



# SYRIA'S WAR ON CHILDREN

## ELEMENTARY RESOURCES



Syrian refugee at a camp on the Turkey-Syria border.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Syria is a country in the Middle East currently suffering through a brutal civil war that has already claimed 100,000 casualties.
- The civil war started in 2011 when government forces, under Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, opened fire on a group of peaceful protestors, killing four people. The Syrian people were shocked and demanded that al-Assad resign. He refused.
- The rebels want the president to step down. They are made up of many different groups, including the Free Syrian Army, which is the largest. Many other people still support the president and his regime.
- Refugees do not always live in refugee camps, which quickly become overcrowded. In fact, most Syrian refugees live in apartments and must pay rent. This cost is very difficult for most families, who cannot work legally in their host country, and many send their children to work.
- The civil war has many consequences other than the immediate violence, like the spread of diseases, including Polio, that are manageable during peaceful times. Neighbouring countries like Jordan and Lebanon are also feeling strains on their country's social services because of the influx of refugees.
- The effect of keeping refugee children out of school could last for generations, because their children will be less likely to go to school, and the cycle of poverty is more likely to continue.
- The Canadian federal government is offering assistance to Syria and its neighbours through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), whose mission is to lead Canada's international development effort.

### NOTE TO EDUCATORS

#### ADVISORY



This article was inspired by a tragic event recently portrayed in the news. Due to some graphic detail, please share this column with students at your discretion.

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to

### KEY TERMS

**Refugee**—A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster.

**Displaced person**—A person forced to leave their home country. However, a displaced person can also refer to someone who was forced to leave their home, but is still living in their home country. In this case, they are usually called an Internally Displaced Person.

**Civil war**—A war between citizens of the same country.

## THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- Themes: children’s rights, politics, education, humanitarian aid, poverty, war and conflicts, global issues
- Course Connections: Language, Social Studies, Geography

## MATERIALS

- Global Voices column
- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

## MAP IT

Have students locate the different locations mentioned in the article to gain an understanding of the international expanse and involvement in this issue. Once they have found it, ask them to recall and explain the significance of the location.

- Moadamia, Syria
- Damascus, Syria
- Jordan
- Turkey
- Lebanon
- Iraq

## DISCUSS

1. What is civil war? What are some examples in history of civil war? How does civil war differ from international wars? (Families can be split and often have to fight on opposing sides, the national government is torn into opposing sides, war is especially close to home for all citizens, etc.)
2. What is a refugee? What are the different types of refugees? (War, religious, environmental, etc.) What are some examples of refugees and the circumstances that surround them from history? (Irish potato famine, US Civil War, Three Gorges Dam in China, World War I and II, etc.) How is moving for refuge different than moving for a new job or to live close to family.
3. How would school offer a “respite” (a short period of rest and relief from something difficult and unpleasant) for these displaced children from the chaos? If they are not able to attend school, what are the short- and long-term consequences?
4. Other than an interruption of education, what are some dangers found in a refugee camp? What is polio? How is the outbreak of polio a symptom of larger problem? Often

refugee camps have very poor conditions and can become “slums,” what is a slum? What are the contributing factors that make refugee camps slums?

5. The article closes with an optimistic look at how youth are pulling together to help the displaced children of the Syrian civil war. What are some examples of youth rising above the conflict?

## DIVE DEEPER

Begin the activity by reading, once more, the following piece from the Global Voices article:

“On the first day of class, Kurdish students from across the Iraqi border arrived with books, backpacks, uniforms and toiletries—bought with the proceeds of bake sales and community fundraisers—and distributed them to hopeful-looking Syrian refugees.

“We trust the strength of youth. This is the sign of looking ahead for a bright future in school, becoming good students and good citizens,” a UNICEF representative in Iraq has said of the effort.”

After reading this passage, ask students what issues affect their community, for example, local hunger, poverty, low literacy. Record their suggestions on the front board.

Next choose an issue to support by class vote. Brainstorm a list of ways to help raise awareness or help the community regarding this issue. Have students think, pair, share actions to get involved. As a class, create an action plan. Think of ways to get the rest of the school and surrounding community involved as well.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information, share these resources with your students:

- The BBC explains the Syrian crisis to children [bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186](http://bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186)