

PROJECT BASED LESSON 1: A WELCOME FOR REFUGEES

Summary

Students will create a plan to help a newly-arrived refugee family in their community. They will consider the needs of both adults and children in the family, identify potential problems the family may face, and ascertain the available community resources that can be tapped. They may then present their action plan to local government leaders. [Note: Insights gained in this lesson will be relevant to all immigrant families, not just those classified as refugees.]

Objectives

Students will investigate the challenges that immigrant families, and particularly refugee families, face in acclimating to a new country. They will plan how best to meet these challenges by using community resources and preparing a welcoming school environment. Through this lesson, students may become more open and welcoming to immigrant students and other new newcomers in their school. They may become more active in pursuing ways to help new arrivals, perhaps gaining insight into opportunities for student service learning.

Subjects

Language Arts, Writing, Social Studies (Civics)

Time Needed

3 class periods plus time for research and creating presentations

Skill Building

Research, collaboration in teams, presentation of material in a useful format

Resources and Materials

- Video of *Brave Girl Rising*
- Related teacher resources including Introductory Lessons and Film Viewing Guides and relevant Issue Fact Sheet, including Resources
- Handout on the refugee family (teacher-created)
- Country pages at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/>
- Local directory of available social services
- Publisher or similar desktop-publishing program (optional)

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Essential Questions

1. Does a community have a responsibility to help immigrant families assimilate?
2. What are the special needs of refugee families coming to my community?
3. What will happen in our community if we do not offer support to immigrants?
4. What resources does my community provide to help resettle refugee families?
5. How can my school help students who have arrived as refugees?
6. What will I myself gain from helping a refugee family?

Sample Content Questions

1. Where do refugees/immigrants to my community tend to come from?
2. Why have the members of this family left their home country?
3. How difficult was their journey to my community?
4. What does this family need in order to start a new life and be successful in my community?
5. How can my school and community help this family? What resources are available?
6. What role can I personally play in helping this family?

Building a Foundation and Making Connections

View the short film *Brave Girl Rising* and use the introductory lessons, film viewing guides, relevant country and issue fact sheets, and resources to engage students so that they begin to develop an understanding of the experiences refugees have undergone, their feelings about loss of home country and friends, and needs and goals they will have after immigrating to your community.

Project

Before this project gets under way, teachers should do some research of their own. They will identify a refugee or immigrant group coming to their community and find out why people in this population have emigrated from their homes, whether they were in refugee camps first, etc. (Note: It is best not to choose a group represented by a student in the class, which might make that child self-conscious or embarrassed.) The teacher will create a fictional family consisting of one or both parents and one or more children. He or she will assign first names and ages to each family member, having at least one child the same age as students in the class. The parents can be given occupations that they might have followed in their home country. (However, students should understand that many parents coming to a new country will not be able to follow their former occupations; for example, a lawyer or doctor would not be able to practice in the new country without a license. This is another source of difficulty and even grief.) Finally, the teacher will make up a handout that includes a paragraph or more describing this family and a map showing the location of their home country. When introducing the project, the teacher will explain to students that this fictional family represents many real families.

[Note: If there are any students who are immigrants, the teacher may wish to discuss the project with them or their families beforehand to be sure that they are comfortable with it. Such students or family members might be willing to be guest speakers or participate in a Q and A session, through an interpreter if necessary.]

Research Phase

The students' challenge is to prepare a positive reception for this family as they are moving to the local community. They should begin by researching conditions in the family's country of origin. What might have driven them to move to this country? What might they have to sacrifice to get here? What did they leave behind? How dangerous was the journey? What would they have been able to bring with them?

Students should then be divided into two teams: one to plan for the adults and the other for the children. (Teams can be subdivided to focus on particular issues.) Some sample questions they should consider are listed below, but the teacher should encourage students to make up their own questions in addition.

After learning more about the country of origin, the student team focusing on the adults in the family will identify the needs that the family will have when they come to their new home. What native language do they speak? How can they learn to speak your target language? How will they find a new home and furnish it? How will the parent(s) find a new job? How will they learn to shop for groceries or use a stove if it is unfamiliar? Students will put themselves in the place of the new family and imagine as many urgent questions as possible. They will then investigate the resources to be found in the community—ESL night classes, local job listings, nonprofits that work with immigrants, food banks (until established with a job), mental health if the immigrant has experienced trauma, physical health checks especially if prescription medications are needed, etc. If no such resources are found, they should propose a plan to establish one.

The second student team will consider how the children in the family can best adapt to a new school. How should they be welcomed? How should teachers be trained to understand the cultural norms the children are familiar with? If they don't speak English, should the children be placed in ESL classes only or given some ESL classes and mainstreamed in others? Who can help if they fall behind in their studies? How will they navigate the lunchroom on their first days? As with the first team, they should investigate options and establish a well-defined welcome/follow-up plan to help these students, with practical tools such as a map of the school showing the cafeteria, nurse's office, and bathrooms.

Presentation Phase

When the project research is complete, each team should prepare a brochure summarizing their findings

and present a draft to the other team, answering questions and taking notes on any suggestions the other team has. Then each team should refine and finalize their brochure.

It would be ideal if the team working on adult issues could present their ideas to a community leader such as a town council member, city manager, etc. The team working on school issues might present their ideas to the principal or at a faculty meeting. In both cases, even though the family that has been created is fictional, the issues raised should be of concern to any administrator into whose location a new family is moving.

Ideas for Encouraging All Learners

English Language Learners

When showing the film, be sure to turn on subtitles in the student's native language if available.

These students should be assigned to the second team, the one investigating best practices for welcoming newcomers to schools. Their experiences will become fundamental to suggesting steps to take, making them an integral part of the team and encouraging them to speak up. The teacher might model responses for these students ahead of team meetings to give them a chance to practice what they would like to say and to be sure they have the necessary vocabulary. The teacher should also provide a rubric to guide them.

Gifted Students

A third team of gifted students could do the research into any environmental, political, and military crises in the family's country of origin before the rest of the class becomes involved in the project; they could then provide a briefing on their findings to other members of the class. Then the gifted team could split, with half the members assigned to each of the other teams to serve as resources on history, culture, etc.