

# Voices of Iraqi Refugees



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These lessons are a joint project of The Advocates for Human Rights, the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, and independent artists, Nathan Fisher and Monica Haller.



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To download the *Voices of Iraqi Refugees* teaching guide and other Human Rights Education resources, go to [DiscoverHumanRights.org](http://DiscoverHumanRights.org).



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The Advocates for Human Rights is a volunteer-based, non-governmental organization, nonprofit, 501 (c)(3) organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of internationally recognized human rights. Since 1992, The Advocates has been a local and national leader in bringing the principles of international human rights to the classroom and the community. We believe that educating about human rights and responsibilities is the most important way to ensure long-term improvements in respect for human rights in the United States and around the world.



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The Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP) creates bridges of communication, understanding and support between Iraqis and Americans. We work toward our mission of reconciliation from war and occupation through the arts, education, cultural and professional exchange, support for peacemakers in Iraq, and water and sanitation projects. We work with our partner organization in Iraq, the Muslim Peacemaker Teams.

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Monica Haller is a visual artist who works on long-term collaborations with individuals and small groups, often using photography, video, and writing. Her artistic practice is rooted in social justice concerns and attempts to mobilize information by amplifying the materials and technologies that her collaborators have turned to along the way. Drawing from the experiences of the individuals and communities with whom she works, Monica reactivates their personal histories, and in so doing, hopes to provoke critical dialogue around them and their larger social contexts. Monica has a BA in Peace and Conflict Studies, an MFA in Visual Studies, and has received fellowships from foundations including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Jerome Foundation. [www.veteransbookproject.com](http://www.veteransbookproject.com)



# Teacher Background

## FAQ Teacher Background: The Iraqi Refugee Experience

**Why are Iraqis fleeing?** The United States and the United Kingdom invaded Iraq in 2003. The two countries did not officially declare war, but instead justified their decision in concerns over threats to national security and human rights. Specific explanations for the invasion shifted over time but generally included accusations that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or WMDs (including biological, chemical, and nuclear); that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was supporting al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups; that the Hussein regime had committed grave human rights violations against its own people; and that the Iraqi people had a right to democratic rule.

The rationale for the invasion and occupation of Iraq has been widely criticized, in part because neither the U.S. nor the UK has found WMDs or has been able to establish a connection between President Hussein and al-Qaeda. In addition, while it was substantiated that Iraqis suffered abuses under the Hussein regime, human rights violations continued to occur and, in many cases, worsened after the invasion. Credible sources estimate that between 100,000 and one million civilians have been killed and many more wounded or maimed as a result of the violence in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, many Iraqis remained in Iraq, optimistic that changes in the government would bring more freedom and a better life. However, a prolonged period of destabilization and increasing sectarian violence began to drive many Iraqis into neighboring countries. As bombings and kidnappings became increasingly frequent in many areas, people chose to leave.<sup>2</sup> Initially, high-income Iraqis fled, with the major refugee exodus occurring after 2006.

**Where have Iraqis fled?** Iraqi refugees fled to a few primary countries: Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. Many lived in cities, as opposed to the refugee camps often envisioned when people think of refugees.<sup>3</sup> As of 2009, there were significant populations of Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, although only about 20% of the Iraqis in these countries are registered with United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as refugees.<sup>4</sup>

**What is life like for a refugee in these countries?** Life as a refugee can be incredibly difficult and unpredictable. In Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, Iraqis do not have the legal right to work and primarily subsist on money from savings, remittances from family members in Iraq and other countries, and work on the black market.<sup>5</sup> Access to school differs depending on whether an Iraqi family is registered as a refugee and the policies in the receiving country.<sup>6</sup> Some children do not go to school, because they need to work to support their family.<sup>7</sup>

**How many Iraqis are refugees?** Approximately 2.5 million Iraqis fled Iraq after 2003.<sup>8</sup> At the end of 2011, UNHCR estimated there were 1.4 million Iraqi refugees worldwide.<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of current Iraqi refugees are temporarily residing in either Syria or Jordan.<sup>10</sup>

**How many Iraqi refugees have come to the United States?** Large-scale resettlement of Iraqis to the United States started in 2007.<sup>11</sup> Since that time, more than 64,000 Iraqis have been resettled in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

