

Human Rights and Refugees – 15-18 years Unit and Lesson Plans



UNHCR Lego Posters **TEACHERS' GUIDE IN: HUMAN RIGHTS AND REFUGEES**

These posters have been reissued as a set of four, with an accompanying teacher's guide, to mark the 50th anniversary in 1998 of the proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The guide has been designed to help teachers to prepare lessons which demonstrate the relationship between refugee protection and human rights. The posters, showing familiar LEGO models, are ideal stimulus materials for students between the ages of 9 and 14 (levels 1 and 2). For older students, a series of articles is used as a basis for classroom discussion for students between 15 and 18 (level 3).

HUMAN RIGHTS, REFUGEES AND UNHCR

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." (from the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*)

When the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1951, there were an estimated 1 million refugees to care for, the majority of whom were European. Currently, UNHCR cares for almost 22.4 million people, of whom 12 million are refugees, mainly from Africa and Asia. Eighty per cent of them are women and children. In addition to individual flight from persecution, the modern pattern of refugee movements is that of mass exoduses caused by ethnic conflicts and violations of rights of minorities.

People become refugees because one or more of their basic human rights have been violated or threatened. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) underlines the strong connection between human rights and the work of UNHCR. Article 14 of the UDHR states that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

The work carried out by UNHCR, whether involving protection or material assistance, is influenced by human rights considerations. Violations of human rights are one of the main causes of mass exoduses; they also eliminate the option of voluntary repatriation as long as the violations persist.



No one likes or chooses to be a refugee. Being a refugee means more than just being a foreigner. It means living in exile and often depending on others for basic needs such 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. Rather, their country of origin has proved itself unable or unwilling to protect those rights. UNHCR has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that refugees are protected by their country of asylum, and assists asylum countries as far as possible in that task. Its main role is to ensure that states are aware of, and respect, their obligations to protect refugees and persons seeking asylum and solutions.

A refugee has the right to safe asylum. However, international protection comprises more than physical safety. Refugees should receive at least the same rights and basic help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including certain fundamental entitlements of every individual: refugees have basic civil rights, including freedom of thought and of movement, and freedom from torture and degrading treatment. Similarly, economic and social rights apply to refugees as they do to other individuals. Every refugee should have access to medical care. Every adult refugee should have the right to work. No refugee child should be deprived of schooling, or recruited into military service or prostitution.

In certain circumstances, such as large-scale inflows of refugees, asylum states may feel obliged to restrict certain rights, such as freedom of movement, the right to work, or proper schooling for all children. Such gaps can and should be filled wherever possible by the international community. Thus, when there are no other resources available – from governments of the country of asylum or other agencies – UNHCR provides assistance to refugees who cannot meet their own basic needs. The assistance may be in the form of financial grants, food, equipment such as kitchenware and tools, sanitation and shelter. There are also programs to establish schools and clinics for refugees who are living in a camps or other communal groupings. UNHCR makes every effort to ensure that refugees can become self-sufficient as swiftly as possible – this may require formal income-generating activities or projects to teach new skills.

On the other hand, refugees also have certain obligations. In particular, they should respect the laws of their country of asylum.

Copies of regular size LEGO posters are available free of charge for teachers/schools from info@unhcr.org.uk, UNHCR, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP, UK

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES USING THE POSTERS TO LAUNCH DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING REFUGEE ISSUES

Have copies of three of the four posters set up in the classroom. Do not display *Spot the Refugee* yet.



As the teacher may not choose to use all the posters in class, a couple of the discussion questions in the lesson activities below have been repeated. If using all the posters, ignore the repeated questions.

When watching news reports and documentaries about the massive refugee flows which have occurred in the last decade, students may wonder how they can contribute their part to international cooperation to solve these tragedies. Students may sense that they are powerless to help, but this is not the case.

Introductory questions for the students

Who produced these posters?

Do you think the posters are advertisements for Lego? If not, why not?

