

# How to teach ... about refugees

5-7 minutes : 5/25/2015

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The number of people forced to flee their homes has now [exceeded 50 million for the first time since the second world war](#).

The issue is firmly in the international spotlight at the moment. In Europe, thousands of refugees from countries including Eritrea and Somalia [put themselves in danger every day by attempting to cross the Mediterranean in over-crowded boats](#), while in Asia the plight of the Rohingya people, for example, has been widely covered.

[Refugee Week](#), which starts on Monday 15 June, celebrates the contribution refugees make to the UK. This week's how to teach includes lots of ideas and resources to help you explain the current refugee crisis to your class.

## Primary ideas

Discover what [primary children know and think about refugees](#) with this resource from the [British Red Cross](#). It focuses on the experiences of evacuees in the second world war, and can be used to explore the hopes and fears of refugees today.

As a follow-up activity, ask students to draw two pictures: one under the title "Leaving danger" and another entitled "Finding refuge". Discuss how the images compare.

## Secondary ideas

Introduce secondary students to the topic with this [British Red Cross lesson plan](#) and [presentation about seeking safety](#). Students are encouraged to think about what it would be like to feel unsafe in their homes and the belongings they would take if they were forced to flee. Working in groups, ask your class to list some of the reasons why people migrate. Can they identify some similarities and differences between being a refugee now and in the past? Use these ideas to create an extended piece of creative writing or a drama improvisation.

Investigate the difficulties faced by [people who have been displaced in their own countries with the help of this resource](#) by [Oxfam](#). It focuses on South Sudan where fighting has forced around 1.5 million people to flee their homes with a further 474,000 becoming refugees in neighbouring countries.

Use this role-play activity to help key stage 3 students [identify which people are most vulnerable in a complex emergency](#). Based on what they've learned, how do they feel the international community should respond when poverty and conflict combine to create a crisis? If you have some tech to hand, you could record these thoughts in a podcast or video.

Another fantastic resource is the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\) photo library](#). It covers the past 60 years and contains more than 250,000 images, making it the world's largest collection of refugee-

related photos. It includes recent photographs from the Bay of Bengal and Mediterranean Sea. What would students like to ask some of the people featured in the images? Working in pairs, get your class to act out one of these conversations then write a newspaper report to accompany the picture. Alternatively, choose some of the statistics included in the captions to create an infographic, or use them to inspire a piece of artwork.

## Ideas for all ages

As the focus of Refugee Week is on celebrating the contribution that refugees make to the UK, [Counterpoint Arts](#) has handily created [14 learning activities](#) for key stages 1 to 4. They explore issues of refugee-hood, displacement, home and identity. Ideas include a [music lesson in which students create a soundscape about a journey](#) and an [art lesson that focuses on personal identity](#). The aim is to raise awareness of refugee architects, musicians, writers and artists who have sought sanctuary in the UK. Did pupils know, for example, that singer Rita Ora was a refugee? Or that the family of artist Lucien Freud moved to London in the 1930s to avoid persecution by the Nazis? As a homework task, challenge students to research a well-known refugee of their choice.

If you have students in your class who are refugees or asylum seekers, you might be interested in this [guide to becoming a "School of Sanctuary"](#). It contains information about refugees and asylum seekers, including what it's like to be an asylum-seeking child in school, and advice on how to foster a culture of inclusion. Choose a "language of the month" and give students the opportunity to share greetings and phrases from their home language, or set up conversation clubs for children who are learning English as an additional language.

Education charity [Into Film](#) has found that running a film club can be a fantastic way of aiding integration while providing a fun, safe and inclusive learning environment. It's [Identity and Belonging](#) resource (more suited for secondary) was created earlier this year to show how film can be used to support new arrivals to the UK. A second resource about Refugee Week, suitable for all ages, [uses six films to explore the emotional turmoil of being forced to flee your country](#).

Having learned about refugees, students should be in a position to enter the [Refugee Week 2015 competition for schools](#). From whole-school poetry collections to collages and newspapers, entries can be in any medium and should celebrate the contribution that refugees and migrants have made to the UK. One idea is to [build and decorate a tent inspired by the work that Syrian children have been doing in UNHCR refugee camps](#). Entries are limited to one per school and must be received by Tuesday 30 June. Use the hashtag [#RefugeesContribute](#) to find out more.