

# Thinking about the refugee experience

## Classroom activities for Refugee Week

AUSTCARE Refugee Week aims to develop awareness of refugee issues and of the contribution refugees make to our society, and to offer all Australians the chance to make a difference. The following activities have been collated to assist teachers in providing activities for all students during or in the lead up to Refugee Week.

The activities are grouped under eight focus areas: Sharing knowledge, Definitions and facts, Reasons and choices, Understanding the experience, Rights and responsibilities, Taking action, History and Politics and The media. A number of questions are listed for each focus, and then suggested activities and resources are given. Each activity is also categorised according to Williams' Taxonomy. This taxonomy consists of eight skills levels, which describe the type of thinking, encouraged by the activity. The first four levels are cognitive in nature and the last four levels are affective in nature. The four cognitive thinking skills are *Fluency*, *Flexibility*, *Originality* and *Elaboration* and the four affective skills are *Risk-Taking*, *Complexity*, *Curiosity* and *Imagination*. Students should have the opportunity to engage in activities across the range of thinking skills.

Some activities may not be suitable for particular refugee students. Teachers should be aware of the backgrounds and experiences of their students and select or adapt activities carefully. Students should make the choice about whether to share their experiences with the rest of the class or not.

Some activities have been adapted or taken from the references listed below. These references are all available from the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, 150 Palmerston Street, Carlton, telephone: (03) 9349 2400. Many of these references also contain resource material for use in a range of activities, such as refugee stories and facts and figures.

### References

- Department of Education, Employment and Training (2000) *Not a Matter of Choice* DEET, Victoria
- (1998) *Forging New Identities: Young Refugee and Minority Students Tell their Stories* Minority Rights Group International, London
- Healey, J. (ed.) (2000) *Refugees and Illegal Immigrants Issues in Society Volume 128* Spinney Press, Balmain, NSW
- Klippel, F (1984) *Keep Talking* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- McGrath, Dr. H., and Edwards, H. (1999) *Creative Kaleidoscope* Horwitz Martin, St Leonards, NSW
- (1986) *Photolanguage* Catholic Education Office, Sydney
- Rutter, J. (1992) *Refugees A Resource Book for 8-13 Year Olds* Refugee Council, London
- Rutter, J. (1991) *Refugees We Left Because We Had To An Educational Book for 14-18 Year Olds* Refugee Council, London
- Trist, S. (1998) *Australian Issues Collection Refugees* McGraw-Hill Roseville, NSW
- Wajnryb, R. (1991) *Other Voices A Cross-Cultural Communication Workbook* Thomas Nelson, South Melbourne

### Web-based resources

- <http://www.austcare.org.au>
- <http://www.justiceforrefugees.org>
- <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/youthchallenge/introduction.html>
- [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/info\\_for\\_teachers/index.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_teachers/index.html)
- <http://www.abc.net.au/civics/oneworld/convention/>
- <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/index.html>

## Sharing knowledge

What do you already know about refugees and the refugee experience?

What do you think is important for others to know?

Activity	Thinking skill
Students brainstorm what they know about the refugee experience and represent their knowledge on slips of paper which can then be bundled or classified in different ways, such as the source of the information, or the stages in a refugee's experience.	Fluency
Students brainstorm words and concepts they associate with the word <i>refugee</i> . They create displays or concept maps which can be added to as their knowledge develops (Rutter 1991 p 9).	Fluency
Students list all the people they can think of who are refugees. These may be people they know personally or famous people. <i>Not a Matter of Choice</i> and <i>Australian Issues Collection</i> have some examples.	Fluency
Students create and/or play a game of 'Jeopardy' (McGrath and Edwards p 72) with facts and information about refugees and their experiences.	Fluency
Students create acronyms or acrostic poems (McGrath and Edwards p 25) using the word <i>refugee</i> or other relevant words like <i>welcome</i> as a way of collating knowledge and ideas.	Fluency
Students create and carry out a survey to find out how much their classmates, school community, family or friends know about refugees (Rutter 1991 p 15, 1992 p 52). They then follow up by publicising or sharing the opinions or beliefs and the facts with those who completed the survey.	Fluency
Students complete a quick quiz about refugee statistics in pairs or small groups, making a guess at any answer they don't know. They then compare their answers with the facts and reflect on why they were or were not aware of particular information ( <i>Not a Matter of Choice</i> ).	Fluency
Students examine a number of pictures of Australians. They complete simple tasks which require them to make judgements based only on the photograph or picture, such as 'Write down three words to describe each person', 'Make a prediction about the occupation of the person in the photograph' or 'Identify whether the person in the photograph is Australian-born, a migrant, a refugee, a displaced person or an asylum seeker.' They can then discuss in groups what their judgements were and how they came about. There is a series of photographs in the <i>Not a Matter of Choice</i> materials which can be used for this activity. Students could then view the final section of the video to see the occupations of the people photographed, who are all refugees.	Flexibility
Students use plasticine or play dough to model or represent particular words relevant to the refugee experience. This can be played as a game like Pictionary (Plastiscenery!) where other members of the class guess what is being modelled.	Risk taking
Students work in cooperative groups to organise and create a public display for Refugee Week, focusing on any aspect of the refugee experience.	Risk taking

