



Understanding the Syrian Crisis through Virtual Reality

A Global Nomads Group Curriculum

Learn about the Syrian Refugee Crisis and take action
with the Students Rebuild Healing Classrooms Challenge
and *Clouds Over Sidra*, a virtual reality film



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The *Clouds Over Sidra* virtual reality film was produced by Chris Milk and
Gabo Arora for the UN Millennium Campaign

Program Outcomes and Structure

How to Use the Curriculum, Virtual Reality Experience, and Webcast in Your Class

Student Learning Outcomes

This program is designed to promote the following:

1. **Empathy:** Students will have the capacity to understand perspectives, feelings, and experiences of others, including those from different cultural, national, or religious backgrounds.
2. **Critical Thinking:** Students will be able to synthesize and reflect upon their learning, including consideration of multiple sources or perspectives.
3. **Global Awareness:** Students will deepen their understanding of the Syrian conflict and more broadly, challenges faced by refugees and others forced to leave their homes.

What is in this program and curriculum?

- This program is structured around three 50-minute class activities. You may condense them to take place over one day, or do them over 3 days. The virtual reality experience is part of the second activity.
- Each activity includes an educator lesson plan, marked by a green bar along the border, and a student worksheet.
- Print out all of the student worksheets for your class (pages 5, 6, 9, and 12)

What is Virtual Reality?

Instead of watching a film on a screen, virtual reality (VR) brings participants inside of a 3D world or experience. Using a headset like Google Cardboard or Oculus, viewers can see the VR environment all around them.

Global Nomads Group (GNG) uses VR to build empathy among the world's youth. When young people feel connected to an individual or place, they are more likely to be inspired to learn more and/or take action.

Classroom Activities and Preparation

Activity	Activity Overview	Time	Page #	To Prepare
1. Understanding the Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis	Students will deepen their background knowledge of the ongoing Syrian conflict and refugee crisis, in preparation for the virtual reality experience.	50 minutes	3-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Print pages 2, 5, and 6 for students.• Set up computer to watch intro videos.
2. Experiencing One Syrian Story through Virtual Reality	Students will participate in a virtual reality experience, <i>Clouds Over Sidra</i> , which shares the story of one Syrian refugee. Students will create an outline of a VR of their own life.	50 minutes (or more)	7-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up at least 5 VR kits.• Print page 9 for students.• Set up 2 classroom stations.
3. Reflect and Take Action	Students will analyze the causes and effects of a conflict they saw illustrated in <i>Clouds Over Sidra</i> . They will consider how they can contribute to a solution to this conflict or the broader refugee crisis.	50 minutes	10-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Print page 12 for students.
4. Live Webcast: The Syrian Crisis (Optional)	Watch the Healing Classrooms Challenge live webcast between Syrian and American students on Thursday, April 21, 2016 or view the recording afterwards.	60 minutes	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch the webcast at: https://plus.google.com/b/117923513554881524053/events/cv4d0n7slff3nv115c3uhdl80oc• Set up computer with Internet to watch the webcast/recording.• Go to the Students Rebuild website for additional activities.

Understanding the Syrian Crisis through Virtual Reality

How can we, as young people, contribute towards solutions to the Syrian Crisis

Print for
Students!

What is the Syrian Crisis? Why are you doing this program?

More than 11 million Syrians have left their homes due to the civil war that started in 2011. These 11 million are among the 60 million refugees and internally displaced people around the globe right now. This means one out of every 122 people in the world has left his or her home due to violence, war, or persecution. Children and youth are particularly vulnerable during conflict: they lose safety, shelter, and access to education. Millions of children—still living within Syria or those who have fled—are not attending school. It is important to understand the broad scope of this issue, but the gravity of these statistics can also overshadow individual stories and make us feel as if the situation is hopeless.

In this program, we'll investigate the human impact of the Syrian crisis and what it means to be a refugee. We'll use class activities, virtual reality, and (optionally) a webcast to build our own awareness. Through this, we'll determine how we can best take action to change a part of the situation affecting Syrians – and refugees around the world.

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Class Activity	Time	Page #
1. Understanding the Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis	50 minutes	3-6
2. Experiencing One Syrian Story through Virtual Reality	50 minutes (or more)	7-9
3. Reflect and Take Action	50 minutes	10-13
4. Healing Classrooms Challenge Webcast: The Syrian Crisis (Optional)	60 minutes	14

Activity #1: Understanding the Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis

Overview Students will deepen their background knowledge of the ongoing Syrian conflict and refugee crisis in preparation for the virtual reality experience.

