The U.S. Child Migrant Crisis

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LesPlan is grateful to the Lkwungen Peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, on whose unceded land we now live, and do our work.

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I have had many parents comment to me about how great they think What in the World? is, and they look forward to each month’s issue coming home... This is a great resource for a small country school to explore the global issues that affect us all.

K. Cameron, Grade 7/8 teacher Admaston, ON

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BEFORE READING

1. Write the title of the article on the board: Child Migrant Crisis at the U.S. Border. Then, have students work in pairs to generate a list of questions related to the topic. (For example, how old are the children? Where are they migrating from? Why is it a crisis? Where along the U.S. border is this crisis taking place? etc.)

2. Have partners share their questions as a class, identifying similarities and differences among the questions. Co-create an anchor chart of these questions to refer to later.

3. Next, have students view the news report at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XbPHD1o-IQ [2:03]. As they watch, have students note any details that may answer some of the questions they generated from the title.

4. After viewing the video, have students add any new questions that they have about the situation to the anchor chart.

5. Finally, invite students to set a purpose for reading the article, referring to the resource page Setting A Purpose Before Reading as needed.
They huddle for comfort in overcrowded, jail-like conditions. They try to sleep under foil blankets on plastic cots, metal benches, or thin mattresses. There isn’t enough soap for everyone, so they sometimes go without morning showers. Many don’t get outside for more than a few minutes a day. Catching COVID-19 in such packed quarters is a real risk.

A DESPERATE JOURNEY
The scared and lonely people living in these circumstances aren’t war victims in faraway refugee camps. They are migrant children from Central America. They have arrived at the U.S. border without parents or guardians. Most are teenagers, but some are toddlers. Thousands are now temporarily living in bleak, jammed border facilities. These sites aren’t suitable for kids.

The children are mostly from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. They have travelled thousands of kilometres through Mexico to get to the U.S. And they have made the difficult journey north by foot.

They carry little but their meagre belongings and dreams for their futures. Some leave their parents at the border. Some come with older siblings or relatives who are also under 18. Paid smugglers are escorting other children.

A SPIKE IN ARRIVALS
Most enter the U.S. at a border crossing in Texas. They are coming in greater numbers now than they have in two years. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP) receives the children. By March, it had 15,500 in its care – and the influx isn’t letting up.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS
Why are desperate parents sending their children on a dangerous trip to an unknown land? And what has changed to cause the numbers to skyrocket?

Migration to the U.S. from Central America is not new. The region suffers from long-standing poverty. That has often pushed people to flee north looking for new opportunities. However, add the coronavirus pandemic into the mix and economic conditions have worsened even more.

Drug lords who control communities through gang violence are an escalating threat,
International

Child Migrant Crisis at the U.S. Border

as well. And in November, Central America was battered by two hurricanes. That left scores of already struggling people destitute and homeless.

COVID-19 restrictions are easing in many areas, too. That means people are freer to travel than they have been in a year.

DID YOU KNOW?
In February alone, officials stopped more than 100,000 migrants from entering the U.S.

A change of heart
But perhaps the biggest reason for the surge is different leadership in the U.S. In 2021, a new Democratic president, Joe Biden, took office. His approach to migrants is markedly different from his predecessor’s, former Republican president Donald Trump.

In 2018, Mr. Trump declared a ‘zero tolerance’ policy against migrants who didn’t have permission to enter America. Officials brought in laws aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19. They refused entry to all unauthorized adults and children. Mr. Biden’s government has reversed part of that policy. Adults are still turned away, but children are let in. So parents are sending them.

A stressed system
Many say that accepting kids is the right humanitarian response. The problem? The U.S. was ill-prepared for so many children knocking on its door.

Under U.S. law, the CBP can’t hold unaccompanied minors for over 72 hours. Another federal agency, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is then supposed to move them into child-friendly shelters. The minors stay there until relatives, sponsors, or foster homes are found to accept them.

But when shelters are full, children get stuck in border detention centres. That’s what’s happened. In late March, at least 5000 children stayed longer than the 72-hour limit. Some 800 were there for over 10 days. That must change, critics say.

The shelter hunt
So officials are working around the clock to find better temporary shelters until HHS can take them. They have asked charities and other federal agencies for assistance.

These efforts have helped. By March 22, more than 1500 children had been placed in a conference centre in Dallas, Texas. The Red Cross has also set up a camp for kids.

“A border patrol station is no place for a child,” said U.S. Homeland Security head Alejandro Mayorkas. ★

Definitions
DESTITUTE: extremely poor
HUMANITARIAN: help or money given to people, countries, etc., in order to improve living conditions
PREDECESSOR: a person who had a job or position before someone else
QUOTA: a prescribed, or set, number

Asylum in the U.S.
Tens of thousands of people apply for asylum in the U.S. each year. Asylum is the protection granted by a nation to someone who has left a home country as a political refugee.