**Why is the number of Iraqis resettled so small?** Only a small percentage of the displaced Iraqis will be resettled to in third country, such as the United States.<sup>13</sup> Delays in refugee processing have been common, in part due to security checks required for resettlement to the United States.<sup>14</sup> Certain groups of refugees receive higher priority for resettlement, including: survivors of torture, women and children, the elderly, people with family in other countries, and individuals who have high profile cases or worked with foreign governments and organizations.<sup>15</sup> Increasing numbers of Iraqis chose to return to Iraq in 2011 for a variety of personal reasons.<sup>16</sup> There has also been a decrease in the numbers of individuals resettled, in part due to security concerns in Syria which prevented UNHCR officials from accessing refugee populations there.<sup>17</sup>



# Teacher Background

**What is the background of the Iraqi refugees?** Iraqis represent diverse religious and ethnic groups: Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Kurds are the four primary groups.<sup>18</sup> Members of all of these groups have fled and been resettled. Appreciating the Iraqi refugee experience requires an awareness of the situation in Iraq before 2003. Though life was oppressive and difficult under Saddam Hussein, the dictator ensured free education, largely free medical care, and subsidized food and gasoline.<sup>19</sup> Before the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was considered to have one of the best educational systems in the region.<sup>20</sup> Iraq has traditionally had high levels of literacy for men and women as well as internationally recognized schools in science and technology.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, the 1991 war and the 2003 war resulted in both a disruption of education and a destruction of school facilities. In addition to the videos and stories included with this project, Iraqi Refugee Stories features many video interviews with refugees to provide perspective: [iraqirefugeestories.org/stories.html](http://iraqirefugeestories.org/stories.html).

**What do refugees expect when they come to the U.S.?** Many refugees expect that resettlement to a free country such as the U.S. will be equal to or better than Iraq on benchmarks like health care, work, and educational opportunity.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, refugees have heard that jobs can be difficult to find, childcare is not free, and that there is a limited period of cash assistance and food assistance.<sup>23</sup> For many resettled refugees, the primary concerns and questions are around education for children and financial assistance from the government.<sup>24</sup> Refugees go through a cultural orientation before coming to the U.S., but they also rely on information from friends, family, and fellow refugees.<sup>25</sup>

**What challenges do Iraqi refugees face in the U.S.?** Starting over anywhere with limited friends and family is challenging regardless of past circumstances. Some refugees are also dealing with the stress of past torture, trauma, and loss of family members. Language is often a barrier. A considerable source of stress is the loss of social status and the need to readapt to social roles in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Many Iraqis were well-educated and held professional positions prior to displacement. They often grapple with depression and feelings of humiliation or feeling undervalued in the United States when forced to accept lower skilled jobs. The non-transferability of degrees poses an additional barrier for resettled professionals, who may not be able to pursue their prior profession without additional schooling or licensure exams.<sup>27</sup> "Better-educated Iraqis, in particular, are reluctant to take entry-level jobs, preferring to put off employment in hopes of landing jobs commensurate with their work experience and education. Resettlement agencies have found that Iraqis who worked for the U.S. government in Iraq can be especially disappointed by their employment prospects in the United States."<sup>28</sup> The resettlement process is not free, and the various costs involved are often daunting to refugees. For example, refugees are loaned money for air travel, and they must reimburse the government for the cost.



# Teacher Background

## Endnotes

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# Gr. K-4 Lesson Plan: Making a Connection

**Goal:** To help elementary school students make a connection between themselves and Iraqi refugee children and learn how to welcome refugees into their classrooms and schools.

**Objectives:**

- Students will be able to find Iraq on a world map.
- Students will understand basic information about the Iraq War.
- Students will be able to empathize with Iraqi refugee children.
- Students will understand how to make refugee peers feel welcome and the benefits of doing so.

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

**Grade Level:** K-4

**Materials:**

- World map
- Paper and crayons or markers
- Photos from books by Iraqi refugees Alia, Ali, and Sarah, available at [iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking](http://iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking)
- Internet connection and display screen for YouTube video clip (at 8:16-8:40 min), available at <http://youtu.be/jGxsJyursXM>

**Appropriate Subject Areas:** Language Arts and Social Studies

**Vocabulary:** community, differences, Iraq, respect, responsibility, similarities

**Background:** To prepare for this lesson, please read the FAQ Teacher Background on p. 3 in advance of the lesson(s) as a refresher summary. For further information and resources, please refer to sources in the endnotes of the Background.