Time 50 minutes

Materials Computer, Internet access, projector screen, whiteboard, dry erase markers

Learning Objective **Critical Thinking:** Students will be able to synthesize and reflect upon their learning, including consideration of multiple sources or perspectives.
Global Awareness: Students will deepen their understanding of the Syrian conflict and more broadly, challenges faced by refugees and others forced to leave their homes.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. What does it mean to be a refugee? (15 minutes)

- As a warm-up, discuss as a class: What are some reasons that you and your family might move or leave your home? Examples include job loss, new job, or living closer to family.
- Ask students to free write/journal on their own for 2 minutes: What would force you or your family to leave your home (e.g. natural disaster, violence, gentrification, lack of resources)?
- Have students share answers with the group and chart the main ideas on the board/digitally.
- As a class, review the key definitions on page 5 (refugee, IDPs, Asylum Seekers, Migrants).

2. Assess Knowledge of Syrian Crisis (5 minutes):

Have the students brainstorm as a class and write their responses on the board/digitally.

- Who are Syrian refugees? Why have they left their homes?
- What is the Syrian war about? Who is involved?

3. Understanding the Syrian War and Refugee Crisis (15 minutes)

As a class, investigate the history and causes of the conflict. Use the following resources; additional resources are on pages 15:

Background on the Syrian War	http://www.syriadeeply.org/background/basics/ (Syria Deeply) You can also use this site to explore the major players and current news.
Refugee Crisis	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w&feature=youtu.be (Kurzgesagt, UNHCR)
Impact of War	http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/12/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-after-four-years-map.html (NY Times) Analyze the charts/images.
Syrian Youth Voices (Optional)	http://studentsrebuild.org/blogs/international-rescue-committee and https://www.youtube.com/StudentsRebuild

4. **Mapping the Impact of the Crisis (15 minutes)**

Divide the class into small groups to fill out the “Mapping the Human Impact” graphic organizer on page 6. Students should use what they learned from the resources above. They should analyze the impact of the war on education, health and environment, and economics for Syrians and host countries.

If time allows, have each group present their findings for one part of the graphic organizer.

Discuss:

- What surprised you from this activity?
- What questions do you have now about refugees or the Syrian crisis?

Activity #1:

Understanding the Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis

More than 60 million people are displaced around the world, due to violence, war, or persecution. That statistic can be overwhelming, and distract us from the individual stories of people who leave their homes and the reasons they become refugees. In this activity, we'll investigate what it means to be a refugee, migrant, or internally displaced person (IDP).

Journal/Write

What are some reasons that you and your family might move or leave your home?

What would force you or your family to leave your home?

Key Vocabulary: Who is a Refugee?

Refugees **Refugees** are people who leave their countries to seek safety in another country, because of violence from war or conflict, or fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political views, or membership in a social group. Refugees have rights under international law, and cannot be forced to return to their country.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) **IDPs** are people who are forced to leave their homes, but move within their country. This could be because of war, conflict, or natural disasters.

Asylum Seeker **Asylum seekers** are people who have left their country, arrive in another country, and apply to stay because of danger at home. Governments and international organizations evaluate their applications, to see if they fit the criteria to be refugees. If approved, asylum seekers become registered refugees and are allowed to stay in the new country.

Migrants **Migrants** are people who immigrate to another country for reasons such as employment or education. They do not face a direct threat of persecution or violence, and are thus not protected by the same international laws as refugees.

Journal/Write

Who are Syrian Refugees? Why have they left their homes?

With your class, use the following resources to learn about the Syrian war and refugee crisis:

Background on the Syrian War	http://www.syriadeeply.org/background/basics/ (Syria Deeply) You can also use this site to explore the major players and current news.
Refugee Crisis	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w (Kurzgesagt, UNHCR)
Impact of War	http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/12/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-after-four-years-map.html (NY Times). Analyze the charts/images.
Syrian Youth Voices (Optional)	http://studentsrebuild.org/blogs/international-rescue-committee and https://www.youtube.com/StudentsRebuild

Despite local and international efforts, the situation in Syria has continued to worsen since 2011. In order to understand the conflict, we must explore: How has the war affected the humanitarian situation in and outside Syria?

