



# The Rights of Migrants in the United States

Lesson Plan:  
Fleeing for Your Life

Grade Level: 6-8



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# Lesson Plan: Fleeing for Your Life

**Goal:** To understand the unique circumstances faced by refugees and asylum seekers

**Objectives:**

- Students will gain a basic understanding of what it means to be a refugee and/or asylum seeker
- Students will simulate the personal journey of a refugee
- Students will explore possible reasons that refugees come to the U.S. and the impact on society

**Essential Question:** What is the experience of a refugee coming to the United States?

**Materials and Resources:**

- Paper, cardstock or cardboard, markers, pens, flip-chart or whiteboard
- Notebook or journal to use throughout the lesson
- Handout: Refugee Identity Cards

**Time Frame:** 2-3 class periods

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Teacher Background:** For this lesson students should be familiar with the following vocabulary words: *migrant*, *migrate*, *immigrant*, *refugee*, *asylee*, *asylum*, *asylum seeker*. As an activity beforehand, ask if students know these words. Generate ideas as a class first, then write definitions to display in class. Ask students to copy the definitions into their journals and keep the definitions displayed throughout the remainder of the lesson.

The classroom should be a safe place for open discussion. Be sensitive to the fact that you may have students, or family members of students who are migrants and whose migration history they may not feel comfortable discussing in class.

**Procedure:**

**Activity 1: Refugee Role-Play Activity**

1. **Give each participant an identity and family group number.** The handout with the identities is provided at the end of this lesson. Be sure to stagger them so all members of one family are not right next to each other. It may also be helpful to copy and enlarge them and/or laminate them for use with other classes. If you have fewer students than identities, pass out identities for four families rather than for all five. If you have more students than identities, you could ask them to share with another student or have a few students circulate and document the process for you. What did these documenters notice? What was heard from more than one group?, etc.

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## 2. Read the following role play scenario out loud and fill in the blanks:

**\*\* Teachers should adapt the names of states and places to ones that are relevant to their classroom.**

Citizens of the state of **[Wisconsin]**, wanting more land for their people, have invaded **[Minnesota]**. Entering the state through the city of **[Stillwater, MN]**, the people of **[Wisconsin]** have taken control of the Capitol Building in **[Minnesota]** and the police and National Guard throughout the state. There are snipers in the capitol city buildings and **[The Mall of America]** has been blown up. All interstate highways have been closed. The people of **[Wisconsin]** have taken over the main stadium and are using it as a staging ground for their troops. You have heard rumors that the invaders are going to be going door to door, and unless you can prove that you were born in **[Wisconsin]**, you will be arrested and taken to an undisclosed location. Fighting has begun in the capitol city and is spreading into the suburbs and rural towns across the state. You can hear the fighting around your house. Mobs of people from **[Wisconsin]** are roaming the streets and have set fire to your neighbor's house. You realize that you must flee **[Minnesota]** tonight. You have two hours to pack your belongings. Because all of the roads are blocked, you must head toward a refugee camp in **[North Dakota or Iowa]** or other bordering states on foot.

- 3. Imagine.** Tell the students to write down ten items that they would bring with them based on their identity, without talking to anyone else. Give them two minutes to decide. Time them and give a warning after a minute and a half has passed. They should write clearly so their list can be shared with others.
- 4. Convene the family groups.** Ask students to form small groups with everyone from their assigned family. These small family units must now decide together what they can take with them. Each person can only carry three things. All the items recommended from individual lists must be considered, but with the interest of the family in mind. Each person should construct a list of the three items he or she can carry. The group must take into consideration any elderly, sick, or very young people in the group who cannot carry items. The groups should meet for 5-10 minutes.
- 5. Decide a route.** Once the time limit has passed, tell the families they now have to decide whether they will flee by foot or escape by boat. They need to think about where they will sleep, find food, etc. There are refugee camps in the surrounding states where they can stay.
- 6. Come back together and have each group present their plan.** Where did they decide to go? How will they get there? What did they decide to take and why?

### Questions for discussion:

- Why did you choose the items you did? Why did you eliminate other items?
- Did you choose items based on what you thought you would need to survive or what would help you remember your life back home?
- Do you think you could carry all of the items?
- Where did you decide to flee and why? How long should it take to get there?
- Who had the most say in the decision-making process? Why was that?
- How do you feel about what is happening?