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**Procedure:**

**Prepare:** Before class begins, have the YouTube video clip cued and ready to show on a screen in your room.

**Activity 1: Introducing Iraqi Refugees (approx. 15 min.)**

1. **Locate.** Have students find Iraq on a world map. Then, have them find the United States. Draw a line between the two countries.
2. **Share.** Discuss what students already know about Iraq (i.e., location, climate, war, whether they know anyone that is Iraqi, etc.). Give them some basic background about Iraqi culture and the war in Iraq as they share what they know.

**Activity 2: Discovery through Photos**



# Gr. K-4 Lesson Plan: Making a Connection

1. **Analyze.** Lay selected photos out at three separate stations around the room (by category). Divide students into small groups. Assign each student to a station and ask them to find what is similar and what is different between what they see in these pictures and what they experience in the United States. When students are at the “People” photo station, ask them to also discuss how they think the people in the photos are feeling, and why they think that. (Younger students can talk over their answers. Older students should write their group’s answers on a piece of paper that they carry to each station.)

**Places:**

Alia: Pages 165-166

Sarah: Pages 5-6, 93-94, 97-98, 105-106, 121-122, 131-132

**Food:**

Alia: Pages 79, 155-156, 157-158

Sarah: Pages 83, 109, 111-112

**People:**

Alia: Pages 35, 91-92, 99-100, 117-118

Sarah: Pages 11, 15-16, 17-18, 47, 65, 80



*Photo from Alia’s Book, from the  
Veteran’s Project Book Library*

2. **Discuss.** Discuss students’ findings as a class. Have students share which photos are their favorite, and why.

### Activity 3: Welcoming New Students

1. **Role Play.** Ask for two student volunteers. Tell them they will pretend to be new students at the school, coming into the classroom for the first time. Ask them to wait in the hall. While they do so, they should make up a name and country of origin. Tell the other students that they should think of ways to make the “new” students feel welcome. When the two students re-enter the room, have them introduce themselves using the name and country selected. With the “new” students still up front, ask the rest of the class for some ideas of how they could make these newcomers feel welcome. Write the ideas on the board.
2. **Discuss.** Ask students what they think it would be like to leave everything they know behind and move to Iraq. Some questions might include:
  - What would you need to bring if you moved to Iraq?
  - How would you feel leaving your friends and family behind?
  - What would make you feel welcome in your new neighborhood?
  - How would you hope other kids would treat you at school? Is this similar to how we thought we could welcome new students? (Point to responses on the board.)
3. **Watch.** Go to the video clip of Mohammed (8:16-8:40 at <http://youtu.be/jGxsJyursXM>). Ask students: “After everything we talked about today, how would you respond to his question?” On a large sheet of poster paper, draw a large house with a globe inside of it and write some of their responses inside of it. Post the drawing in the classroom.



# Gr. 5-8 Lesson Plan: Visualizing Iraq

**Goal:** To provide basic facts about Iraqi refugees and build empathy for Iraqi refugees.

**Objectives:**

- Students will understand why Iraqis fled their homes during the Iraqi war (2003-ongoing).
- Students will explore the experience of Iraqi refugees through photographs and a first-person narrative.

**Time Frame:** 2 class periods

**Grade Level:** 5-8

**Materials:** Sudad's Story, available for download at [iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking/](http://iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking/)

**Appropriate Subject Areas:** Art, Language Arts, and Social Studies

**Vocabulary:** Arab Spring, human rights, Iraq war, persecution, refugee

**Background:** To prepare for this lesson, please read the FAQ Teacher Background on p. 3 as a refresher summary. For further information and resources, please refer to sources in the endnotes of the Teacher Background. For lessons on root causes of war and ways for students to be peacemakers, please refer to The Advocates' curriculum, *The Road to Peace*, available for download at [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/curriculum.html](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/curriculum.html).