Instructions:

Working in small groups, use what you learned to fill out the chart below. Think about:

- How has the Syrian war affected Syrians inside and outside the country?
- How has it affected citizens of host countries?
- What is the impact of war and displacement on education, healthcare, the environment, and economics?

Mapping the Human Impact of the Syrian Crisis

Look for and Discuss	Education	Health and Environment	Economics
Syrian people who remain in Syria: How are children and their families affected?			
Syrian people who leave Syria: How are children and their families affected?			
Host countries: How has the crisis affected countries hosting Syrian refugees?			

Activity #2: Experience One Syrian Story through Virtual Reality

Overview Students will participate in a virtual reality experience, *Clouds Over Sidra*, which shares the story of one Syrian refugee. Students will create an outline of a VR of their daily life, to explore the line between storytelling and reality.

Time 50 minutes

Materials At least 5 virtual reality toolkits (see below)
Optional materials for “Your Life in VR” (butcher paper, computer stations, whiteboard)

Before students are present, set up the VR station and VR kits!

Learning Objective **Empathy:** Students will have the capacity to understand perspectives, feelings, and experiences of others, including those from different cultural, national, or religious backgrounds.
Global Awareness: Students will deepen their understanding of the Syrian conflict and more broadly, challenges faced by refugees and others forced to leave their homes.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. **Introduce Classroom Stations: *Clouds Over Sidra* Virtual Reality” and “Your Life in VR” (10 min.)**

Share that students will experience a virtual reality film called *Clouds Over Sidra*, which shows the life of a young Syrian girl in a refugee camp in Jordan. Brainstorm as a class:

- What do you expect to see in the virtual reality?
- What do you think Sidra’s life will be like?

2. ***Clouds Over Sidra* Virtual Reality (30 minutes, simultaneously with “Your Own VR”)**

Introduce students to VR, the “VR kit,” and VR guidelines.

Guide small groups of students through this station, trying to have them start and complete the VR at the same time. If you have 5 VR kits, you can have 5 students in this station at a time.

What is VR?	Instead of watching a film on screen, virtual reality (VR) brings participants inside a 3D world (or experience). Using a headset like Google Cardboard, viewers see the VR environment all around them. VR allows us to be immersed in situations that we otherwise may not ever experience – like traveling to a far-away place or meeting a new friend from across the world. It can be a tool that helps us build empathy and understanding for others, while opening our eyes, classrooms, and minds.
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VR Toolkit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>A Smart Phone:</i> iPhone: Requires iOS 8.0 or later. Compatible with iPhone 5s or later. iPad: iPad Air, iPad mini 2 or later, iPad Pro Android: 4.4 and up 2. <i>VRSE App (http://vrse.com/)</i> Download VRSE from the App store or Google Store. Then, connect to wireless and download the “Clouds Over Sidra” VR experience. We recommend using Wi-Fi instead of cellular data to save on costs. 3. <i>VR Headset: Google Cardboard</i> In order to experience the VR fully, you will need to put your smart phone into a VR Headset. Google Cardboard is an inexpensive way to view VR experiences. Other headsets include: Samsung Gear VR, and Mattel ViewMaster. 4. <i>Headphones</i> Plug headphones into your smart phone before you begin – you must have sound! If possible, use noise-cancelling headphones to be fully immersed in the experience.
VR Guidelines for Your Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Privacy:</i> Going through a VR experience is personal and people may respond differently. Make sure VR participants have a space separate from the larger group. • <i>Quiet:</i> Keep surrounding areas quiet to minimize distractions for students. • <i>360 Motion:</i> VR experiences put you at the center of an environment or situation. This means that you must have the ability to turn your body all the way around. Sitting in swivel chairs or standing is the best way to experience VR.

3. Your Life in VR (30 minutes, simultaneously with Virtual Reality)

At this station, students will draw, write, or digitally create an outline of 5 scenes, for an imagined VR that shows a day in his or her life. You can provide computer stations, butcher paper, and whiteboards - or just use the worksheet.

Post these guiding questions:

- If you could make a VR about a day in your life, what 5 scenes would you show?
- What things make you proud? What challenges do you face? How can you show them both?
- What would be left out? What is hard to show?

4. Reflection (5 minutes)

Discuss as a class:

- How was Sidra’s life similar or different to what you expected?
- What similarities do you see between yourself and Sidra?
- What did the VR leave out of Sidra’s story? How does seeing only these few scenes of her life change the way you think about her and/or the Syrian crisis?

