



Lesson Plan: The Challenges of Refugee Resettlement

OVERVIEW:

This lesson plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the film *Rain in a Dry Land*, which follows the stories of two modern-day Somali Bantu families who resettle in the United States. **Note: A significant portion of the film includes subtitles.**

P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and note taking strategies to understand and interpret a video clip
- Create and analyze a bar graph that represents the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. from various regions of the world in a given year
- Work in groups to read an article and identify the challenges faced by various organizations that assist refugees
- Develop strategies to address the challenges of resettling refugees

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12

SUBJECTS: U.S. and World History, Sociology, Geography, Current Events

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: One 50-minute class period, plus homework

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Political map of Africa showing the location of Somalia and Kenya
- Handout: Viewing Guide (PDF file)
- Method (varies by school) of showing the class a video clip from the P.O.V. Web site for *Rain in a Dry Land*, or have a copy of the film and a VHS/DVD player and monitor.
- Computers with Internet access, or printouts of articles used in the lesson

SUGGESTED CLIP:

Life in Kakuma Refugee Camp/Cultural Orientation Class (9:05 min)

(The clip begins at 5:40 with text on the screen: "Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya, January 2004." The clip ends at 14:45 after the line, "There is a fire.")

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Somalia

Smaller than the state of Texas, Somalia is located on the Eastern-most tip of Africa. It shares borders with Ethiopia (with whom it has had perennial border disputes), Djibouti, and Kenya. It sits just across the Arabian Sea from Yemen.

Though instability has made exact figures impossible to obtain, the population is about 9 million, with a Somali majority and Bantu minority. Nearly all are Sunni Muslim.

After a history of colonization by both the British (in the north) and Italians (in the south), and a nine-year struggle for power, Somalia formally declared independence in 1969. With backing from the Soviet Union, a socialist, authoritarian government ruled Somalia for two decades.

In 1991, the Somali government was overthrown by insurgents. This was followed by a number of secessions in the northern part of the country during the 1990's. The nation has been torn by factional fighting ever since.

When the resulting instability led to widespread famine, the United Nations stepped in to provide relief. The U.S. military deployed forces in order to protect those humanitarian operations but met resistance from independent factional forces. On October 3, 1993, a U.S. military operation in the nation's capital, Mogadishu, was met by resistance from fighters led by warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. What was planned as a quick, surgical strike turned into violent chaos, leaving 18 Americans and hundreds of Somalis dead. U.S. forces subsequently withdrew. By 1995, the country had become too dangerous for the U.N. workers and they, too, withdrew.

Somali Bantu

The Bantu are an ethnic group bound by language and with ancient roots in West Africa, in the region where Cameroon is today. At this point, there is cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity within the Bantu population, which has spread across Africa. The language has also morphed into many forms.

Historically, as Bantu speakers spread across eastern Africa, language barriers and their migratory status led to marginalization and discrimination. In some parts of Africa, Bantu-speaking people have been compared to the "untouchable" caste in India.

In Somalia, the people identified as Bantu are largely the descendants of southern Africans brought to the area by slave traders about 200 years ago. Largely disenfranchised and often denied access to social institutions like schools, the Bantu found themselves without a power base. Caught in the crossfire of a civil war, thousands of Somali Bantu fled, mostly to refugee camps in Kenya.

The U.S. as Refuge

The cap on the number of refugees accepted by the United States has steadily declined, from a high of 231,700 per year in 1980 to just 70,000 annually since 2002. Of the total refugee admission allotment for fiscal year 2007, 20,000 are reserved for Africans. Potential Bantu refugees, which, according to Amnesty International, number about one million, would be granted only a fraction of those slots.

Somali Bantu in the U.S.

In 2003, the United States announced that it would accept approximately 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees to be resettled in the U.S. Today, there are more than 13,000 Bantu in more than 50 cities across the U.S., with most residing in Lewiston, Maine, (approx. 3,000) and Salt Lake City, Utah, (approx. 1,000).

Nearly all Somali Bantu refugees in the U.S. previously resided in Kenyan refugee camps. There, candidates for emigration to the U.S. were provided with cultural training and English language instruction. Upon arrival, each family was assigned to one of ten placement assistance groups that contract with the U.S. State Department. Each of these groups provided assistance in finding housing, improving language proficiency and job training.

