

Can I come in?

Refugee, go home! He would if he could.

Complexity	Level 3
Group size	6 - 20
Time	60 minutes
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration • Discrimination and Intolerance • Peace and Violence
Overview	<p>This is a role-play about a group of refugees trying to escape to another country. It addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plight of refugees • The social and economic arguments for giving and denying asylum
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to seek asylum in other countries • The right of non-refoulement (the right not to be returned to their country where they can risk persecution or death) • Freedom from discrimination
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop knowledge and understanding about refugees and their rights • To practise skills to present arguments and make judgements • To promote solidarity with people who are suddenly forced to flee their homes.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role cards • Flipchart (optional) • Chalk and or furniture to create the border crossing post • Pens and paper for the observers to make notes
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy the role cards. Each immigration officer, refugee and observer will need their own card. • Set the scene for the role-play. For example, draw a line on the floor to represent a border or arrange furniture to make a physical frontier with a gap for the check post. Use a table to serve as a counter in the border control office and, if you wish to, make notices about entry and customs regulations.

Instructions

1. Explain that this is a role-play about a group of refugees fleeing their homeland who wish to enter another country in search of safety.
2. Start with a brainstorm to find out what people know about refugees. Write the points on a large sheet of paper or flipchart paper to refer to in the discussion later.
3. Show people the set-up in the room and read out the following: "It is a dark, cold and wet night on the border between X and Y. A large number of refugees have arrived, fleeing from the war in X. They want to cross into Y. They are hungry, tired and cold. Some have a little money and only a few have identification documents or passports. The border officials from country Y have different points of view – some want to allow the refugees to cross, but others don't. The refugees are desperate, and use several arguments to try to persuade the border officials."



Migration



Discrimination and Intolerance



Peace and Violence



Level 3



6 - 20



60 minutes



4. Divide the participants into equal groups: one group to represent the refugees from country X, the second group to represent the border officials in country Y, and the third group to be observers.
5. Tell the “refugees” and the “border officials” to work out a role for each person and what their arguments will be. Distribute the role cards and give them fifteen minutes to prepare.
6. Start the role-play. Use your own judgement about when to stop, but about ten minutes should be long enough.
7. Give the observers five minutes to prepare their feedback; then start the debriefing and evaluation.



Debriefing and Evaluation

Start by asking the observers to give general feedback on the role-play. Then get comments from the players about how it felt to be a refugee or a border official, and then move on to a general discussion about the issues and what participants learnt.

- How fair was the treatment of the refugees?
- Refugees have a right to protection under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Were the refugees given their right to protection? Why/why not?
- Should a country have the right to turn refugees away? When? For what reasons?
- Would you turn someone away if you were a border official? What if you knew they faced death in their own country?
- What sorts of problems do refugees face once inside your country? Which of their human rights are being violated?
- What should be done to solve some of the problems facing refugees once inside your country?
- Are there any Internally Displaced Persons in your country? Or in a neighbouring country?
- What can and should be done to stop people becoming refugees in the first place?



Tips for the facilitator

Use the brainstorm to ascertain how much people already know about why there are refugees, what causes people to flee their homeland, where they come from and the countries that they go to. This will help you decide how to guide the debriefing and evaluation, and what additional information you may need to provide at that stage.

Think about what to do if someone in the group is a refugee. Depending on how they came, you could build on their experience and use them as a resource person. On the other hand, it might be too traumatic.

The three groups do not have to be equal. You may, for instance, choose to have only three or four observers and let the rest of the group be active role-players.

The scene is set on a dark, cold and wet night. So why not turn off the lights and open the windows when you do the role-play? If it is more appropriate to your situation, you can set the scene as the arrival of a group in a small, leaky boat. To add to the refugees’ confusion, you could make the signs and notices at the border in a foreign (or invented) language. Remember to brief the border officials about what the signs say!



Variations

Run the role play a second time, but let border officials and the refugees swap roles. The observers should now have the additional task of noting any differences between the first and the second role-plays, especially those that resulted in a higher protection of the refugees’ rights.

Make a follow-on role-play involving an official team sent by UNHCR to help the refugees from country X.

Suggestions for follow-up

Find out more about refugees in your country, especially about the realities of their daily lives. Participants could contact a local refugee association and interview workers, volunteers and refugees.

Look at www.newtimes.dk where you can read stories written (in English) by asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark. Pick an article and discuss your response.

The British Red Cross has information and activities about refugees that is produced in their Positive Images project: www.redcross.org.uk.