Activity #2: Experience One Syrian Story through Virtual Reality

Today, you will learn about the life of one Syrian girl in a refugee camp in Jordan through a virtual reality film called Clouds Over Sidra.

Journal: BEFORE the VR

What did you expect to see in the virtual reality?

What do you think Sidra's life will be like?

Reflect: AFTER the VR

How did the virtual reality compare to your expectations?

What similarities do you see between yourself and Sidra?

What was not show in Sidra's Story?

Your Life in VR

What would a day in your life look like, if it were VR?

- If you could make a VR about a day in your life, what 5 scenes would you show?
- What things make you proud? What challenges do you face? How can you show both?
- What would be left out? What is hard to show?

Scene 1

Draw

Caption

Scene 2

Draw

Caption

Scene 3

Draw

Caption

Scene 4

Draw

Caption

Scene 5

Draw

Caption

Activity #3: Reflect and Take Action

Overview Students will analyze the causes/effects of a conflict they saw in *Clouds Over Sidra*. They will consider how they can contribute to a solution to this conflict or the broader refugee crisis.

Time 50 minutes

Materials Whiteboard/flipchart, (optional) Students Rebuild Challenge materials

Learning Objective Empathy: Students will have the capacity to understand perspectives, feelings, and experiences of others, including those from different cultural, national, or religious backgrounds.

Critical Thinking: Students will be able to synthesize and reflect upon their learning, including consideration of multiple sources or perspectives.

Global Awareness: Students will deepen their understanding of the Syrian conflict and more broadly, challenges faced by refugees and others forced to leave their homes.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. What conflicts did you see in *Clouds Over Sidra*? (10 minutes)

Using the guiding questions, explore what conflicts were shown in the virtual reality.

- What conflicts did Sidra face? Her family? The other people in Za'atari?
- What conflicts had she already overcome to get where she is?

Pick one conflict to analyze as a group.

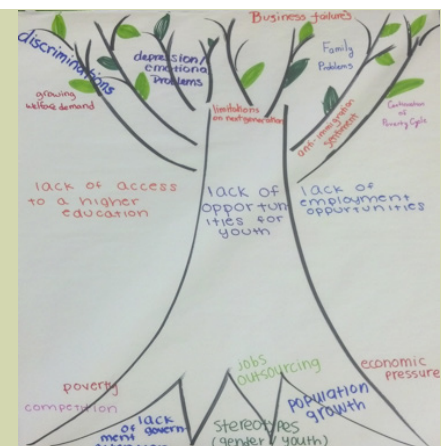
2. Map Your Problem with a “Conflict Tree” (20 minutes)

Introduce the Conflict Tree as a tool to analyze the conflict that students selected. As a group, help them map the conflict's core problem, causes and effects.

Conflict Tree Components:

Every conflict or problem has roots (causes) and branches (effects), like a tree. Understanding causes and effects helps us identify solutions.

1. Trunk (Core problem): The main issue. It's the largest visible piece of the tree, but is only one piece of the conflict, as it comes from many roots.
2. Roots (Causes): Underlying reasons for the problem. Often hard to see, although they keep the conflict alive.
3. Branches (Effects): Consequences or new conflicts that come from the core problem.



2. **Reflect and Take Action (20 minutes)**

Reflect on your conflict tree as a group and consider how you could contribute to a solution.

Discuss:

- How would you begin to address the conflict: at the roots, trunk, or branches?
- How have people dealt with similar conflicts in the past?
- How can different people/groups take on various roles to address this conflict? What role can you play?

Teachers may guide students toward the Students Rebuild Healing Classrooms Challenge as a way to take action (see Additional Resources on page 15).

Activity #3: Reflect and Take Action

Every conflict or problem has roots (causes) and branches (effects), like a tree. Understanding these causes and effects helps us to identify solutions and our role in the problem.

As a group, pick one conflict that you saw in *Clouds Over Sidra*. Then, map its causes and effects on the conflict tree on the next page.

