Understanding and Supporting Refugees:

A Guide for Teachers

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Introduction

- **Overview:** Emphasizing the importance of educating students about refugees and displaced people.
- **Goals:**
  - Foster empathy and understanding.
  - Provide age-appropriate explanations.
  - Encourage inclusive behavior to make displaced students feel welcome.

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Section 1: Elementary School (Ages 5-10)

1.1 Explaining Refugees and Displaced People

- **Simple Definition:** Use language appropriate for younger students, explaining that refugees are people who had to leave their homes because it wasn't safe.
    - **Who are refugees?** Refugees are people who had to leave their homes because something very bad or scary happened where they lived, and they weren't safe anymore. This might be because of war, violence, or natural disasters like big storms.
    - **Why do they leave?** Sometimes, there are fights or wars that make it dangerous for people to stay in their homes. Other times, there might be problems like not having enough food or clean water. So, they have to find a new place to live where they can be safe and take care of their families.
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- **Storytelling:** Introduce stories of children who had to leave their homes and start a new life in a different place.
    - **Example:** A picture book like *"The Journey"* by Francesca Sanna, which can visually and emotionally engage students.

1.2 Activities

- **Art Activity:** Have students draw what "home" means to them. Then, discuss how it might feel if they had to leave their homes.
- **Empathy Exercise:** A role-playing activity where students imagine they have to pack a small bag with their most important things. Discuss what they would take and why.

1.3 Making Refugees Feel Welcome

- **Welcome Card Project:** Create welcome cards for new students from different places, including words in their language if possible.
- **Classroom Inclusion:** Encourage students to invite new students to join games or activities.

1.4 Supplementary Materials

- **Books:** *"My Name is Sangoel"* by Karen Lynn Williams, which tells the story of a Sudanese refugee.
- **Videos:** Short, animated videos that explain the concept of refugees in a child-friendly way.

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Section 2: Middle School (Ages 11-14)

2.1 Explaining Refugees and Displaced People

- **Expanded Definition:** Discuss why people become refugees, touching on conflict, persecution, and natural disasters.
    - **Who are refugees and displaced people?** Refugees are people who are forced to leave their country to escape danger, such as war, persecution, or natural disasters. Displaced people may not leave their country but are forced to move away from their homes for similar reasons.
    - **Why do they become refugees?** People might become refugees for several reasons:
        - **Conflict and War:** In some countries, there are wars or conflicts that make it too dangerous for people to stay. For example, in Syria, many families had to flee because of the ongoing war that made their cities unsafe.
        - **Persecution:** Sometimes, people are treated unfairly or violently because of their religion, race, or political beliefs. For instance, in Myanmar, many Rohingya Muslims were forced to flee because they were persecuted for their religion.
        - **Natural Disasters:** Natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, or droughts can destroy homes and communities, forcing people to leave. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, many people had to leave their homes because entire neighborhoods were destroyed.

- **Historical Context:** Introduce historical examples, such as World War II refugees, to help students understand the global nature of displacement.
    - **Example:** During World War II, millions of people in Europe were displaced because of the fighting and persecution. Jewish people, in particular, had to flee from Nazi persecution. This led to a large number of refugees who had to find new homes in other countries.

2.2 Activities

- **Research Project:** Students research a country currently affected by conflict and present on the challenges faced by refugees from that region.
- **Letter Exchange Program:** Partner with an organization that connects classrooms with refugee students abroad or in other regions of the country.

2.3 Making Refugees Feel Welcome

- **Peer Buddy System:** Pair new students with a buddy who can help them navigate the school and feel included.
- **Cultural Exchange Days:** Organize days where students can share and celebrate cultural aspects of their backgrounds, including food, music, and stories.

2.4 Supplementary Materials

- **Books:** *"Refugee"* by Alan Gratz, which weaves together stories of refugees from different eras.
- **Documentaries:** Short documentaries about young refugees that provide personal insights into their lives.