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## Activity 2: Life in a Refugee Camp

1. **Regroup.** Ask students to reconvene with their “families.” The families have now made it into refugee camps. Explain to the students that in the camps, the refugees themselves handle a great many of the day-to-day responsibilities of keeping the camp running.
2. **List.** Based on the discussion, have each participant make two lists:
  - What do they think they can offer to others in the camp based on their identity?
  - In what ways do they need help from relief workers in the camp?
3. **Discuss.** In their small groups, students should discuss what they can offer. Then discuss what their needs are, and whether they think relief workers can help them.
4. **Share.** Ask students to share their ideas with the whole class or create a display telling others about their new roles and possible responsibilities.

## Activity 3: Resettlement in the U.S.

**Four years later.** After spending four years in the refugee camp, the families have been safely resettled in a “third country”—in this case, in your local community. Reassign Family #1 and Family #2. They will now play the role of families living in the chosen city. The children of the families attend a small, diverse public school. New refugee families (the other families in the role play) have just been resettled in their neighborhood.

1. **Welcome.** Families #1 and #2 will play the role of host community. They should outline what they would do to welcome the new families. They should be encouraged to include ideas at the individual, school, and community levels.
2. **Integrate.** The other families continue to play the role of refugees. These students should list what they would do to work with the school and community, and what their school and community could do to welcome them and help them adjust to their new city.
3. **Compare.** Compare the lists and discuss. Is there anything that might be missing from the lists? How difficult or easy would it be for some of their suggestions to happen?
4. **Debrief.** Have students respond to the following questions in their journals:
  - What have you learned about the experience of a refugee coming to the U.S.?
  - How is the experience of a refugee unique compared to other immigrants?
  - What, if any, assumptions about refugees or immigrants did you have before this activity?
  - How has your attitude toward refugees and immigrants changed?
  - What can you do to take action on the issue of immigration in your town? School?
  - How can you make people new to your school or neighborhood feel welcome?
5. **Optional Extension: Take Action!** Encourage students to think of ways to make newcomers feel welcome. For example, start a club, create a welcoming committee for new students and new neighbors, post signs in multiple languages, have a culturally diverse potluck or fashion show, display photos in your school that are representative of the many origins of your student body, display maps with lines connecting origins to where we live now.

## Refugee Identities:

The refugee identities can be added to and adapted as necessary. You may want to cut and laminate the refugee identity cards for future use. Be sure that you have one identity card for each student in class.

### FAMILY #1: Grandfather

- 65 years old
- Retired farmer

### FAMILY #2: Father

- Dentist
- Likes to jog

### FAMILY #2: Daughter

- 13 years old (twin)
- Good swimmer

### FAMILY #1: Grandmother

- 60 years old
- 5th grade teacher

### FAMILY #1: Grandson

- 12 years old
- Parents have died
- Likes to help his grandfather in the garden

### FAMILY #2: Mother

- English teacher
- Is a runner

### FAMILY #2: Daughter

- 13 years old (twin)
- Very athletic

### **FAMILY #3: Father**

- Works as an electrical engineer

### **FAMILY #3: Mother**

- Stays at home with children
- Has skills in sewing and child care

### **FAMILY #3: Daughter**

- 18 years old
- Looking forward to going to college
- Has a boyfriend

### **FAMILY #3: Son**

- 14 years old
- Likes to play soccer

### **FAMILY #3: Son**

- 9 years old
- Has health problems and needs regular medication

### **FAMILY #4: Mother**

- Works as a doctor
- Specializes in family medicine

### **FAMILY #4: Father**

- Works for a major newspaper as a reporter on business issues
- Loves to cook

### **FAMILY #4: Daughter**

- 18 years old
- Computer whiz

**FAMILY #4: Daughter**

- 16 years old
- Wants to be an actress

**FAMILY #4: Daughter**

- 12 years old
- Very studious
- Loves to read
- Uses a wheelchair

**FAMILY #4: Grandmother**

- 75 years old
- Not able to walk easily
- Loves to tell stories

**FAMILY #5: Mother**

- Divorced
- Works as a city bus driver

**FAMILY #5: Cousin (male)**

- 21 years old
- College student staying with family while in school

**FAMILY #5: Son**

- 10 years old
- Loves to play basketball
- Loves to play computer games

**FAMILY #5: Son**

- 6 years old
- Likes animals

**FAMILY #5: Daughter**

- 9 months old
- Cries a lot