Please be advised that the content of Sudad's Story contains a personal account of war that details some sad and disturbing information. Please read it in advance of the students and determine whether it is appropriate for your class. Be sensitive to any students who are themselves refugees or have experienced violence or death, as the content might trigger personal trauma.

**Procedure:**

**Activity 1: Providing Context**

1. **Define.** Explain to students that in this lesson, they are going to learn about the experiences of Iraqi refugees. Ask students what the word "refuge" means to them. Write down ideas on the board. Once they have finished, explain that "refuge," which means shelter or protection, is the root of the word "refugee." People who flee certain human rights violations at home are considered refugees. Ask students to brainstorm human rights violations that would cause people to flee their home countries. Then, give them the following definition:

*The United Nations defines refugees as people who are fleeing persecution in their own country because of their race, nationality, political opinion, religion, or membership in a particular social group.*

Explain that refugees who come to the U.S. often go through three different stages in their journeys: 1) Fleeing Home (the decision to leave), 2) Making the Journey (what happened on the way to safety), and 3) Coming to the United States (receiving legal status in the United States).

2. **Locate.** Have students find Iraq on a world map. Then, have them find the United States. Draw a line between the two countries and explain to students that since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003, more



## Gr. 5-8 Lesson Plan: Visualizing Iraq

than 64,000 refugees from Iraq have been resettled in the United States. Next, have a volunteer student locate Jordan and Syria, and explain that they will be reading about the experiences of a boy named Sudad, who lived in these two countries after fleeing Iraq. Ask them why they think Iraqi refugees fled to Jordan and Syria. (Answer should be that they are in close geographic proximity.) Explain that many refugee-receiving countries are those who share borders with countries in conflict.

In his story, Sudad mentions that he is not able to return to Iraq because he will be killed, but he also says he is unable to return to Syria (one country he had lived in after escaping the war) because of the Arab Spring. Have a brief discussion about the Arab Spring to give students some context for his comment.

- 3. Analyze.** On the board, write: Fleeing Home, Making the Journey, and Coming to the United States. Using the Teacher Background on Iraqi refugees, work together with the students to fill in each section with the specifics of the Iraqi experience. For instance, under “Fleeing Home,” students might offer the reasons people left, such as “war” or “violence against different ethnic groups” or “bombings”. After the class has filled in all the sections, explain that students will now be able to see these experiences through the eyes of an Iraqi student.



*Photo from Sudad's Book, taken by Nathan Lewis, from the Veteran's Book Project Library*

### Activity 2: Sudad's Story

- 1. Prepare.** Print out a copy of Sudad's Story (9 double-sided pages) for each student.
- 2. Read.** Pass out the books and give students about 15 minutes to read the story quietly to themselves. Let them know in advance that this is a story of war and it contains some sad and emotional content. They should take a break and think about something else, talk briefly to a friend, or raise their hand to talk to you as a trusted teacher if they start to feel overwhelmed.
- 3. Discuss.** As a class, discuss the following questions.
  - What was life like for young Sudad? What seemed similar/different to your childhood experiences?
  - What evidence did you see of damage to the country?
  - Why do you think Sudad does not want to forget Arabic? Can you imagine forgetting English (or students' native language)?
  - How would you feel about the United States if you were Sudad? How can we promote peace between Iraqis and Americans to improve the relationship between the two countries?
  - What can we do as Americans to prevent or end war?
- 4. Reflect.** For the close of the lesson, put students in small groups and ask them to create an image or write a poem to reflect either how they would feel if they had to go through a situation similar to Sudad's or how they feel as children living in the United States reading this story.
- 5. Take action.** Have students participate in “Letters for Peace” through the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project: [reconciliationproject.org/2012/letters-for-peace](http://reconciliationproject.org/2012/letters-for-peace).



## Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit: Iraqi Voices

Please be advised that the content of the Iraqi stories contains personal, real life accounts of war that detail some sad and disturbing information. Please read/watch any recommended texts/videos in advance of the students and determine whether the content is appropriate for your class. Be sensitive to students who are themselves refugees or have experienced violence or death, as the content might trigger personal trauma. All students and educators should follow steps to avoid secondary trauma where noted in the lesson. Remind all students of psychological services available at your school.