A school class may like to carry on with the topic by researching information about the role of the UNHCR (<http://www.unhcr.ch>) and then writing an “official report” including the following points:

- Those arguments which persuaded the border officials to let the refugees in
- Any inappropriate behaviour by the border officials
- Recommendations for what country Y should do to protect the rights of the refugees.

Discuss whether or not the Geneva Convention meets the needs of the present and if it needs updating. For instance, in many countries to get refugee status asylum seekers have to prove that they are being persecuted individually; it is not enough to be a member of a group that is being persecuted or to come from a war zone. Similarly, climate refugees are not covered by the Convention.

If you want to try an activity that follows the events after refugees have crossed over the border and are applying for asylum, you can run the activity “Language barrier”, on page 203. You could also make a collage or posters to illustrate the difficulties refugees face; see “Playing with pictures” on page 247.

Ideas for action

Make contact with a local or national organisation that works for refugees living in your country and see what you can do to support them. For example, many are lonely and find it hard to integrate; they may appreciate some new friends or assistance with learning the language.

Children who come alone without a family member to seek asylum are especially vulnerable. The group could find out what happens to these unaccompanied minors in their country and how they could support them. Ideas include being a friend, helping with learning the language and education, playing football and going on outings together.

Invite an NGO working with refugees or even a refugee to your school or club to learn more about how refugees get to your country, the asylum process and about their life now.

The website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides a lot of information, flyers and videos for organising a workshop about refugees in your organisation or school: <http://www.unhcr.org>.

Further Information

Refugees are people who have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state – indeed it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death – or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights.

KEY DATE



20 June
World Refugee Day



Definitions and statistics about refugees and migrants can be found in the Migration section of Chapter 5.



Handouts

Refugees' role card

Refugees' arguments and options

You should prepare your arguments and tactics; it is up to you to decide whether to put your argument as a group or whether each member, individually, takes responsibility for putting individual arguments.

You can use these arguments and any others you can think of:

- It is our legal right to seek asylum.
- Our children are hungry; you have a moral responsibility to help us.
- I will be killed if we go back.
- I have no money.
- I haven't anywhere else to go.
- I was a doctor / nurse / engineer in my hometown.
- I only want shelter until it is safe to return.
- Other refugees have been allowed into your country.
- Where are we? The smugglers agreed to deliver us to country Z.
- I will try to bribe the officials to let me enter.

Before the role play, think about the following options:

- Are you going to apply to come in as a group, or individually?
- Will you split up if the border officials ask you to?
- What will you do if they try to send you back? Will you agree to go home? Will you ask them to let you through so that you can get to county Z?
- Do any of you have travel documents? Are they genuine or are they false?

You are to role-play a mixed group of refugees, so in your preparations each person should decide their identity: their age, gender, family relationships, profession, wealth, religion and any possessions they have with them.

Observers' role card

Your job is to observe the role-play. At the end of the role-play you will be asked to give general feedback. Choose a member to be your representative.

As you watch you should, amongst other things, be aware of:

- The different roles played by both the refugees and border officials.
- The arguments they use and how they present them.
- Look out for any infringements of human rights.

You have to decide how you are going to take note of everything. For example, you may consider dividing into two sub-groups so that one group observes the border officials and the other the refugees.

Border officials' role card

Border officials' arguments and options

You should prepare your arguments and tactics; it is up to you to decide whether to put your argument as a group or whether each member, individually, takes responsibility for putting individual arguments.

You can use these arguments and any others you can think of:

- They are desperate: we can't send them back.
- If we send them back we will be morally responsible if they are arrested, tortured or killed.
- We have legal obligations to accept refugees.
- They have no money, and will need state support. Our country cannot afford that.
- Do they have any travel documents or means of identification? Are these genuine or false?
- Do they look like genuine refugees? Maybe some are just here to look for a better standard of living?
- Our country is a military and business partner of country X. We can't be seen to be protecting them.
- Maybe they have skills that we need?
- There are enough refugees in our country. We need to take care of our own people. They should go to the richer countries.
- We could demand that they pay us a bribe to let them in.
- If we let them in, others will also demand entry.
- They don't speak our language, they have a different religion and they eat different food; they won't integrate.
- There may be terrorists or war criminals hiding among them

Before the role-play, think about the following options:

- Will you let all of the refugees across the border?
- Will you let some of them across the border?
- Will you split them up by age, profession, wealth...?
- Will you do something else instead?

Notes

This activity was adapted from *First Steps: A Manual for starting human rights education*, Amnesty International, London, 1997.

The quote, "Refugee go home! He would if he could" was a slogan used in an UN-HCR campaign.