consider the work of national and international voluntary groups. A comprehensive list of groups can be found on the UNHCR's UK website at www.unhcr.org.uk/info/faqs_links/links.html.

- **the importance of resolving conflict fairly**

Dispersion has led to increased social tensions in areas, which did not traditionally host refugee communities. In response to this the Association of Chief Police Officers (www.acpo.police.uk) has published guidelines for its officers to meet the policing needs of asylum seekers and their host communities, to encourage good reception and to dissipate tensions. Such guidelines provide an ideal resource for any consideration of conflict resolution. Furthermore through studying refugee issues students will also become aware that conflict is often the cause of refugee populations.

- **the significance of the media in society**

Asylum has become a very controversial issue in the British media, and subsequently amongst the general public. However the headlines may not always paint an accurate picture. Students could look at articles from various newspapers to see how reporting of refugee issues differs. How much is emotion or attention-grabbing? How much is accurate? What is the consequence of such media coverage? See UNHCR's 'Refugee Myths' (www.unhcr.org.uk/info/briefings/asylum_issues/myths.html or available from the UNHCR London office).

- **the world as a global community, and the political, economic, environmental and social implications of this, and the role of the European Union, the Commonwealth and the United Nations.**

Being a refugee means more than being a foreigner. It means living in exile and often depending on others for such basic needs as food, clothing and shelter. Where most people can look to their own governments to guarantee and protect their basic human rights and physical security, refugees cannot do so. UNHCR has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that refugees are protected by their country of asylum but the institution of asylum is coming under increasing political, economic and social pressure. Refugee issues are therefore an ideal subject matter for this topic. Students

can consider how the UNHCR persuades governments to uphold individuals' right to asylum in difficult times and what deeper European integration will mean for future asylum seekers and refugees in the EU.



Special events such as *World Refugee Day* (20th June every year) and *Refugee Week* (around World Refugee Day each year) provide additional opportunities for children to explore refugee issues and to celebrate the positive contribution of refugees in the UK. Schools can take part in numerous ways including making displays, planning drama events or concerts to raise awareness, focussing assemblies on refugee issues and inviting speakers. Further ideas and information can be obtained from the UNHCR (contacts overleaf) or www.refugeeweek.org.uk.

CITIZENSHIP LESSON PLANS

For each age range there is a set of three lessons with an accompanying unit plan, showing the teacher at a glance the sequence of the lessons, their objectives, content, the teaching method/learning strategies involved, and the related resources, as well as further suggested readings for the teacher. Although the lessons are arranged in units, some lessons stand on their own, and so could be taught without their partner lessons.

9 – 11 years: Refugee Children

12 – 14 years: Child Soldiers

15 – 18 years: Refugee Women

The lesson plans are not prescriptive, but provide interested teachers starting points for lesson preparation. Teachers can integrate these ideas into their own programmes or schemes of work.

Available free:

http://www.unhcr.org.uk/info/resources/lesson_plans.dwt

Or via the UNHCR's London office

Dealing with Controversy - The treatment of refugees has become a contentious issue. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable dealing with elements of the debate surrounding asylum, which may need detailed explanation. Explaining divergent viewpoints and contestable issues can be complicated and there may be a temptation to shy away from controversy. Children should be allowed to understand the *process* behind opinion forming. Children should also be encouraged to examine differing opinions and investigate the complexity of feeling involved in the reception of

newcomers into the UK. Detailed information on refugee and asylum issues is available on the UNHCR's UK website (www.unhcr.org.uk) or via our London office (for contact details see overleaf). The QCA has also issued guidelines on teaching controversial issues (www.qca.org.uk).

Some of the educational resources available from UNHCR London:

- **Teacher's guides and films** - including the popular animated film 'Carly' (ages 5-8 years); 'To be a Refugee' (ages 8-12 years) and 'To Feel at Home' (ages 14-18 years). All films come with an accompanying teacher's guide, including suggestions for lesson plans. In addition, the kit 'Human Rights, Refugees and UNHCR' (ages 9-18 years) is designed to help teachers prepare lessons which demonstrate the relationship between refugee protection and human rights.
- **Magazines and booklets** - including 'Refugee Teenagers' and the cartoon booklet 'Refugee Children: Escape from Persecution and War', as well as UNHCR's quarterly magazine 'Refugees' and leaflets on the work of UNHCR.
- **Posters and display materials** - we have a variety of posters to send out to schools. In addition schools may borrow various displays, including ones featuring refugee women, the environment and a history of refugees since the 1950s, as well as authentic UNHCR sheeting, with which students can make their own mock refugee camp. We also have paintings by refugee children living in camps in Kenya and Thailand.

How to order:

To order any of the above resources, or if you would like further advice and information on refugees and our work, including a full educational resource list, please visit www.unhcr.org.uk/info/resources/teachtools.html or contact us at:

Public Information Unit

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
21st Floor, Millbank Tower, 21 - 24 Millbank, London SW1P 4QP
Tel: 0207 932 1022 Email: info@unhcr.org.uk

Finally! - The main emphasis of work on refugee issues in schools should always be on encouraging the humanisation of refugees. This can be achieved through photographs, testimonies and inviting in speakers. Such studies should encourage students to empathise with refugee students and to develop a wider understanding of tolerance and difference.