**Goal:** To provide basic facts about Iraqi refugees and build empathy for Iraqi refugees.

**Objectives:**

- Students will understand the impact of the Iraq War on individuals and their ability to claim their human rights.
- Students will empathize with Iraqi refugees' experiences.
- Students will understand the current humanitarian crisis in contemporary Iraq.
- Students will make connections between U.S. foreign policy and its effects.
- Students will appreciate how art can be used as a vehicle for personal and societal transformation.

**Time Frame:** This mini-unit can be taught in full or in part. The introductory and closing activities take approximately 1 class period each. The remaining activities take 1-2 class periods, depending on the reflection time needed. You can determine which of the activities would be most beneficial to your students.

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Materials:**

- Handout 1: Discussion Questions for Refugee Videos
- Handout 2: Discussion Questions for *The Unreturned*
- Computer and Internet access
- Large sheet of paper, tape to post it in classroom, and two different-colored markers

**Subject Areas:** Art, Language Arts, Social Studies

**Vocabulary:** foreign policy, human rights, humanitarian crisis, Iraq War, refugee

**Background:** To prepare for this mini-unit, please read the FAQ Teacher Background on p. 3 in advance of the lesson(s) as a refresher summary. For further information and resources, please refer to sources in the endnotes of the Background. For lessons on root causes of war and ways for students to be peacemakers, please refer to The Advocates' curriculum, *The Road to Peace*, available for download at [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/curriculum](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/curriculum).



# Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit: Iraqi Voices

## Procedure:

### Introductory Activity

- Share.** Ask students, “What knowledge and opinions do you have about the Iraq war? What do you know about the refugees who fled and the human rights violations they suffered?” Have them talk in pairs for 2-3 minutes. Post one large piece of paper on the wall and ask students to write on it in black ink words and phrases based on their small group discussion. Then, write “Before” at the top of the sheet.
- Explain.** As a class, discuss U.S. rationale for invading Iraq at the time, how we were received, some of the criticism, and the basic timeline of what happened during the war. Make connections to the students’ words and phrases where possible.

### Optional Activity 1: Reading Voices

- Prepare.** Explain to students that they will be reading personal accounts from refugees, and this will likely be an emotional experience. Tell them that if the content seems overwhelming at any point, they should take a break and think about something else, talk to a neighbor briefly, or select an alternative text.
- Read.** In a computer lab, or using student laptops, give students 20-30 minutes to read through one or more of the books written by Iraqi refugees that are available for viewing at [www.iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking/](http://www.iraqiartproject.org/bookmaking/). Students can select whichever book seems most interesting, or you can direct them based on the following information: [**Hilwah**: no graphic content; **Sarah**: no graphic content; **Zainab**: describes shell bomb incident; **Tarah**: mention of fighting and death; **Ali**: mention of threat to kin and cut author; **Sudad**: mention of kidnapping and murder; **Ahmed**: some graphic content; **Tarik**: cursing, some graphic content; **Alia**: graphic content.]
- Reflect.** When the time is up, return to the classroom (if applicable) and ask students to break out into small groups by the texts they chose to read. Give them 5-10 minutes to reflect on what they read as a small group. Then, bring the entire class together to discuss the content of the books and what the students learned and felt as they read them. Some questions for discussion are included below:



*Image from Ali's Book, from the Veteran's Project Book Library*



*Photo collage from Sarah's Book, from the Veteran's Project Book Library*

- How did you feel while reading these books? What content was most difficult?
- What were some of the main human rights issues faced by Iraqi refugees that emerged in the books?
- What took you by surprise? / What did you learn?
- How did this book help deepen your understanding of the Iraq War and those who fled?
- How would you feel about the United States if you had experienced the same situation?



# Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit: Iraqi Voices

## Optional Activity 2: Connecting through Film

1. **Watch.** Set up three stations with one of the following videos at each station. Pass out copies of *Handout 1: Discussion Questions for Refugee Videos* to each student. Assign students to small groups and have them rotate through the stations with notebooks and pens, in addition to their handouts. Have them watch the video and then discuss the questions. Allow each group approximately 5 minutes at the end of their session to write down their personal responses to each question at the end of their discussion.

