

# Language/Literature 15-18 years

## Unit and Lesson Plans



Refugees contribute to the culture of their host community. Some are well-known artists, painters, poets or novelists. Dante Alighieri created the major part of his work during his exile. Playwright Bertold Brecht, authors Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka, poets Pablo Neruda and Jorge Semprun, musician Miguel Angel Estrellas, painters Lucian Freud and Remedios Varo -- all suffered periods of exile which, in some cases, deeply colored their work. The theme of exile can be studied in literature, the history of music and art. Texts addressing refugee issues can also be used in language courses.

### **UNIT PLAN FOR AGES 15-18 IN LANGUAGE/LITERATURE: THE DEPICTION OF REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN LITERATURE**

#### **UNIT OBJECTIVES**

##### **Knowledge**

To understand refugees' sense of alienation

To be briefly informed about refugee situations around the world, with particular reference to Ethiopia

To understand the living conditions of African refugees

##### **Skills**

To practise reading and interpreting a poem

To practise sharing one's thoughts and feelings with the class

To practise analysing the ways in which a writer conveys strong feelings in prose

To analyse:

a) emotional response

b) fluency of expression

c) evocative use of language

To practise effective prose writing

##### **Values**

To encourage the students to enter into the feelings of exile and alienation which refugees experience

To encourage the students to relate to the poet's experience to their own, or to that of someone they know

To empathise with refugees' sense of alienation

To reflect upon the response of a host community to refugees, particularly their own community response

To provide a personal response to literary works on refugee themes



## LESSON 1

<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES</b>
<b>The Depiction of Refugee Experience in Poetry: Bertolt Brecht, Concerning the Label Emigrant</b>	<p>Preparation The day before the lesson, ask the students to read about Bertolt Brecht's life and work in an encyclopaedia.</p> <p>Reading Seat students in a large circle, if possible. The teacher, or a talented reader among the students, should read aloud the poem.</p> <p>Comprehension questions Can be answered verbally or in writing.</p> <p>Discussion questions Bring out the poet's sense of alienation. Encourage the students to relate that feeling to their own experience, or to that of someone known to them.</p>
<b>RESOURCES</b> <b>BRECHT, Bertolt, "Concerning the Label Emigrant" in Refugees: An Anthology of Poems and Songs. Edited by Brian Coleman. Ottawa, 1988, p. 21. Distributed by the Editor, 44 Caroline Avenue, Ottawa, K1Y 0S7, Canada.</b>	

## LESSON 2

<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES</b>
<b>The Depiction of Refugee Experience in Prose: Misganaw Worknehe, All tomorrows are the same.</b>	<p>Preparation</p> <p>Library research questions for homework: Give some examples of host countries who have opened their doors to refugees. Where did the refugees come from, and when did this happen? Ask the students to read the short story and "Ethiopia: The Past" and "Ethiopia: The Present" from One day we had to run!, p. 46-47.</p> <p>Follow up of library research</p>

Teacher builds up blackboard summary, with discussion under these headings:

HOST COUNTRY  
REFUGEES' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN  
DATE OR PERIOD

#### RESOURCES

**WORKNEHE**, Misganaw, "All tomorrows are the same" in *Tilting Cages: An Anthology of Refugee Writings*. Edited by Naomi Flutter and Carl Solomon. Sydney, 1995, pp. 77-81. Distributed by the Editors, PO Box 223, Pyrmont, NSW, 2009, Australia.

Sybella Wylkes, *One Day We Had To Run!* (London, Evans Brothers, 1994), "Ethiopia the Past, Ethiopis the Present", p.46-47.

### LESSON 3

#### CONTENT

#### TEACHING METHODS/LEARNING STRATEGIES

Critical analysis of Brecht's poem and Worknehe's short story.

Writing task  
Questions requiring the students to analyse the literary qualities of the two works.

#### RESOURCES

Further readings for the teacher

John Simpson, ed. *The Oxford Book of Exile* (Oxford, OUP, 1995)

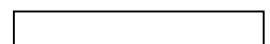
### LESSON PLANS FOR AGES 15-18 IN ALNGUAGE/LITERATURE: THE DEPICTION OF REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN LITERATURE

#### Purpose

Mercifully, most senior high school students do not have personal experience of systematic persecution or war, such as that suffered by millions of refugees, both in the past and now.

Refugees are people who flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. A refugee either cannot return home, or is afraid to do so.

These lessons are designed to help the student to empathize with the plight of refugees, to become aware of the depths of human feelings stirred by the experience of enforced exile and subsequent sojourn in refugee camps or settlements. Refugees' sense of alienation, of not belonging in the host community,



is evoked in the two literary works which are the subject matter of the lessons.

### **Texts**

[At this point, reproduce the texts of Bertolt Brecht's poem Concerning the Label Emigrant and Misganaw Worknehe's short story All tomorrows are the same. For full references, see the Unit Plan.]