## Definitions and facts

What is the definition of a refugee?

What is the difference between refugees and migrants?

Where do refugees come from? Where do refugees go?

How do refugees leave their countries?

Activity	Thinking skill
Compare student-generated definitions of 'refugee' with the official United Nations definition and other working definitions. The video <i>Not a Matter of Choice</i> contains a number of working definitions and the support materials include the 1951 United Nations definition.	Fluency
Students read or watch and reflect on refugee stories which focus on journeys and/or escapes from conflict.	Fluency
In small groups, students brainstorm similarities and/or differences between refugees and migrants and compare answers between groups for discussion. Comparisons can be made of many groups, including comparing refugees without papers and immigrants who overstay their visas, refugees and Australian residents, those who speak English and those	Fluency

who don't.	
Students collect images they associate with the refugee experience from newspapers, magazines and the internet and use them as the basis for discussion about what defines a refugee. They then create a collage or poster. LMERC has a collection of posters which provide stimulus.	Fluency
Ask students to list as many countries as they can which people leave as refugees and as many countries as they can where people arrive as refugees. Students brainstorm and colour or mark a map as they think appropriate. They then compare their maps with factual information. This allows discussion about how common the refugee experience is and about the global nature of the issue. The UNHCR website <a href="http://www.unhcr.ch">www.unhcr.ch</a> has a relevant document which can be downloaded in PDF - follow the links to <i>Basic Facts</i> and then choose <i>Refugees by Numbers. Australian Issues Collection</i> p 14 to 17 and both Rutter books also have data.	Fluency
Play The Journey to Safety Game (Rutter 1992 p 36), which is for four players and is based on the journey of two refugee children from Somalia to Britain. This game could be adapted to reflect other experiences, or students could create their own version of the game, based on what they learn in other activities about refugee journeys. If appropriate, refugee students could map their own journeys in this way.	Complexity
There is also a version of The Journey to Safety Game for older students, based on the flight of two Burmese families and adapted from a game called 'Run for your life' (Rutter 1991 p 133). This is more complex and requires a larger number of students.	Complexity

### Reasons and choices

Why do people become refugees?

What do refugees have to deal with?

What choices do refugees have?

What do refugees give up and why?

What happens to you once you become a refugee?

Activity	Thinking skill
Students list all the reasons someone might have for becoming a refugee. This list can be compared with formal and working definitions and the reasons given in personal recounts.	Fluency
Students think of all the possible options a person might have if they are unsafe where they are living.	Flexibility
Students read <i>Sathya's Story</i> (Rutter 1992 p 34) or <i>Peter's story</i> (Wajnryb p 35) and reflect on, discuss and write about the danger and moral dilemmas which face refugees.	Elaboration
Students work from a list of refugees, perhaps one they have generated earlier, and discuss what those people's lives may have been like if they had never needed to become refugees or if they had not found refuge. In the case of refugees such as Albert Einstein students can discuss the effect of the individual and their experience on the lives of others.	Flexibility
Students work in groups to design a robot for finding and detonating land mines. Information about landmines, the way they work and their distribution can be found on web sites such as <a href="http://www.icbl.org">www.icbl.org</a> .	Risk taking
Students investigate the process of applying for and receiving refugee status and create a flow diagram to illustrate this. Different diagrams may be created for refugees, for asylum seekers, for the country of first refuge or for the country of resettlement.	Complexity
Students read a range of refugee stories and answer each of the questions above. They record their information in tables, lists or graphic form for display.	Fluency
Students play the role of a refugee and discuss/prioritise their needs (Rutter 1991 p102).	Complexity

### Understanding the experience

What does it feel like to be a refugee?