Ask the students what similarities all the Lego people share? (Responses could include: all the figures have similarly-shaped yellow heads; the facial features are usually the same, i.e. two black spots for the eyes and a smile; they all have similarly-shaped hands, although pirate figures can have a hook instead of a hand; they all have a body and legs which are also similar in shape, but pirate figures can have a stump instead of a leg!)

Ask how they think the manufacturers make a Lego figure resemble a woman or a girl? (Possible replies could include: select a feminine hairstyle, female clothing, pastel colours, etc).

Spot the Refugee

Place a copy of the poster on the wall, folded, so that the writing is not visible. Ask the students to look closely at the rows of Lego people. Ask them to suggest an identity for each figure, beginning from the first Lego person in the first row. After several have been identified, ask the students by what means they decided upon each identity? For example, did they look at the clothes, the facial appearance and/or the gender?

The students are informed that the people who designed this poster decided that one of the figures is supposed to be a refugee. Ask the students to **spot the refugee**, and to describe how they came up with their identification. Do any of their reasons match the descriptions written on the blackboard at the beginning of the lesson?

This is an important lesson in the dangers of *prejudice* and *stereotyping*. The students should be brought to understand the harm which can be caused by ignorant, thoughtless name-calling and attribution of negative characteristics to a whole social group.

Now unfold the poster to reveal the text and allow the students time to read the information quietly by themselves.

Comprehension and discussion questions

Ask the students to write answers to the following questions in their notebooks.



What is the one difference between refugees and you and me?
What events do you think could have happened to cause a person to flee and leave everything behind?
What types of experience might refugees endure during their flight?
How would you feel if you were a refugee who had to leave your home, family and possessions behind and live in another country?
Define the term 'open mind'. What does it mean? Why does UNHCR ask that people keep an open mind and a smile of welcome?
Discuss the answers to these questions around the class. Refer to the concept of *discrimination*.

How Does It Feel?

If the class is used to working in small groups, give each group one of the following scenarios and ask them to discuss among themselves how they would feel if they were:

a new student who has just joined their class in the middle of the school year
a child of their age who has been holidaying with his/her family in another country where the language is foreign, and the child has somehow been separated from the other family members
someone who has just heard the bad news that the breadwinner of the family no longer has a job

After a suitable time has elapsed, the students can reassemble as a class group, and are led by the teacher to share the fruits of their group discussions.

Now turn the class' attention to the UNHCR Lego poster *How Does It Feel?* Allow the students a few minutes to take in the picture and to read the text.

Comprehension and discussion questions

Use these questions as the basis of a discussion:

Thinking about the three situations we just discussed, what similar *feelings* might the lonely Lego person have?

What similarities and differences are there between the *situation* of the lonely Lego figure and the three cases we just considered?

What do you think the people who designed this poster are trying to suggest through the way the Lego figures have been arranged?

Who do you think is the intended audience of this poster?

What attitudes towards refugees is UNHCR encouraging people to adopt in this poster?

What's Wrong Here?

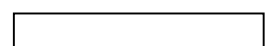
Discussion questions

UNHCR has the responsibility to ensure that refugees are protected in their country of asylum and assists refugees by coordinating the provision of shelter, food, water, sanitation and medical care in emergency situations.

What makes a person a refugee?

Why would a refugee have nothing?

How does UNHCR suggest, through this poster, that individuals can help refugees?



Do the students agree?

What else can governments do to protect the rights of refugees?

What responsibilities do you think refugees might have in their host countries?

What's The Difference?

Refugees have frequently been successful in finding asylum in countries in the industrialised world. Having found asylum, the refugees are safe from the persecution that they feared in their own home countries, but they may face the problem of not being thoroughly accepted in their new country.

Discussion questions

What is the difference between each Lego figure?

If there is no difference, why is there a different name underneath each one?

Why do you think some people call other people nasty names?

If you had to divide the Lego people into two groups, how would you do it? Would you group *you and me* in a small group of two, and put the *refugee* with the rest?

Or, would you group the last three Lego people, the *refugee, you and me*, together?

Give your reasons for your decision.

re-read the last two sentences. What do you think is the message of these sentences?