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Section 3: High School (Ages 15-18)

3.1 Explaining Refugees and Displaced People

- **In-Depth Analysis:** Discuss the political, social, and economic factors that lead to displacement, including global conflicts and human rights issues.
    - **Who are refugees and displaced people?** Refugees are individuals who flee their home countries due to well-founded fears of persecution, war, or violence. Displaced people may not cross international borders but are forced to leave their homes due to similar threats, including environmental factors.
    - **Why do people become refugees?**
        - **Political Conflict and War:** Conflicts, such as civil wars, proxy wars, or political uprisings create unsafe environments. *For example, the ongoing proxy war in Sudan has forced millions to flee their homes to avoid violence.*
        - **Persecution:** Some people face persecution based on their ethnicity, religion, nationality, or political opinions. *For Example, Palestinian have been persecuted in numerous ways by their oppressors for their ethnicity, has led to millions being displaced in and out of Palestine since 1948.*
        - **Human Rights Violations:** In some regions, governments may engage in oppressive practices, targeting specific groups or individuals. *For instance, in Venezuela, political instability and economic collapse have driven many to seek asylum abroad.*
        - **Environmental Disasters:** Climate change and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts, can displace large populations. The Sahel region in Africa, for instance, is experiencing severe droughts, leading to food shortages, and forcing people to migrate.
- **Case Studies:** Use real-life case studies to analyze the challenges faced by refugees, including legal hurdles, cultural adaptation, and the impact on mental health.
    - **Syria:** The civil war in Syria, which began in 2011, has resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in recent history. Over 6 million people have fled the country, seeking asylum in neighboring countries and beyond.
    - **Venezuela:** Economic collapse and political turmoil in Venezuela have led to a significant exodus, with millions seeking refuge in Colombia, Brazil, and other South American countries.

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3.2 Activities

- **Debate and Discussion:** Organize debates on topics such as asylum policies, the responsibilities of host countries, and the ethical implications of displacement.
- **Service Learning:** Encourage students to volunteer with local organizations that support refugees and displaced people, allowing them to connect theory with practice.

3.3 Making Refugees Feel Welcome

- **Advocacy Projects:** Students can develop campaigns to raise awareness about refugee issues in their school or community.
- **Mentorship Programs:** High school students can mentor younger refugee students, providing academic and social support.

3.4 Supplementary Materials

- **Books:** *"The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives"* edited by Viet Thanh Nguyen, which includes essays by writers who are refugees.
- **Films:** Movies like *"The Good Lie"* or *"Human Flow"* by Ai Weiwei that provide a deeper understanding of the refugee experience.

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Section 4: What Teachers and Schools Can Do

4.1 Creating an Inclusive Environment

- **Professional Development:** Training for teachers on trauma-informed practices and how to support refugee students.
- **Inclusive Curriculum:** Incorporating diverse perspectives, including refugee stories, into the curriculum.

4.2 School-Wide Initiatives

- **Welcome Committees:** Establish committees to help integrate new students, with a focus on those from refugee backgrounds.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with local refugee resettlement agencies to provide additional resources and support.
    - IRC
    - Local churches/mosques/NGOs

Section 5: Ask Guiding Questions to *Build Empathy and Understanding*

1. How would you feel if you had to leave your home suddenly and could only take a few things with you?
2. How do you think it feels to leave behind family, friends, and everything familiar?
3. How do you think students who are refugees feel about going to a new school in a different country?
4. How can learning about different cultures and backgrounds help us understand refugees better?
5. What can you do to make a refugee feel more welcomed if they moved to your neighborhood or school?

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Section 6: Further Considerations

1. Universal Themes: Discuss resilience and empathy, focusing on experiences everyone can relate to, without spotlighting individuals.

2. Use Stories and Literature: Introduce books or stories about refugees or immigrants, keeping the conversation general.

3. Promote Empathy and Understanding: Use role-playing or similar activities to help students understand different perspectives.

4. Discuss Historical and Current Events: Frame discussions within a broader context, like history or current events, rather than individual experiences.

5. Highlight Contributions: Emphasize the positive impact of refugees and immigrants, showing the value of diversity.

6. Encourage Open-Ended Questions: Use a “question box” for anonymous queries, ensuring no one feels put on the spot.

7. Create a Safe and Inclusive Environment: Reinforce that the classroom is a safe space where diversity is valued and respected.