

# WITH EYES TO SEE



## REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLES

ideas for  
teachers  
who want  
to  
integrate  
social  
justice  
concepts  
into what  
and how  
they teach

March  
2007

What do the countries of Afghanistan, Sudan, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have in common? They are the four countries that have recently produced the largest number of refugees in the world (as of January 1, 2006\*). Despite recent events in the region enabling large numbers of Afghani refugees to return home, there are still close to 2 million living in camps in Pakistan.

What do the countries of Colombia, Iraq, Sudan, and Azerbaijan have in common? They are the four countries in the world with the largest number of internally displaced peoples (IDP) in the world (as of January 1, 2006\*). Colombia alone has an estimated 2 million IDPs as a result of its decades-long civil war.

Over the past year, one country is estimated to now have more than 2 million refugees and another 2 million IDPs, now near the top rank in both categories (and rising): Iraq.

As educators working with children and youth, what can we do to support people forced to leave their homes as a result of wars, famine, or natural disasters? Send aid? Advocate for policy change? Educate others? Yes to all of these, but the best place to start is to educate ourselves. Where are there refugees/IDPs in the world today? Why did they leave their homes? What is the role of my own government in the causes and/or solutions for displaced peoples around the world? Is the problem far away or in my community? As we begin to explore these questions, it is hoped that we educators can turn knowledge and understanding into action.

Take Rwanda for example: for three months in 1994, an estimated 800,000 Rwandans were massacred due to fighting between the majority Hutus and minority Tutsis, and more than 2 million people (mostly Hutus) fled the country. Determined not to let history repeat itself, many world leaders declared that "never again" would they stand by and let such atrocities take place. At the ten-year anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, in 2004, two college students attending Swarthmore College, Mark Hanis and Andrew Sniderman, learned about the current genocide taking place in Darfur, Sudan, and were enraged that "never again" was, unfortunately, happening again. They formed the Genocide Intervention Network in October 2004, and have become an important force in raising awareness of and advocating for the people of Darfur.

This edition of With Eyes to See is meant as a first step in this process of information to-action on the issues of displaced peoples of the world. Concern America's own history of working with refugees and IDPs from El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and others, makes this issue one that is close to our hearts. We invite you to use the classroom activities found here to motivate your students to act and bring hope to those who are forced to leave their homes, from New Orleans to Baghdad.

(\*UNHCR: Refugees by Numbers 2006 edition)

CONCERN AMERICA

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"Refugees are defined as persons who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group."  
-United Nations, 1951

K-12

### Books for All Ages

As with so many difficult topics, one of the best ways to teach about refugees and migrants is to turn to children's books. A simple children's book search using the key word of "refugee" will turn up a wonderful number of possibilities across the world and the conflict regions that have given rise to large-scale displacement. Below are a few good examples, spanning grade levels, which can be used (including a couple of selections on homelessness in this country for comparison).

***Maniac McGee***, by Jerry Spinneli, grades 4-12, tells the story of a boy who loses his parents and spends his time running between homes. A Newberry book award winner, *Maniac McGee* deals with homelessness, loss, and racism with touching humor. There are any number of lesson plans for using this book available online.

***Fly Away Home***, by Eve Bunting, grades K-12 (picture book), is about a boy and his father who are homeless and live in an airport.

***The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story***, by Pegi Deitz Shea, grades K-12, takes place in a refugee camp in Thailand and tells of a Hmong girl who learns to weave a pa'ndau, the traditional story cloth, as she explores the story of her life as a refugee and what brought her and her grandmother to the camp.

***Refugees***, by Catherine Stine, grades 7-12, is a novel that parallels the lives of a girl in the U.S. that has run away from home and an Afghan boy in a refugee camp.

***Teenage Refugees from Guatemala Speak Out (In Their Own Voices)***, by Gerry Hadden, grades 5-12, presents personal narratives from youth who fled their home country of Guatemala and traveled to the U.S. as refugees.

***Making it Home: Real-life Stories from Children Forced to Flee***, by Beverly Naidoo, grades 4-12, contains the narratives of twenty children and their experiences as refugees. The children are from a number of regions including Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Liberia, and others.

### Refugees Are Only Over There!?

6-12

Putting aside the varying levels of complicity of the U.S. in many of the refugee and IDP crisis around the world, what do refugees have to do with us in this country? We often think of refugees as people living in camps in regions of conflict around the world, but many refugees arrive to the U.S. every year. Also, there are hundreds of thousands of people without a home/forced to leave their homes in this country. Can they be compared with refugees from other countries? Some research and discussion can help answer these questions. Use the following questions to guide this exploration: How many refugees are currently living in the U.S.? Where do they come from? How many apply and then actually receive asylum here? Should homeless people in this country be considered "refugees"? "Internally Displaced"? Are the people displaced by Hurricane Katrina refugees or IDPs? Why? How can we support refugees/IDPs in our communities?