Conclusion

Referring to all the posters, ask the students how they have previously regarded refugees about whom they have seen news stories, and how have they viewed refugees who live in their community. Do they sense any change within themselves, concerning their attitudes towards refugees, since starting this unit of work? What changes are there? The teacher needs to guide this discussion with sensitivity, encouraging the students to be frank, but being assertive if students rudely challenge each other over differing viewpoints.

UNIT PLAN FOR AGES 15-18 IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND REFUGEES: The Right to Asylum

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Knowledge

To introduce the concept of asylum

To realise that the right to asylum is a basic human right

To understand the limits of asylum - who is excluded?

To understand the political and economic forces which affect asylum-granting practices

To understand the meanings and possible sources of *stereotypes, prejudice, racism and discrimination*

Skills

To practise sensitive enquiry and reasoning skills

To recognise prejudice in oneself and others

To identify means by which refugees may integrate in their host countries

To articulate contrasting feelings

To strengthen discussion skills

Values



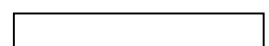
To encourage empathy
 To avoid stereotyping and excluding people from "our" communities
 To appreciate the importance of open-mindedness and respect for others, particularly people different from oneself
 To reflect upon fundamental human rights - those rights to which all human beings are entitled by virtue of their common humanity

LESSON 1

CONTENT	TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES
Asylum - a basic human right The history of the institution of asylum	Introduction: Students are asked for their impressions of the meaning of the term asylum Development: Exploration of the meaning of asylum, through discussion of article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students read the article "Asylum Under Threat" and answer comprehension and discussion questions.
RESOURCES Students' Resource Sheet: Chapter 2, "Asylum Under Threat", from The State of the World's Refugees 1993: The Challenge of Protection.	
Suggested readings for the teacher:	
UNHCR, Protecting Refugees: Questions and Answers (Geneva, UNHCR, 1996), available free of charge from info@unhcr.org.uk, UNHCR, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP, UK	
Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1950), available free of charge from info@unhcr.org.uk	
Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), available free of charge from info@unhcr.org.uk	

LESSONS 2 and 3

CONTENT	TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES
Pressures upon asylum Factors leading to an increase in the number of asylum seekers in recent	Students are given the chapter to read for homework, and asked to write answers to the comprehension and



years.

discussion questions.

Reasons why states are granting fewer requests for asylum.

In class, go through the answers, ensuring clear understanding of pressures upon the institution of asylum.

Group work: Each group to read one of the articles listed in the Resources column and report back examples of threats to asylum drawn from the article.

RESOURCES

"Protecting Refugees – "An Introduction", UNHCR

"A Change of Direction for Tanzania" Refugees, no. 110, winter 1997

"An Iranian Surprise", Refugees, no.108, II-1997

"Coping in a new environment", Refugees, no. 107, I-1

"A family destroyed", Refugees, no. 107, I-1997

"Uganda shows it cares", Refugees, no. 107, I-1997

"Welcome to Limbo", Refugees, no. 101, III-1995

LESSON 4

CONTENT

Prejudice, Stereotyping, Racism
In the country of asylum, refugees may be safe from the persecution that they suffered in their own countries, but they face the huge problem of not being thoroughly accepted in their new country.

TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES

Using the UNHCR poster What's the Difference? as a springboard for exchange of ideas, students are asked to consider the possible problems of prejudice and stereotyping which refugees at times have to endure in their countries of asylum.

RESOURCES

UNHCR Lego poster entitled What's the Difference?

