



Amnesty International

# TIME TO FLEE

A human rights education resource on refugees and asylum. For use with young people aged 11-16 exploring Citizenship/PSE or Geography.

**HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION  
RESOURCE  
REFUGEES**

[www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This lesson is suitable for young people aged 11-16 years and will take approximately 1 hour. The lesson is particularly useful for Citizenship or Geography lessons in England and Northern Ireland, Personal and Social Education or Geography in Wales and Modern Studies or Geography / People and Place in Scotland.

### Aim

To help students understand why people become asylum seekers and the difficulties they face on arrival in another country.

### Resources required

- Teacher information sheet – Suada’s story
- A sample threatening note – create your own or download a sample from [www.amnesty.org.uk/our-rights](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/our-rights) To create your own, draw a skull and a coffin. Cut letters out of magazines and stick them on the page to make up phrases like: ‘Your days are numbered, scum. Signed: Friends of the Motherland.’
- Felt tip pens and large sheets of paper for each group

## ACTIVITY 1

## WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME REFUGEES?

**(15 minutes)**

Ask the students to write down their own definitions of

- Persecution
- Refugee
- Asylum seeker

Share, discuss and compare their definitions with the following:

### Refugees

The UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) – the Geneva Convention – defines refugees as people who seek asylum (safety) in another country and have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or their membership of a particular social group, which prevents them from returning to their home country.

### Asylum seeker

Someone who is seeking a place of safety in another country, who has applied for protection as a refugee and is waiting for the authorities to decide their status. Asylum seekers become accepted as refugees if the authorities in the receiving country decide their claim is valid and fits the international definition of a refugee.

### Persecution

To subject a person to prolonged hostility and ill-treatment because of who they are or what they think.

Ask the students how many refugees they think there are in the world.

(Approximately 10 million – more than double the population of Scotland.)

What percentage of these are in the UK? (2.8%)

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2007)

Most refugees have fled from one poor country to another and over half of all refugees are women and children. However, some refugees do end up in the UK. Here is an example of one girl’s experience (read Suada’s story, overleaf).

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## SUADA'S STORY

Between 1991 and 2001, conflict and human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia resulted in more than two million people fleeing Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. Suada, a girl from Bosnia, was 13 when she wrote this.

**It was a nice morning in May. I was in my house in my home village in Bosnia. I was about to have breakfast. I often heard people talking about the war going on around us, but I could not imagine it happening to me. That morning it did and it turned my life upside down.**

**First I heard the sound of shooting. Then I heard our neighbour crying. 'They're taking the men away!' she said. My father came out to see what was happening. I came out as well. I saw a lot of soldiers coming towards us, screaming and using indecent words. Soldiers, tanks, the smell of shooting everywhere.**

**I was afraid, as I have never been in my life. The soldiers made us children and our mothers gather under a tree. They were shooting over our heads and threatening that they were going to slaughter us. I saw them take my Daddy away together with other men. I was crying. Then a dirty soldier took my cousin Nermin and killed him in front of my eyes. I was too afraid even to cry. Many houses in the village were burned down – ours as well. We were taken to Trnopolje camp. We stayed there for two weeks. We thought we would never get out.**

**Two weeks later they let us go to our village. Most of the houses were burned down so we stayed in those that were less damaged. Two or three families stayed in a house. My Mummy and I lived with my aunt and her daughter.**

Suada, her mother and aunt made the dangerous journey through battlefields and crossed the border to Croatia. Life in the refugee camp where they had to stay was very hard. But for the children, after all the horrors they had seen, it seemed like heaven. Suada was eventually reunited with her father. Her family was then told they were going to the UK.

**I am very happy now being in London with my parents and my cousin and her parents. But I often think of my friends and my toys I left in Bosnia. Sometimes I have nightmares and think that the soldiers are coming to get me again. I wish that they could never frighten and kill children and their parents again.**

*(From Refugees – We left because we had to, Jill Rutter, Refugee Council, 1996)*

## ACTIVITY 2

### ROLE PLAY (35 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of five or six. Read the story below to the class imagining you are a member of the family explaining what happened.