## **LESSON 1: Concerning the Label Emigrant by Bertolt Brecht**

### **Preparation**

Ask the students to read about Bertolt Brecht in an encyclopaedia.

### **Procedure**

To encourage dialogue and a free flow and exchange of ideas and opinions between the students, have them seated in a large circle. Give out copies of the poem at the beginning of the lesson.

The teacher or a talented student reader should read the poem aloud to the class.

The teacher may choose to handle the Comprehension questions verbally or as a written task.

Through the Discussion questions the students are encouraged to relate the perhaps rather remote experiences of German refugees from Nazism in 1933 to their own feelings. As the questions are deliberately personal, to draw out an empathic response from the students, the teacher should lead the discussion with tact and sensitivity.

The library research question provides a link to the next lesson.

### **Comprehension questions**

1. To what was Brecht referring in the phrase "the shame which now defiles our land"?
2. What do you think Brecht meant by the simile "we ourselves / Are almost like rumours of crimes, which escaped / Over the frontier"?
3. Who could have been the "they" who gave the label 'emigrant'? Is the narrator complaining that the label is derogatory, or is he is complaining about something else?

### **Discussion questions**

1. In this poem, what seems to be the attitude of the 'emigrants'? Where are their thoughts?
2. Does this poem form a connection between those of us who have and those who have not known what it is to be an exile or a refugee? Have you ever had a sense of exile? What happened to cause you feel like this?
3. Do you know anyone who has parents or grandparents who came to this country as refugees? What can you tell us about their story?

### **Homework**



1. Library research: Ask the students to give some examples of countries who have opened their doors to refugees. Where did the refugees come from, and when did this happen?
2. In preparation for the next lesson, the students should also be asked to read the short story, "All tomorrows are the same" in *Tilting Cages*, and Ethiopia, The past ad Ethiopia: The present" in *One day we had to run!*, (p. 46-47).

**LESSON 2:** *All tomorrows are the same* by Misganaw Worknehe

**Procedure**

The teacher should check the outcome of the library research, building up a quick blackboard summary, with 3 columns, headed:

HOST COUNTRY	REFUGEES' COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	DATE OR PERIOD
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This exercise may lead to questions and discussion about particular refugee crises, past and present, for which the teacher should be prepared.

After the blackboard work, the students should move to sit in a circle.

Given time limitations, the Comprehension questions should be handled verbally.

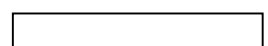
The Discussion questions are designed to be more open ended rather than closed, to encourage the students to examine closely how language can be used to convey images and feelings. The questions also encourage the students to empathise with both the refugees and their hosts.

**Comprehension questions**

1. What happened in Ethiopia to cause Mesfin to flee his home country more than once?
2. What words would you use to describe
  - a) the conditions of the refugee camp?
  - b) the physical and emotional state of Mesfin?

**Discussion questions**

1. The writer describes the local Turkana people as 'uncompromising'. Would you consider this to be too harsh a description, especially after reading about the incident between Mesfin and a Turkana man over a bundle of wood?
2. How far did Mesfin have to walk simply to collect enough twigs to cook his meagre meal? What does this indicate about the condition of the local surroundings? How would you describe the predicament of the Turkana people?
3. How does the writer convey the emotional distance between the refugees and the locals?
4. In Brecht's poem and in Worknehe's short story, the refugees' reception by the host community is evoked. What is the essence of the conflict between refugees and hosts in each case? Are they equally serious?
5. What do you feel should be our community's response to refugees?



## LESSON 3: Critical analysis

### Purpose

The section on Critical analysis allows students to examine short passages closely, providing an opportunity for them to polish their own writing skills.

### Procedure

1. Both the poem and the short story are vehicles for the respective writers to convey deep emotions. Which form of writing affects you the most? Why?
2. Not all writing is great, simply because it is published. There are many qualities by which literary merit is judged. At least two of them are revealed in the contrast between Brecht's and Worknehe's treatments of a broadly similar theme, the refugee's sense of alienation in a foreign land. These two qualities could be summed up as fluency of expression and evocative use of language.

#### a) Fluency of expression

Paragraph five of the short story opens with the following sentences:  
*After travelling much of the distance back to the camp, sweating and panting under the load of the bundle, the unexpected happened. Unfortunately he met an aggressive local Turkana armed with knives and arrows and was asked to throw the bundle he was carrying down. Poor chap!*

Here, Worknehe employs language which is neither well adapted to the seriousness of the incident he is describing nor to his theme. Rewrite the passage in more effective English prose.

#### b) Evocative use of language

In paragraph four of the short story, there is a sentence that is composed of only one word. Sometimes a writer can use the physical shape or length of his words and sentences to create an impact. How effective is the use of "Shame" in this instance?

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