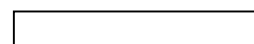
LESSON 5

CONTENT

Those who are entitled to asylum and those who are not
Among those who apply for asylum,

TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES

Group work:
Students become UNHCR Protection Officers, to determine the status of five



there are some people who clearly qualify as refugees according to the 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. However, in other cases, there are some who do not meet the qualifications for refugee status. In fact, the Convention specifically excludes certain types of asylum seekers.

asylum seekers, whose cases are described in the Student Resource Sheet.
(Answers to Case Studies)

RESOURCES

Student Resource Sheet: The Right to Asylum

Suggested reading for teachers:

UNHCR, Protecting Refugees: Questions and Answers (Geneva, UNHCR, 1996)

LESSON PLANS FOR AGES 15-18 IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND REFUGES: The Right to Asylum

Context and Purpose

This sequence of lessons is designed as a case study on refugee rights within a larger unit of work on human rights. References to several such curriculum units are listed in the Resources column of Lesson 1 in the Unit Plan for ages 15-18. It is assumed that the students are familiar, through earlier lessons, with...

- 1) The concepts of:
legal rights and responsibilities
international law;
- 2) the principal *international declarations and covenants* concerning human rights:
the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and
the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- 3) a range of *human rights violations*, such as arbitrary arrest, detention without charge or trial, torture, disappearances, political killings by governments and opposition groups, in many countries around the world; and with
- 4) the work of some national and international *organizations*, including United Nations agencies, which defend human rights.

Within the context outlined above, the following lessons introduce students to the concept of asylum, its crucial importance in today's world, and the role of UNHCR in providing international protection to refugees during their stay in host countries.

Background

Refugees have a fundamental right to asylum. This right - to seek and enjoy refuge



from persecution - is enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 14, and is a basic principle of international law. It is a widely respected practice of states and an international obligation.

What sets refugees apart from other people who may be in need of humanitarian aid is their need for *international protection*. Most people can look to their own government and state institutions to protect their rights and physical security, even if imperfectly- however, refugees cannot. In many cases, they are fleeing in terror from abuses perpetrated by the state. In other instances, they are escaping from oppression that the state is powerless to prevent, because it has lost control of territory or otherwise ceased to function in an effective way. By definition, refugees cannot benefit from the protection of their own government.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has therefore been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that refugees receive adequate protection from the governments of the countries where they have sought asylum. UNHCR also seeks to ensure that their other basic human rights are properly respected. Most fundamentally, refugees should not be forced back to a place where they may be persecuted. This is the principle known as *non-refoulement* (from the French *refouler*, to force back).

LESSON 1: Asylum

Preparation

Have ready a copy of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, prepared on an overhead transparency.

Make copies of Chapter 2, "Asylum Under Threat", from *The State of the World's Refugees 1993: The Challenge of Protection*.

Introduction

Ask the students to give their ideas on what is asylum. Some may describe an institution for mentally ill or handicapped people. Do not reject this idea, but use it to probe the deeper meaning of the notion - refuge, safety, protection from harmful treatment.

Development

Distribute a copy of the following paragraph, taken from *The State of the World's Refugees: The Challenge of Protection* (Geneva, UNHCR, 1993), page 6:

The process of becoming a refugee is not instantaneous. It proceeds through the often slow growth of root causes to the sometimes quite sudden flash of an immediate catalyst that generates actual flight. Asylum follows when another state grants those in flight access to its territory and extends protection to them. Finally, for the more fortunate, a permanent resolution of their status is sought and found, and they cease to be refugees.

Ask the students: What does the underlined sentence suggest that the *right to*



asylum might mean?

The right to seek asylum is found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 14, which states that:

Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Homework

Hand out copies of Chapter 2, "Asylum Under Threat", from *The State of the World's Refugees 1993: The Challenge of Protection*, and ask the students to read it for homework and to write answers to the following questions:

Comprehension and discussion questions

The number of asylum seekers has increased dramatically in the last decade. What are the underlying causes of this phenomenon?

Give some examples of the countries which recent asylum seekers have come from, and to countries which they have gone.

What are the two distinct patterns of asylum seekers?

Give reasons why countries which have previously granted asylum are now either making it more difficult for asylum seekers to stay, or worse, are turning back potential asylum seekers before they even reach their borders.

LESSONS 2-3: Asylum under Threat

Procedure

In class, go through the students' answers to the homework questions, ensuring that they clearly understand the threats to the institution of asylum.

