World Refugee Day
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**Written by Maaike Kaandorp
and illustrated by Gary Goodwin**

This knowledge pack discusses the issues of displaced people in order to encourage students and teachers to recognise World Refugee Day. World Refugee Day (WRD) is marked on June 20th every year and can be used to raise awareness of some of the political, cultural and economic issues facing refugees. We hope it provides information, ideas and encouragement for students and teachers to raise awareness in their school, community and beyond.

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Historical background

Since 1951, tens of millions of people have been forced to leave their home countries due to persecution, conflict or terror. As the numbers of people seeking refuge elsewhere increased with the outbreak of the two World Wars in the 20th century, the international community reacted by developing agreements and laws that would facilitate travel of these refugees and ensure that they were treated well and that their human rights would be protected. After a long process that started in 1921 with the League of Nations, a conference in 1951 saw the signing of the Geneva Convention which clarified 'the Status of Refugees'. Besides outlining what a refugee is, it also clarifies what legal protection and social rights they are entitled to.

Case study:

Vietnam & Indochina

After WW2	Ho Chi Minh, the leader of Vietnam's communist party, declared independence from France. This action set off 30 years of conflict, which also impacted the neighbouring countries of Laos and Cambodia.
1951	War between France and Vietnam ends with the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu. A peace settlement, known as the Geneva Accords, divided the country in two. The communist North was headed by Ho Chi Minh and supported by the Soviet Union. A pro-western South was under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem and backed by the United States.
1960	The Geneva Accords aimed to reunite the two countries, but remaining tensions led to the proclamation of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, better known as the Viet Cong, in 1960. A guerrilla war broke out between the North and the South and lasted until 1975, with increasing support from American troops.
1973	American troops depart.
1975	Surrender of the South Vietnamese government sees the establishment of a communist Vietnam. With this, people left the country. Many of them had supported the South Vietnamese government. Some were evacuated by the US and many fled to countries such as Thailand, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Many of the migrants travelled by boat and so were called 'boat people'. Boats were often small wooden fishing crafts which were not fit for open sea. They were often overcrowded, which could lead to drowning. No country in the region had agreed to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, nor the 1967 Protocol. Countries such as Malaysia and Thailand began to turn away boats, saying they had reached the limit of people they could receive.
1979	Another Refugee Convention was held in Geneva in 1979 to ensure that the crisis would not escalate. The countries of origin were to prevent people from leaving illegally. They would create an 'Orderly Departure Programme' for legal emigrants. Meanwhile, other countries in Southeast Asia would provide temporary asylum to the refugees. More than twenty countries, including Canada, Australia, France, and the United States, agreed to allow resettlement of the refugees.
Late 1980s	Migration had not declined and many Western governments (such as Hong Kong) were less willing to help with the resettlement, increasingly doubtful of the migrants' motivations.

South Sudan

Sudan has been plagued by civil wars since its independence from the United Kingdom and Egypt in 1956. The Arabic Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south continue to dispute over issues like access to resources (such as oil), the role of religion in the states, and self-determination. There was a brief interim period after a peace agreement was signed between the National Congress Party (NCP) and Sudan's People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in 2005. However, the violence resumed when the people of South Sudan voted for an independent and secular state in 2011. Issues concerning border areas and oil remain unresolved and the Dafur region's complaints against the Sudanese government were discounted. The SPLM/A and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Dafur had previously taken up arms against the government in 2003. Despite an attempt to come to a peace agreement, the conflicts continue.

People from both South Sudan and the Darfur area have been fleeing the violence since 2011. Many from Darfur seek to escape atrocities committed by the Janaweed, a militia group linked to the Sudanese government under Al Bashir. They often target ethnic groups, such as the Fur tribe, based on the dark colour of their skin. Villages are plundered and men and women are attacked and killed. In the newly independent South Sudan, different factions are struggling for power. The crises in Darfur and South Sudan have led to over 3 million people internally displaced within Sudan. Half a million are living in refugee camps in bordering countries such as Chad, Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, areas that have all experienced their own conflicts and refugee crises. These numbers are expected to increase in the future due to hunger.

Although the UNHCR is present in the area, providing aid is not easy. Local bureaucracy complicates access to refugees by requiring visas and work permits. With many refugees located in remote areas it is difficult for aid workers, who at times are also victims of violence and threat, to reach them. Poor infrastructure and extreme weather conditions make reaching these groups even more challenging. The Sudanese government has promised the population free access and full freedom of movement, but many refugees do not want to return to their places of origin out of fear of new attacks.

The situation in the refugee camps is dire, and they were not designed for long-term use. Overcrowding, makeshift housing and poor sanitation often contribute to the outbreak of diseases such as cholera and malaria. A lack of food and potable water increases risks of disease and starvation. The UNHCR and other organizations aim to improve these conditions while also trying to prevent refugees' complete dependence on outside help. They focus increasingly on self-sufficiency amongst the Sudanese refugees. They provide migrants in rural areas with land and tools to improve their livelihood and increase their independence through farming. Critics argue that self-sufficiency is hard to obtain when refugees are forced to stay within camps. Furthermore, the population of the camps often consists of a high number of dependents, which makes for a limited labour force. Lastly, the local populations of the receiving countries often struggle with poverty themselves and are unable to assist let alone compete with the refugees.

What can schools do to highlight World Refugee Day and to promote solidarity with those who are forced to flee?

The aim should be to:

- ✔ Empower and educate students who are interested in how refugees' stories have shaped the world.

- ✔ Establish school links with local initiatives or personalities who are dedicated to these issues.

- ✔ Stage a class debate

  - Example: many celebrities, such as George Clooney and Angelina Jolie, have been very vocal about the Sudanese and other refugee crises. Using your communication and critical thinking skills, debate whether the involvement of Hollywood stars is a good or bad development with your class.

- ✔ Hold regular meetings, using current affairs articles and videos, to discuss refugees in both a local and global context.

- ✔ Form reading groups to educate members on relevant issues.

- ✔ Work with local refugee or aid organizations.

- ✔ Set up Skype meetings and talks with local or international academics.

- ✔ Visit: **http://www.un.org/en/events/refugeeday/** to learn more.