- Jameela (7 min, 53 sec): <http://youtu.be/uRjwy5RsPww>
- Naser (3 min, 46 sec): [https://youtu.be/1KLq57\\_KUPc](https://youtu.be/1KLq57_KUPc)
- Mohammed (9 min, 20 sec): <http://youtu.be/jGxsJyursXM>
- Alice (5 min, 16 sec): <http://youtu.be/rgbAW5OscnM>



Image from Mohammed's Video

2. **Reflect.** Have students create a reflection piece, either written or drawn, that conveys the lessons they learned about the Iraqi refugees in the videos. The paper or artwork should express not only factual information, but also an analysis or synthesis of the information and an emotional reaction to the material.

## Optional Activity 3: Veteran's Book Project

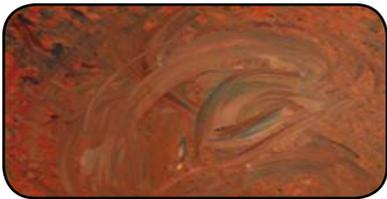


Image from Ian Sharpe's book, from the Veteran's Project Book library

1. **Prepare.** Explain to students that they will be reading personal accounts of war by veterans, and this will likely be an emotional experience. Tell them that if the content seems overwhelming at any point, they should take a break and think about something else, talk to a neighbor briefly, or select an alternative text.

2. **Read.** In a computer lab, or using student laptops, give students 20-30 minutes to read through one or more of the books written by Iraqi vets from the Veteran's Book Project ([veteransbookproject.com/the-books](http://veteransbookproject.com/the-books)). Students can select whichever book seems most interesting, or you can direct them to the following (which do not contain overly graphic content and are shorter in length):

**Drew Francis Cameron, Nathan Lewis, or Riley and Nancy Sharbonno.** For a slightly longer and more mature book, direct them to **Ian Sharpe**.

An alternate method is to read one book together as a class by displaying it on a screen in front of the room so students can see the images and read along. This is a good way to know exactly what students have read and address potential areas of sensitivity if there are concerns over secondary trauma.

3. **Debrief.** Have students write personal reflections for 10-15 minutes. Then, pair students and have them share some of what they read and the impact it had. Finally, bring the class together and discuss the similarities and differences between the experience of war as described through the voices of refugees and veterans. Talk students through any difficult content they read about and ask them to reflect on how they think refugees and veterans might best cope with having lived through such intense experiences. Ask them: "Whose responsibility is it to help these individuals heal and integrate (or reintegrate) back into society?"



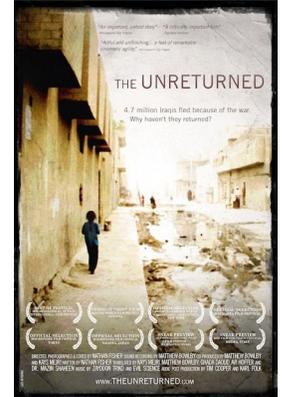
# Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit: Iraqi Voices

## Optional Activity 4: *The Unreturned* Documentary Film

1. **Prepare.** To have students learn more about the challenges still faced by Iraqi refugees around the world who cannot return home, order the film *The Unreturned* (available at [theunreturned.com](http://theunreturned.com)).

*The Unreturned* intercuts between the daily lives of refugees in Jordan and Syria and their recollections of life in Iraq before and after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. With an unflinching eye, powerfully candid dialogue, and a subtle touch of humor, the film captures scenes of daily life that are both personal and illustrative of the larger issues facing Iraq.

2. **Watch.** Watch the film together as a class.
3. **Discuss.** Have students answer the discussion questions in *Handout 2: Discussion Questions for The Unreturned*, either independently as a reflection paper, or in a classroom dialogue.



## Optional Activity 5: Humanitarian Crisis Essay

1. **Research.** Have students conduct independent research on the current humanitarian crisis and related human rights violations still occurring in Iraq. Encourage them to look to numerous sources from various categories of institutions, such as international human rights and humanitarian NGOs, Iraq-based groups, news outlets, government agencies, independent think tanks, etc. Remind them to select only credible sources and to try to find connection points in the material as they are reading through it.
2. **Write.** Have students write an essay based on their research findings. This essay can be of any length, but should be determined and assigned in advance, with the required minimum number of sources corresponding to the final length of the essay.