Make available copies of "An Iranian Surprise", "Coping in a new environment", "A family destroyed", "Uganda shows it cares" and "Welcome to Limbo". These brief articles come from the UNHCR publication *Refugees*. They give practical illustrations of the issues which are referred to in the questions above.

Divide the students into five groups. Ask each group to read one article. The group should appoint one spokesperson to report back to the whole class what they have learned about the threats to asylum from the article.

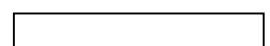
LESSON 4: Refugees' Experiences in Countries of Asylum: "What's in a name"?

Preparation

A copy of the UNHCR publicity poster entitled *What's the Difference?* is needed for this lesson.

Link to previous lessons

For revision, ask the class these questions:



Why do people sometimes need asylum?
Where have these people sought asylum?
What are the two main kinds of asylum seekers?
What can stop asylum seekers from successfully finding asylum?

Introduction

Allow the students some time to study the poster entitled *What's the Difference?* Ask for suggestions from the class for the possible motives behind this poster, while reminding them that this poster has been produced by UNHCR.

Development

When watching news reports and documentaries about the refugee flows which have occurred in the last decade, students may wonder how they can contribute to efforts to solve these tragedies. Perhaps students may sense that they are powerless to help, but this is not the case.

As mentioned in the reading material used in the previous lessons, refugees have sometimes been successful in finding asylum in countries in the industrialized world. Having found asylum, the refugees may be safe from the persecution that they suffered in their own home countries, but they face the problem of not being thoroughly accepted in their new country.

Ask the students: What problems does the poster suggest might be faced by refugees in their host countries? Ask them to reflect upon the experiences of some of the refugees referred to in the articles which they read during the last lesson.

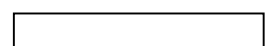
You may also find it useful to refer to the following definitions during the discussion:

Prejudice is a negative attitude or opinion about a person or group which is not necessarily based on knowledge of that person or group.

A **stereotype** is an oversimplified, generalized attitude about a group of people. Stereotypes are often, but not always, negative. They may be based on prejudice; they may also be derived from contact with one member of a group, if an impression of that person is assumed to be true for all who belong to that group.

Racism describes attitudes, actions, or institutional practices based on the assumption that certain people have the right to have power over others solely because of their skin colour or ethnic origins. Racism has been described as 'prejudice plus power'.

Stereotyping harms *all* members of the world community. Individuals who belong to groups which are commonly stereotyped are often denied education, employment opportunities and housing. They may be the targets of ridicule, harassment, and violence. The images harm the stereotypers as well because their biases rob them of the chance to share the knowledge and experience of other cultures. For a real attitudinal change to occur, students need to address the roots of prejudice, become aware of their own



stereotypical beliefs and understand where these come from. They need to work to eliminate stereotypes that they hold, develop skills for dealing with bias in the community at large, and make a personal commitment to equality and justice.

Source: Susan Fountain, *Education for Development* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 83

Referring to the poster *What's the Difference?*, ask the students how they have regarded refugees in past. Do they sense any change within themselves, concerning their attitudes towards refugees, since starting this unit of work? What changes are there? The teacher needs to guide this discussion with sensitivity, while encouraging the students to be frank, but be assertive if students rudely challenge each other over differing viewpoints.

Finally, if there is time, perhaps the teacher could ask the students why this lesson is titled "What's in a name?" and where they imagine the phrase came from.

LESSON 5: THE RIGHT TO ASYLUM

Preparation

Make copies of the Student Worksheet "*The Right to Asylum*".

Procedure

Distribute the worksheet. Divide the students into groups of three to discuss the five cases in the worksheet. Pretending to be UNHCR Protection Officers, the students must decide whether the individuals in the following cases are eligible for refugee status. Students will base their decision on international law, specifically the 1951 *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Article 1, sections A (2) and F, of the Convention are reproduced in the worksheet. In addition, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been included. Give the students at least 20 minutes to reach their decisions.

During the report-back session, ask the students to explain their decisions on the five cases.

You might conclude by stressing the necessity for international law to be upheld, even in the most stressful circumstances.

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