The president, in consultation with Congress, sets an annual refugee quota. From October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020, the U.S. accepted 11,814 refugees. That’s far less than the quota of 18,000, and a 40 percent decrease from 30,000 the year before. It was a record low for a program that lets in an average of 95,000 refugees annually. The former U.S. administration’s policy toward migrants, as well as COVID-19, likely account for this decline.

Those granted asylum are eligible for some benefits and may apply for permanent resident status after one year. Permanent residents can then apply for citizenship after four years.

Did you know?
In February alone, officials stopped more than 100,000 migrants from entering the U.S.
CHILD MIGRANT CRISIS AT THE U.S. BORDER

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the target quota for the number of refugees that could enter the U.S. last year?

2. How many refugees were actually allowed into the U.S. from October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020?

3. Which region do many refugees who arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border come from?

4. What is different about many of the migrants who arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border in recent weeks?

5. Why did they leave their homes to come to the United States?

6. Describe the conditions these children experience on their journey north.

7. What recent change in the U.S. prompted the latest surge of refugees?

8. Which U.S. government agency first deals with migrants? How long can it keep custody of children?

9. Which U.S. government agency is then assigned to help these young unaccompanied refugees?

10. Why is there currently a crisis in dealing with these migrant children?
1. During former president Trump’s term, he declared a ‘zero tolerance’ policy against migrants arriving at the border that did not have permission to live in America. He even separated some children from their parents as a deterrent to future migrants; some of those families are still waiting to be reunited. Today, President Biden is still turning away adult migrants, but has pledged not to turn away children.

Consider the consequences of each president’s policies. Which of the two do you feel is the most desirable? What changes or modifications would you suggest to make them better? Explain.

2. Unless you are Indigenous, someone in your family tree immigrated to Canada. Maybe it was you! What do you know about your family history? Share what you know with a small group and ask them questions about their history as well.

Describe the circumstances around your or another family’s immigration experience.

What themes are common? How do they compare to the experiences of child migrants in the U.S.? Explain.
International
Child Migrant Crisis at the U.S. Border

Questions for Online Exploration

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/en/links for easy access.

1. Visit the links below to learn more about the experience of child migrants in the U.S., from their treacherous journey north to the processing of their asylum claims once they reach the U.S. border:

   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6fDGQpHd_k [5:01]
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9p1Iuy1Mkk [2:20]
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oo9YJrcx9WQ [4:17]
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14HAjiChCxy [7:02]

   What surprised you about their experiences? What questions do you still have about this crisis? Give specific details to support your ideas.

2. UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, was established to give every child an equitable chance in life. Visit the UNICEF USA site to learn more about the organization’s efforts to support the plight of migrant children:


   What did you learn about UNICEF and its support of child migrants in the U.S.?
Biden ramps up refugee admissions

President Joe Biden has signed an executive order to radically increase refugee admissions to the United States in the next fiscal year, from 15,000 under the Trump administration, to 125,000

U.S. REFUGEE ADMISSIONS AND CEILINGS

Fiscal years (FY)*, ‘000

- Number of admitted refugees
- Annual ceiling

Biden sets FY2022 ceiling at 125,000 up from 15,000 this year under President Donald Trump

Trump uses executive order to slash FY2017 ceiling to 50,000, reversing cap of 110,000 set by outgoing President Barack Obama

Sep 11, 2001: Terrorist attacks

Sources: U.S. Department of State, Center for American Progress
*Fiscal year runs from Oct 1 to Sep 30

Picture: Getty Images

© GRAPHIC NEWS
What questions do you still have about the topic presented?
YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon, then answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:
1. What do you already know about migrant children in the U.S.?
2. Describe what you see and read in the cartoon.
3. What do you suppose the masks represent in the cartoon?
4. What do you know about the Statue of Liberty? What does this American landmark stand for or represent?
5. What do you suppose the large shoe refers to?
6. As you see it, what might the cartoonist be saying about the migrant children in the U.S.? Explain.
7. For what reasons do you agree with the cartoonist’s perspective? For what reasons do you disagree?
Map Assignment
U.S.A. - Mexico Border

Complete this map assignment to better understand the article *Child Migrant Crisis at the U.S. Border*.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Obtain the required resources and read all the instructions before starting.
2. Colour your map *after* all labelling is completed.
3. Print in pencil only first, then go over the printing in black ink.
4. Work carefully and neatly.