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##### Setting the scene

Dad works as a journalist on the local newspaper. Mum is a mechanic. They have recently had a baby. They have a boy and a girl at school. Granny is in a wheelchair and house-bound since her stroke. Uncle Ali, who is very religious, was a political prisoner for a number of years. He walks with difficulty and a limp since prison. Mum and Dad have an old car. Dad has been a leading figure in the local journalists' trade union. The situation in the country has been changing quite dramatically recently.

##### Two months ago

A military coup took place. There was a lot of gunfire on the streets. Tanks and armoured cars were everywhere. A lot of people were killed and others arrested. A curfew has been imposed and everyone must now stay indoors after dark. The military rulers have taken over the TV and radio. It is very hard to know what is really going on.

##### A month ago

Dad was told that the new military rulers had arrested a number of people. Others, including religious figures, politicians, writers and trade unionists, have simply 'gone missing'. Nobody knows where they are.

##### A fortnight ago

An article appeared in a local newspaper (which supported the military coup). Underneath a drawing of a skull and coffin was a long list of people in the town that it said were enemies of the state. Both Dad's name and Uncle Ali's appeared on this list. It was signed: 'Friends of the Motherland'.

##### Last week

Soldiers came to the school looking for the dinner lady's husband. He was not there. So they took away the dinner lady and her children instead.

##### Four days ago

It was announced that several trade unions, including the journalists' union, had been banned.

##### Three days ago

A note (you pass out copies of the sample) was pushed through the door of the family home. It was made of letters cut out of newspapers. It said Dad was 'a spy and an enemy agent' and that 'his days are numbered'. There was a drawing of a coffin and a skull, a noose and a gun. It was signed 'Friends of the Motherland'.

##### Two days ago

Someone rang up Uncle Ali and told him he'd better get out, as some people were planning to set the house on fire.

##### Yesterday

Some children at the school said that snatch squads of soldiers had been searching the streets in a nearby neighbourhood and arresting people, including some members of Dad's trade union.

**Today**

There has been the sound of gunfire in the main square and trucks full of military have been arriving in front of the Town Hall. There are roadblocks stopping all cars. All trains are being searched.

The family meets together for a hurried discussion. What are they going to do? Dad says the family should flee, and seek political asylum abroad as refugees. It is under an hour to the border by car, but that journey would be very risky. By foot would mean a whole week's journey through the desert and then the high forest across dangerous country to the frontier.

Now they hear the military are starting to search their street. They have 10 minutes to make their minds up, get organised and get out.

**Decisions**

1. Who is to go?

Each group must decide who should go, and who should be left behind or sent off to relatives, or hidden somewhere. Should they take Mum, Dad, the baby, Uncle Ali, Granny, the children? Ask each group to feed back their decision and discuss.

2. What should they take with them?

Each group must make a list of the 10 most important things to take with them to get across the border to claim asylum as refugees.

When everyone is agreed, they write the list down or draw pictures of the chosen items on the sheet of paper.

**Discussion**

Groups report back on who they decided should go and what was on their lists. The suggestions are all written up on a board.

Tell the class that after a long, difficult and frightening journey, tired and hungry, they arrive at the border. The teacher now takes on the role of an Immigration Officer at Passport Control. Ask the students who they are and what they are doing here. When they say they are in danger and need a place of safety in your country, ask them to tell you what happened. Tell them their story sounds improbable and you suspect they are bogus. Do they have any proof for this story in their bags? Evidence could include Dad's union card, the anonymous death threat and the newspaper article. Ask them to unpack their bags. If any of them have listed a weapon among their 10 things, ask what they intend to do with it and ask if they are terrorists! Confiscate the weapons. If they have brought family photographs, confiscate them too, saying they may well prove useful in your investigations. If they cannot provide any proof for their story, send them back as 'failed asylum seekers'.

**ACTIVITY 3****PLENARY (5–10 minutes)**

Come out of role and discuss with the students:

How did they find the experience of being an asylum seeker? Has it changed their perception of asylum seekers in this country?

NB In this country, asylum seekers must make their claim as soon as they arrive at the border. If they do not, they are not entitled to any support. If they do claim asylum immediately, their case will not be assessed on arrival, as it was in the exercise, but it will be assessed over a longer period of time using similar criteria. During this time, asylum seekers may be detained to prevent them from going into hiding. If their claim for asylum fails, they will be sent back to their country, or if they can't go back they stay in the UK but are not allowed to work and most government support is withdrawn. See [www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/asylum) for more information.