Remember to include:

1. Trunk (Core Problem)
2. Roots (Causes)
3. Branches (Effects)

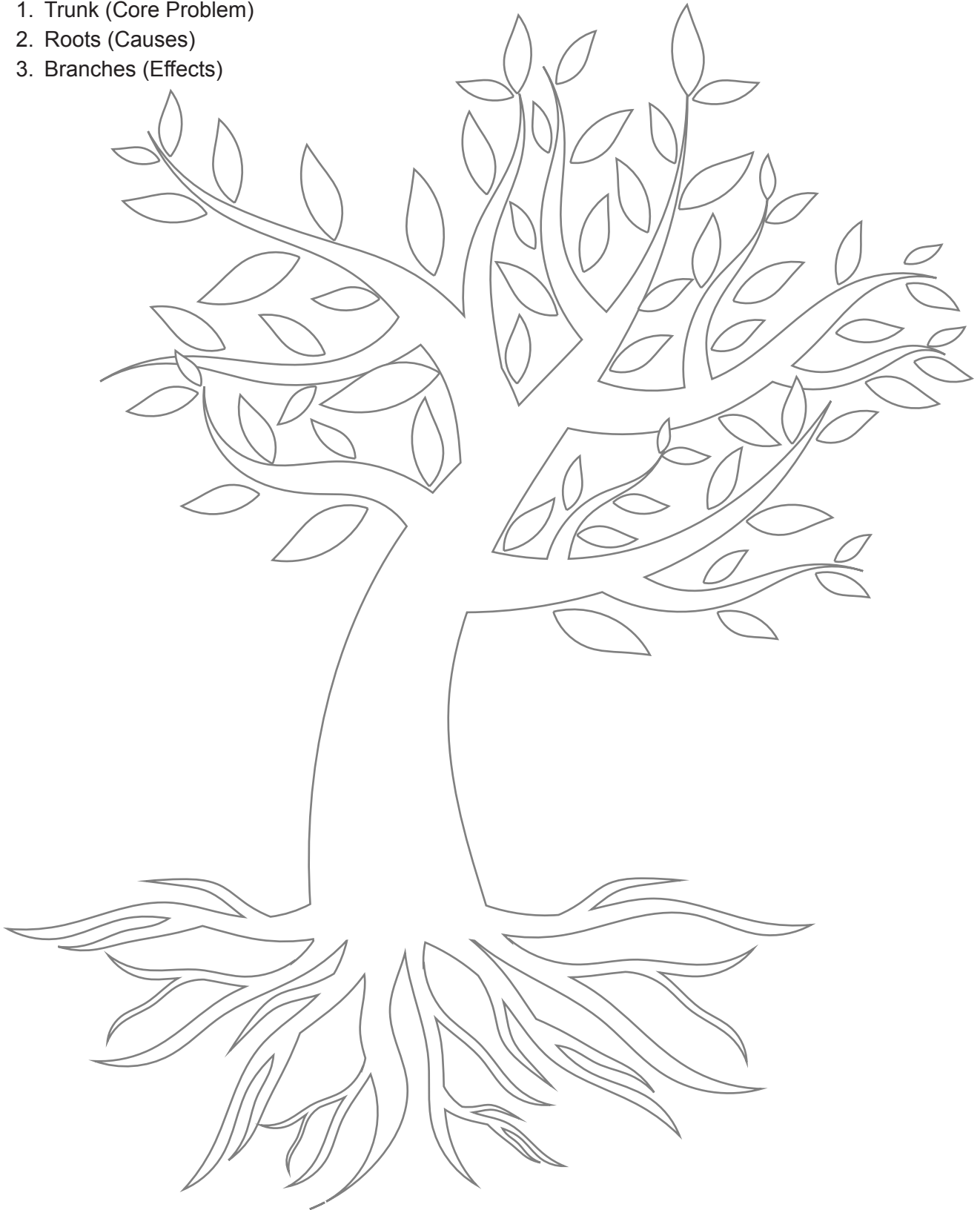
Discuss with your class:

How would you begin to address the conflict: at the roots, trunk, or branches?

How can different people or groups take on different roles to address this conflict? What roles can you play?

Remember to include:

1. Trunk (Core Problem)
2. Roots (Causes)
3. Branches (Effects)



Additional Resources

What is the Syrian Crisis? Why are you doing this program?

Since a civil war erupted in March 2011, nearly 11 million Syrians have fled their homes. Four million of them have sought refuge in neighboring countries of Lebanon, Northern Iraq, Jordan and Turkey—and the majority of these displaced Syrians are children. Devastated families have lost loved ones, homes and jobs. But with the right support, children affected by conflict can develop the coping skills they need to bounce back and move forward with their lives. There's a simple yet powerful way to help make this difference—the Students Rebuild Healing Classrooms Challenge, a partnership between the Bezos Family Foundation, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Global Nomads Group.