**Resources Required:** pencil, black pen, pencil crayons, ruler, eraser and an atlas.

**Part A** Locate and label Texas in CAPITAL letters and shade this U.S. state orange.

**Part B** Locate and label the capital of this state and *underline* this city name.

**Part C** Locate and label the following countries in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:
- Mexico (green)
- Guatemala (pink)

**Part D** Locate and label the capitals of these countries and *underline* each city name.

**Part E** Locate and label the following countries in CAPITAL letters and shade each as indicated:
- El Salvador (yellow)
- Honduras (orange)
- Belize (red)

**Part F** Locate and label the following U.S. states and shade each as indicated:
- California (yellow)
- Arizona (red)
- New Mexico (purple)
- Oklahoma (brown)
- Arkansas (yellow)
- Louisiana (pink)
- Mississippi (red)
- Alabama (orange)

**Part G** Draw and label the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) river and shade it light blue.

**Part H** Locate and label the following U.S. cities:
- Houston
- San Antonio
- Dallas

**Part I** Locate and label the following and shade all ocean water dark blue:
- Pacific Ocean
- Gulf of Mexico
- Bay of Campeche

**Part J** Locate and label the Tropic of Cancer (23°).

**Part K** Shade all remaining territory grey.

**Part L** Complete your map with a frame, title and compass. ★
A. Write the letter that corresponds to the best answer on the line beside each question:

_____ 1. A person who leaves their home country to escape violence or persecution is called a(n):
   a) refugee  
   b) renegade  
   c) evacuee  
   d) illegal alien

_____ 2. Most migrants who show up at the U.S.- Mexico border are coming from:
   a) the Caribbean  
   b) Central America  
   c) South America  
   d) Syria

_____ 3. What is the most important reason behind the wave of new refugees to the U.S.?
   a) a new U.S. president  
   b) hurricanes  
   c) extreme poverty  
   d) the COVID-19 pandemic

B. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False). If a statement is True, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is False, write the words that make it true on the line below.

_____ 4. True or False? The U.S. president consults with Congress to set yearly immigration quotas.

_____ 5. True or False? Most migrants who want to enter the U.S. arrive at the Arizona-Mexico border.

_____ 6. True or False? Most teenage migrants who want to enter the U.S. arrive with their parents.

C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.

7. CBP = U.S. Customs and ____________________ Protection.

8. The refugee target ____________________ for the October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020 period was 18,000.

9. Some parents of migrant children pay ____________________ to escort their children to the U.S.

D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. (Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)

10. What advice would you give to U.S. President Biden about the refugee crisis on the southern border? Give reasons to support your response.
There are a number of reasons we read, and setting a purpose for reading – knowing WHY we are reading – helps us to focus on important information and to better understand and remember what we read. It also helps us decide HOW we will read the text.

We don't read all texts for the same purposes or in the same way. For example, we read an instruction manual for a new Blu-ray player for a different reason than we read a book or a website. How we will read it – the strategies we use – will also differ. We are more likely to skim to find the information we need in a manual. Once we find what we need, we might read the instructions carefully to figure out what to do. Then, we stop reading, put the manual down, and carry out the steps. We may have to reread if we get confused or forget what to do.

This is a very different approach than the one we would use to read a book. When we read a book, we usually read cover-to-cover. We read carefully so we don't miss any details because we want to understand the whole story. Sometimes we make connections or create images in our minds as we read to help us better understand what we are reading. Depending on its length, we may put the book down before we finish reading it but we will start reading where we left off.

Good readers are flexible and responsive. This means that they match their reading strategies to their purpose for reading. What types of text do you read? Why do you read them? What strategies do you use to read each of these texts? The chart below is a summary of the main purposes for reading and what each entails.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose for reading</th>
<th>What it looks like</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For enjoyment</td>
<td>Usually student-selected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows students to choose a variety of genres and forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows students to pursue what interests them while developing reading skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To experience something new</td>
<td>Students make connections between their personal experiences and those of people around the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn more about themselves and others</td>
<td>Students reflect on what they’ve read and express opinions and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students develop a sense of their personal values and make sense of the world around them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To gain information</td>
<td>Students use the features of informational texts to gather, analyse and apply what they’ve learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand issues</td>
<td>Students develop a sense of perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students pose questions, acknowledge other points of view, critique the opinions presented and support opinions with evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To appreciate writing</td>
<td>Students respond to text in ways other than written answers to apply what they’ve learned in new contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To appreciate use of media to communicate</td>
<td>Students respond to a variety of media formats (e.g., infographics, political cartoons, videos, etc.) and react to how the format supports the meaning of the message.</td>
</tr>
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* Chart adapted from: A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4-6, p. 11.
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