What does a refugee leave behind?

Does being a refugee make you different?

What do refugees go through when they arrive in a new country?

What do refugees need when they arrive in a new country?

Activity	Thinking skill
Provide visual images, such as those available in <i>Photolanguage</i> , and ask students to select an image which they see as representing either refugees or the experience of refugees. Students then share their images and explanations, many of which will take the form of similes, analogies or metaphors. These can be discussed, developed and turned into lists or posters for display (McGrath and Edwards p117).	Flexibility
Present students with the following scenario: You are in danger and must leave your home immediately. You have 30 minutes to pack a small bag of your belongings. What will you take and what will you leave behind? (Rutter 1992 p 32)	Fluency
Students research a country of origin of a refugee group, with particular focus on the changes those people would encounter in settling in Australia, such as language, writing script, food, weather and culture (Rutter 1992 p 29).	Flexibility
Using a refugee story ask students to select or even compose a piece of music which reflects their story or the response to it. Students may also like to set the story to music and record it.	Originality
Read students a refugee story and ask them to rewrite the ending.	Elaboration
Students read a short piece about the daily life of a refugee. They then respond to the piece and make comparisons with their own daily lives, routines and possessions.	Elaboration
Make a list of questions to ask a refugee or refugee family.	Curiosity
Students create graphs of the emotional and stressful highs and lows of a refugee story as they listen to it or hear it told. They could then graph this against some of the events in their own lives and compare the two graphs.	Imagination
Imagine your journey as a refugee or imagine your life today if you were not a refugee. Write a journal entry or draw a picture of that life.	Imagination
Read <i>Reiza's story</i> and ask students to reflect on how Reiza's day differs from theirs. Students use the model of the 24-hour clock to draw in the activities of their day and compare this with Reiza's (Rutter 1992 p 40).	Curiosity
Students reflect on and write about people who are important to them and why they are important to them. A worksheet and chart is provided in <i>Forging New Identities</i> p 6–8. Refugee and non-refugee students may like to compare their answers.	Elaboration
Students reflect on both their good and bad memories. A worksheet and proforma is provided in <i>Forging New Identities</i> p 9. Refugee and non-refugee students may like to compare their answers.	Complexity
Students discuss what would happen if Australia suddenly became an unsafe place for them to live. What would they do? Where would they go? What would they take? Structured discussion around this topic was part of the Victorian Multicultural Commission's Postcards campaign (1997).	Risk taking
Imagine and/or write about your arrival as a refugee. Compare this with stories of arrival.	Imagination
Imagine and/or write about the difficulties you might face in trying to settle in a new country.	Imagination
Design a garden to meet the needs of a refugee from a selected country who has settled in your community.	Originality
Read the extract from <i>Kiss the Dust</i> (Rutter 1992 p 26) to stimulate students to write their own stories about fear and escape.	Imagination
Read <i>Nghi Luu's story</i> and then make a list of the basic things that refugees like Nghi Luu might need when they first arrive in a new country (Rutter 1992 p 41).	Fluency
Students discuss how it feels to be new. They might reflect on their first day at school. Refugee and non-refugee students can compare experiences and feelings. Students can reflect on how the feelings would be heightened by unfamiliarity with the language, systems, food, culture and by previous experiences and expectations (Rutter 1992 p 43).	Complexity
Students write a <i>Recipe for resettlement</i> using the appropriate instructional genre.	Imagination

### Rights and responsibilities

What are the rights of refugees?

What are the responsibilities of Australia and other countries?

How are refugees treated around the world?

How are refugees treated in Australia?

Activity	Thinking skill
List, either from your knowledge or by researching, the different ways refugee people have been treated in Australia, historically and currently.	Fluency
Investigate the way Australia receives refugees who arrive here with and without papers.	Flexibility
Students discuss, "What would happen if Australia changed its policy of mandatory detention?"	Curiosity
Make a summary in point form of the Geneva Refugee Convention (see <a href="http://www.unhcr.ch">www.unhcr.ch</a> ). What are the responsibilities of countries which sign it?	Complexity
Students read a dialogue (Rutter 1992 p 54) expressing opinions about refugees and use this to assess and understand prejudices about refugees. They may also write their own dialogues based on survey results, their own experiences or print or non-print media they have seen.	Curiosity

### Taking action

How can refugees get help?

Who helps them?

