

**REFUGEES:
HAS THE WELCOME MAT BEEN PULLED?**

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Introduction: According to a 1993 United Nations report, 1 of every 125 people in the world has been forced out of his/her normal life and home by war, persecution, or violence. At the same time, many countries are becoming less welcoming when refugees seek asylum, whether temporary or permanent. In this lesson, students explore the refugee problem, learning about its causes and debating what U.S. policy on refugee issues should be.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

1. Explain reasons why people become refugees
2. Explain reasons why some countries have become less welcoming of refugees
3. Debate policy issues related to refugees

Time: 3-4 class periods

Materials: You will need copies of Handout 19-1 for all students: you will need enough copies of each of the Debate Instruction Cards for one-sixth of the class. The debate will be most effective if students have some library research time or have access to resources within the classroom. In-class resources would also be useful in the introduction to the lesson.

Procedure:

1. Briefly discuss with students the definition of *refugee*--a person who leaves his/her home country due to fear of persecution on account of race, region, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or holding a particular political opinion. Point out that nearly 20 million people worldwide are refugees. Ask students why they think there are some many refugees. You may want to give them newspapers and newsmagazines to look through for events that might cause people to flee their homes. From where are the people fleeing? Can students imagine having to flee from their homes in order to live?
2. Distribute Handout 19-1 and allow time for students to read it. Discuss the various reasons given for becoming a refugee, as well as reasons why some countries have become less welcoming toward refugees.
3. Tell the class that many people think the United States should rethink its policy towards refugees. U.S. policy has been an important impact on the international situation because the United States is the world's biggest contributor to international programs to help refugees. Lay out the three policy issues that students will be considering:

- The US should accept more refugees for resettlement
 - The US should support a broader definition of *refugee* so that people who flee for economic reasons or because of natural disasters would be included
 - The US should support refugee-prevention strategies
4. Divide the class into six groups and give the members of each group one of the Debate Instructions Cards. Tell the students how long they will have to prepare for the debate. Make resources available for students' use in preparing their arguments, or allow students to spend at least half a class period in the media center
 5. Conduct the three debates; after each, let the members of the four groups that were not involved in the debate vote on which policy they would choose based on the arguments presented.

Follow-up: To focus on the human side of the refugee problem, ask students to write imaginary diaries of refugees, chronicling the events encountered after leaving the home country. Other students might read young adult novels about refugees, such as:

- *Journey of the Sparrows*, by Fren Leeper Buss (New York: Lodestar, 1991). El Salvador.
- *Onion Tears*, by Diana Kidd (New York: Orchard, 1991). Vietnam.
- *The Clay Marble*, by Minfong Ho (New York: Farrar, 1991). Cambodia/Vietnam.

A nonfiction book that would enhance students' understanding of the refugee issues is *Into a Strange Land: Unaccompanied Refugee Youth in America*, by Brent Ashabranner and Melissa Ashabranner (New York: Dodd, 1987).