## Concluding Activity

1. **Reflect.** At the end of all activities you have chosen, cross off “Before” and write “After” in a brightly colored marker on the sheet where students had written their initial thoughts on the Iraq war and Iraqi refugees. Have students silently add to the poster with pens or markers that are colors other than black.
2. **Share.** When all students are finished, ask for students to volunteer to share with the class what they wrote, and why. Encourage a class discussion on big picture reflections on the unit as a whole.
3. **Take Action.** If students wish to take further action (perhaps for extra credit, if applicable), have them visit the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project’s website, either as a class or independently, at [reconciliationproject.org/get-involved](http://reconciliationproject.org/get-involved). The organization has several ways that students can get involved, including a program called “Letters for Peace,” in which they can exchange letters and photos with students in Iraq.



Photo credit: Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project



# Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit

## Handout 1: Discussion Questions for Refugee Videos

### Discussion Questions for Refugee Videos

**Directions:** On the reverse side, or on a separate piece of paper, write down answers to the following questions.

**Jamela** (Video is available at <http://youtu.be/uRjwy5RsPww>)

1. What are some of the personal and professional challenges Jamela faces?
2. How could the United States do a better job of utilizing the skills held by individuals with refugee status?
3. In our increasingly globalized world, what are reasonable expectations for skill transfer between countries?

**Naser** (Video is available at [https://youtu.be/1KLq57\\_KUPc](https://youtu.be/1KLq57_KUPc))

1. Naser remembers wanting to move back to Iraq, even with the threat of being killed, when he had no work or money in Jordan. We often prioritize civil and political rights in the United States (right to equality, peaceful assembly, a fair public hearing, etc). Are economic rights (right to food, housing, health care, etc) as important? Why or why not?
2. What are the misperceptions/truths that Naser describes - held by Americans about Iraqis and vice versa?

**Mohammed** (Video is available at <http://youtu.be/jGxsJyursXM>)

1. Upon finishing high school, Mohammed says he felt “the world was like a beautiful game.” What thoughts and emotions do you think he was experiencing at the time? Do you identify with this? Why or why not?
2. Create a timeline of the “series of disasters” in Iraq that Mohammed describes in the video.
3. What were some of the human rights violations experienced by Mohammed and his family?
4. Does Mohammed seem bitter after all that has happened? How do you think you would respond?

**Alice** (Video is available at <http://youtu.be/rgbAW5OscnM>)

1. What are some of the lasting effects of the war on Alice?
2. How does Alice feel about Iraq? Why do you think she wants to return one day?
3. How do you think you would feel if the U.S. was invaded, and you were granted refugee status by the country that invaded? Would it make a difference if the U.S. had previously been under a dictatorship?
4. What point does Alice make about freedom of speech? Does this seem controversial to you?
5. Alice says, “War and peace are in your hands.” Do you think Alice is accurate that Americans do not take enough time to understand how their vote and taxes directly affect individual lives around the world? Why or why not?



VOICES OF  
IRAQI  
REFUGEES

## Gr. 9-12 Mini-unit Handout 2: Discussion Questions for *The Unreturned*

### Discussion Questions for *The Unreturned* Documentary Film

1. How would you describe the Iraqi refugee experience after watching this film?
2. How do you think the Iraqi refugee crisis will impact Iraq's rebuilding efforts?
3. The Iraq War is the second longest in U.S. history, and the number of people who fled now make up the second largest refugee population in the world (the first is the war in neighboring Afghanistan - largely the same conflict - and the resulting refugee population). Have you read or heard stories about the Iraqi refugee crisis in the media? How do you think it is being covered?
4. The head of the UN refugee agency in Syria described their efforts to help Iraqi refugees as "a drop in the bucket." Why do you think the United Nations was unable to offer more assistance? Who do you think should be responsible for making sure Iraqi refugees are cared for?
5. How could the United States help Iraqi refugees? Would helping Iraqi refugees help the United States' long-term interests? Why or why not?
6. Did the film change your perception of Iraqis? Of refugees, in general? How?
7. What can each one of us do as individuals to address some of the concerns raised in the film?

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