A good place to start for answers to the first three questions is the web site for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

## Pack Your Bag

4-12

What must it be like to have to flee from one's home at a moment's notice? Thankfully, most of our students have not had to live this experience, but taking some time to think about it can go a long way to build understanding of the plight of refugees and IDPs. Ask the students to take out a piece of paper and a pencil. Tell them they have two minutes to flee their homes with their families, and to write down on their papers what they would grab and stuff in a small backpack before leaving. At two minutes, ask them to stop writing. Share together what each student wrote, and discuss how this exercise felt. Where would each go if forced to flee? How must Katrina survivors have felt?

6-12

## What is the Extent of the Refugee Crisis and What Can it Teach Us?

A good place to begin answering these two questions is to have students do a bit of basic research into the current refugee and IDP situations around the world. What regions are producing most of the world's refugees/IDPs? What countries are hosting most of the refugees? What are the causes of these forced migrations? The hopes for return?

Answering these questions can be done in a variety of ways. To integrate **math** into the lesson, ask the students to graph the countries producing and hosting refugees by the number of displaced peoples; the IDPs of various countries can also be graphed. In the same way, listing refugees and their home/host countries also works well for **geography, history, social studies, and current events** lessons: the reasons for massive displacement are many, but cannot be fully understood without looking and the interrelated contexts of the people, places, and events surrounding the displacement.

On a related note, it is very much worth while looking at refugee and IDP returns. In Guatemala for example, hundreds of thousands of people fled to Mexico for refuge during that country's 36 year civil war. As the conflict there decreased and the Peace Accords were signed in 1996, many people returned to Guatemala on their own or as collectively negotiated returns. Many people also chose to remain in Mexico and were granted citizenship. Looking at why people were able to choose to return, how their lives are now back in their home countries, and why others stayed in Mexico, requires a bit of research for the students, but the history of these refugees (or those from other areas with recent returns such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, etc.) is filled with many hopeful endings despite the horrible conflicts that led to their displacements in the first place. It is not often that a sense of hope can be combined with stories of displaced peoples.

(For good information on the history of Guatemala, try [www.nisgua.org](http://www.nisgua.org), or the book *Return of Guatemala's Refugees: Reweaving the Torn*, by Clark Taylor; there are many other resources on Guatemala as well.)

## Wall of Refugees

6-12

As a way to learn more about the plight of refugees and IDPs in our world and teach others around the school, create a Wall of Refugees. One way to accomplish this is to have students research different countries with current refugee/IDP crisis. With the information, the students can draw an outline of the country, and using the space within and around the borders, write/draw information on the refugees/IDPs including numbers, causes, possibilities for return, etc. These posters can then be displayed on the walls in the classroom or around the school.

"We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle, or zoos. We are people and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism."  
--Rigoberta Menchú Tum  
(former Guatemalan refugee and 1992 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate)

# RECOMMENDED

"While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage - the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives."  
- Antonio Gutierrez, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees

## RESOURCES

1. To learn more about the system of asylum in the U.S., watch **Well Founded Fear**, a documentary film by Michael Camerini and Sheri Robertson. From the filmmakers' website: *"Political asylum in the United States - who deserves it? who gets it? who decides? Enter the closed corridors of the INS (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service) for an extraordinary close-up look at what has been called 'the Ellis Island of the 21st Century'."* The filmmakers, in their words, *"share a commitment to making films about ideas and the cross-cultural links that unite people - films that challenge, provoke, dissect, yet stay close and human."*
2. Probably the best resource for information, statistics, current issues, and activities about refugees and internally displaced peoples is the **U.N. Refugee Agency UNHCR**. The UNHCR web site, [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org), also has great posters with pertinent statistics that can be printed for reference; another set of printable posters uses Lego figures to raise awareness about refugees. Also, be sure to visit the site (or others) to get a copy of the **1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees**, the international legal basis for refugee rights.

## CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Colombia, Mozambique, and Western Africa.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in California which include:

- \* The St. Nicholas Project
- \* Walk Out of Poverty
- \* Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- \* "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- \* School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- \* Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

**We hope you join us for Concern America's WALK OUT OF POVERTY, March 31, 2007!** Call Sandra at Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa.

**Setting the Table, Craft Sales, Adopt-a-Volunteer:** Are you looking for a good service project? Have students who need service hours? Concern America offers various ways to get involved in the world and the work of the organization. **Setting the Table** provides a meaningful theme for hosting a dinner to remember people from around the world; sell fairly traded **crafts** from El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Bangladesh; **Adopt-a-Volunteer** enables you to support a Concern America volunteer and learn through her/his work with communities in Latin America or Africa.