What can we do to help?

Activity	Thinking skill
Make a list of questions to ask the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees.	Curiosity
If you had no limits on the money you could use, what would you do to help refugees in Australia and other countries of the world?	Curiosity
Investigate: Who are the people who work to help refugees in countries where there is conflict and where they resettle? How do they survive in countries where there is also war?	Curiosity
Students discuss a list of possible ways they can support refugees, eliminate some and prioritise the remaining (Rutter 1992 p 56).	Flexibility
Students brainstorm ways of taking action to show support for refugees in different categories, such as through personal interaction, practical activity, political activity or community involvement.	Flexibility
Students make a 'Welcome Guide' for students who are new to their school, both refugees and non-refugees (Rutter 1992 p 54).	Curiosity
Imagine you are working to help refugees in a country overseas. Write about your daily life, the difficulties and satisfactions of working there.	Imagination
Students write letters. They may write to newspapers expressing an opinion, to refugees or asylum seekers welcoming or introducing them to Australia or to politicians to express an opinion.	Risk taking
Students organise a fund raising event for a refugee organisation.	Risk taking
Students create a display or campaign to raise awareness of the refugee community within their school community.	Risk taking

### History

Have there been refugees at other times in history?

How have refugees been treated at different times in history?

Activity	Thinking skill
Create a photo display of refugees throughout history. Set it out as a timeline.	Fluency
Explain the history of migration to Australia and the influences of various events on refugees coming to Australia (Trist).	Complexity
Read Refugees in Britain 1680-1945 (Rutter 1992 p 20). List the groups of people who came to Britain between 1680 and 1945. Then write down why they had to leave their home countries. Compare this with the groups of people who came to Australia.	Complexity
Read about and explain the history of the Geneva Refugee Convention ( <a href="http://www.unhcr.ch">www.unhcr.ch</a> ). Why were changes such as those relating to gender persecution required?	Complexity

### Politics and the media

What role can/does the media play in portraying refugee issues?

Why are refugee issues also political issues?

Activity	Thinking skill
Ask students to make a list of examples they have seen in the newspaper or on TV, relating to refugees. They should then work in cooperative groups to share their lists and explain the examples. Next to each of the examples the group should come up with one adjective to describe the way the refugees were portrayed. Some examples of this could be: <i>sympathetic, persecuted, strong, unfortunate</i> . These lists can then be sorted into three groups – <b>positive</b> , <b>negative</b> and <b>neutral</b> according to connotation. Groups can then try to come to some kind of consensus about the role of the media in influencing public opinion on refugee issues.	Fluency
Ask students to think of all the possible terms which could be used to describe people who arrive in countries as refugees. They may create their own. Reflect on the terms which are used by politicians and by the media and the effect of that particular term on the general public's understanding of refugees and refugee issues. The article <i>The discourse excluding asylum seekers – Have we been brainwashed?</i> Australian Language Matters, Jan/Feb/Mar 2002 contains relevant discussion and examples of terms.	Flexibility Originality
Ask students to create an advertisement for any form of print media which portrays refugees in a positive light or which highlights the experiences of refugees. One example could be emphasising the living conditions in a refugee camp through a real estate advertisement. LMERC holds a collection of refugee posters including 'Most people travel for fun' and 'Einstein was a refugee'.	Originality
Ask students to work in groups to create bumper stickers which promote a positive view of refugee issues (McGrath and Edwards p 35).	Originality
Find images or newspaper articles which present refugees in a particular light. This may be positive or negative. Ask students to examine the presentation and – using the BAR acronym, make one aspect bigger or smaller (B), add or subtract one aspect (A) and rearrange one aspect (R) to present a view which they think is more appropriate. Ask them to explain their changes (McGrath and Edwards p 34).	Elaboration
Students debate: <i>That refugees are exactly the kind of people we want in Australia.</i>	Risk taking
Why are refugee issues also political issues? Explain the role of the immigration policy, mandatory detention and illegal immigrants in Australian politics (Healey).	Complexity
Students make a list of questions they would ask a political leader.	Curiosity
Ask students to imagine that all political, economic and environmental problems which have caused people to become refugees in the past have ceased. What do they imagine would be the consequences of this? In groups they discuss the consequences over the short, medium and long term (Klippel p 98).	Imagination
Compare the platforms of the major Australian political parties in relation to refugees. This could include the immigration policy, mandatory detention, health and multicultural affairs.	Elaboration