This transitional assistance is critical to resettlement. When the Bantu arrive in the U.S., more than 95 percent are illiterate. Their experience is largely rural, with expertise in farming, cooking and construction, but rarely with modern, urban living.

ACTIVITY:

1. Introduce students to the types of circumstances faced by refugees with a viewing activity. Begin by showing students where Somalia and Kenya are on a world map. Tell the class that in 1991, civil war broke out in Somalia, and that thousands of Somalian Bantu families fled from the violence across the border into Kenya where they've lived for years in United Nations refugee camps. The United States is now resettling thousands of these refugees in cities all across America. To prepare for this resettlement, the refugees attend a class to learn about life in the U.S. Explain that you are going to show the class a video clip (length: approximately nine minutes) that provides cultural information on the refugees, illustrates life in the refugee camp, and shows some of the information they learn about the U.S. in preparation for resettlement. Then, distribute the Viewing Guide and show the clip.

2. After watching the video, discuss student responses to the questions on the Viewing Guide. Point out that the people in the film left their homes as a result of persecution, and they are unable or unwilling to return to their homes because of conditions there. These circumstances are what define such people as "refugees."

3. Tell students that the U.S. also assists refugees from other regions of the world. Display or replicate the table of "proposed ceilings" from the Arthur E. Dewey interview in the P.O.V. Web feature, "In Search of the Durable Solution: The Refugee Situation Today." Explain that the President of the U.S. establishes these numbers each year after a study group reviews the resettlement needs of refugees worldwide and considers the domestic and international implications of U.S. refugee policy. (Note: The "unallocated reserve" number can be used to admit additional refugees in the event that numbers allocated to a particular region are insufficient and resources to fund them are identified early in the fiscal year.) Ask students to organize the table's data in a simple bar graph that compares the numbers of refugees admitted from various regions in the world. How does the representation of the data in a table compare to its display in a bar graph? What do students think is the best way to illustrate the numbers? Why? If possible, connect students' prior studies of world regions and events to the data in the table by asking them to explain why the refugee allocations for some regions of the world might be higher than those for others.

4. Next, divide students into groups that will each examine an interview from the P.O.V. Web feature, "In Search of the Durable Solution: The Refugee Situation Today." As they read, have each group identify the organization that the interviewee represents and list the challenges faced by this organization as they support refugees. Then, each group should develop a list of recommended strategies for how each challenge could be addressed.

5. Have each group report its findings and recommendations to the class. Discuss challenges shared among the various organizations, as well as the potential impact of the strategies developed by the student groups.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:

Students can be assessed on:

- Completing the Viewing Guide
- Accurate and clear representations of data in their bar graphs, including the use of labels
- Contributions during group work and class discussions

EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS:

- Have students send their list of recommended strategies to the organizations featured in the lesson.
- Look deeper at the experiences of specific immigrants as they've adjusted to American culture. You could do this by watching the P.O.V. films, *Rain in a Dry Land* or *Lost Boys of Sudan* in their entirety, by inviting a school ESL teacher or immigrants from the community into the classroom as guest speakers, or by reading accounts of immigrant experiences available online or in print. What role do language, religion, music, values, and social customs play in helping immigrants adjust to life in American society? What characteristics help or hinder their transition? What aspects of cultural identity did these immigrants choose to preserve as they settled in the U.S? What part of their identities did they change? For an interesting reverse perspective of an American couple emigrating and adjusting to life in the African country of Tanzania, check out the P.O.V. film and Web site for *A Panther in Africa*.
- Challenge students to help refugees by volunteering for community organizations that support local refugee immigrants, or by raising funds and donating them to national or international groups that provide refugee assistance.
- Have students research and create a timeline that compares historical U.S. refugee admissions policies and trends with what is happening today.
- Brainstorm strategies for how students can help classmates from other cultures adapt to American customs that might seem different to them and develop a greater sense of belonging.

STANDARDS:

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

Behavioral Studies

Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

Civics

Standard 23: Understands the impact of significant political and nonpolitical developments on the United States and other nations.

Geography

Standard 6: Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.

Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

Language Arts

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

U.S. History

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource Web site (now PBS Teachers), and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and Northern Virginia.

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