Young people around the world can assist their Syrian peers by making pinwheels for the Students Rebuild Healing Classrooms Challenge. How does it work? For every pinwheel Students Rebuild receives, the Bezos Family Foundation will donate \$2—up to \$400,000—to the International Rescue Committee's Healing Classrooms program. Healing Classrooms trains teachers in special techniques to engage conflict-affected children with social-emotional learning opportunities and to create secure, nurturing learning environments.

Children affected by crisis—whether war or natural disaster—need help restoring a sense of normalcy and safety in their lives. One of the best ways to do this is to reintroduce the familiar routine of school, where teachers can provide structure and stability, and can work with children to heal. IRC partners with schools in crisis zones to create Healing Classrooms—paired with support from parents and the community—so children can recover, grow, develop and learn.

We invite you to take the Healing Classrooms Challenge! Use your creativity and empathy to make pinwheels as you learn about the roots of conflict and discover stories of resilience. With every pinwheel you make for the Challenge, you'll take a stand for children living in conflict and improve their well-being and learning. Even though the Syrian struggle seems overwhelming, we can take action and see change for children. Join us at <http://www.studentsrebuild.org/syria>

Why Pinwheels:

Pinwheels are simple, fun toys found all over the world. They represent the innocence of childhood, play, delight and a sense of being carefree. They are driven by wind, an incredibly powerful force. Several organizations have adopted the pinwheel as a symbol for peace, and we believe that this popular, functional device is a wonderful way to send wishes of joy, freedom and a happy childhood to youth living amid conflict. Join us and make pinwheels for healing. You can help Syrian youth gain the peace and security that all children deserve. To get started making your pinwheels visit: <http://www.studentsrebuild.org/find-challenge/syria-challenge/about-challenge/get-started>

Live Webcast

During Students Rebuild Challenges, we host free, live webcasts to help classrooms around the world connect, learn and get inspired to take action! Webcasts are free special events, live-streamed through the internet. All you need to participate is an internet connection! You can even participate by sending questions in real time through a chat feature. Be sure to join our Healing Classrooms Challenge webcast with Syrian and American students and educators on Thursday, April 21, 2016. Access the webcast at: <https://plus.google.com/b/117923513554881524053/events/cv4d0n7slff3nv115c3uhdl80oc>

Learning Resources on the Syrian War and Refugee Crisis

Articles on the Syrian War, History, and Impact:

- “Syria: The Story of Conflict.” BBC. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868> or
- “Syria’s Imminent Food and Water Crisis.” Chatham House. www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/14959
- “World Report 2015: Syria.” Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/syria>
- “Toxic Footprint of Syria’s War.” Peace Direct. <http://www.insightonconflict.org/2014/07/toxic-footprint-syrias-war/>
- “Syria: A Brief History.” Wall Street Journal. <http://www.wsj.com/video/syria-a-brief-history/2D7BB798-53DD-4066-9D88-51DF668464A1.html>
- “Syria Demographics Profile 2014.” Index Mundi. http://www.indexmundi.com/syria/demographics_profile.html

The Syrian Refugee Crisis:

- “European Refugee Crisis Explained.” Kurzgesagt/UNHCR. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w>
- “UNHCR: More than 4 million Syrians are refugees.” Al Jazeera. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/7/9/unhcr-syrian-refugees-cross-four-million-mark.html>
- “Syria Refugee Crisis in Numbers.” Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/07/syria-refugee-crisis-150709120935092.html>
- “Syria’s Child Refugees,” The Guardian. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WARQID-U-Jg>

Timelines/Maps:

- “Syria’s Education Crisis, in 3 Charts.” Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/03/05/syrias-education-crisis-in-three-charts/>
- “Syria After Four Years of Mayhem.” NY Times. www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/03/12/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-after-four-years-map.html
- “Syria Needs Analysis Project.” ACAPS. www.mapaction.org/component/mapcat/download/2960.html?fmt=pdf

The Syrian War’s Effect on Children:

- “Education of Syrian Refugee Children: Managing the Crisis in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.” RAND Corporation. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR859/RAND_RR859.pdf
- “The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria’s education system on the country’s future.” Save the Children UK. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/cost-war>
- “Futures Under Threat: The impact of the education crisis on Syria’s children.” Save the Children UK. http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/FUTURES_UNDER_THREAT.PDF
- “The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children.” Migration Policy Institute. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/educational-and-mental-health-needs-syrian-refugee-children>