

My Life as a Refugee

One teen's journey from a war-torn country to a new life in America

About the Story

Lexile: 990L

For qualitative complexity factors,
go to the Story tab.

Learning Objective: to synthesize ideas expressed in a poem with those in a nonfiction text and an informational text about refugees

Key Skills: cause and effect, key ideas and details, text features, vocabulary, inference, synthesis

Essential Questions:

- What forces people to leave their homelands?
- What challenges do refugees face?
- What responsibility does the world have to refugees?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:
R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.

My Life as a Refugee
How one teen journeyed from a war-torn country and started a new life in America
By Kristin Eaton

Nonfiction

Headed to Safety
For days, Shahrak and his family waited, scared and uncertain, at the airport. Night after night, Shahrak's stomach ached, his family's lives were in jeopardy. Then, at last, they were selected on a plane. Finally, they were headed to safety.

A Long Conflict
The Taliban is a violent extremist group that took control of Afghanistan in the 1990s. Under Taliban rule, freedoms were taken away. Women were banned. Many basic rights were taken away, especially from women and girls. Women could not hold most jobs or go anywhere in public without a male relative. Girls older than 15 were forbidden from attending school.

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Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Article and poem read-alouds
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Differentiated article:

- Lower-Lexile version

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "Rescue at the Water's Edge"
- "Malala the Powerful"

Literature connections

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- KWL Chart
- Writing Planner: Reaching Out a Hand
- Poetry Discussion Questions: "Mediterranean Blue"
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

20 minutes

***Note to teachers:** The article, informational text, and poem should be handled with special sensitivity, especially if you have students in your class who are refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, or internally displaced people. We suggest beginning with the [“Words Matter”](#) table from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to better understand terms related to refugees, migration, and asylum. [The UNHCR website](#) also offers explainer animations on basic concepts, facts, and figures, which you may wish to watch yourself in preparation for your lessons, in addition to a plethora of curriculum materials and guidance for teachers working with refugee children in the classroom.

Do Now: KWL Chart (10 minutes)

- Hand out the **KWL Chart** from Scope Online or have students make their own KWL Chart. Have them fill in the first two columns: “What I Think I Know About Refugees” and “What I Wonder About Refugees.” Invite students to share their lists. (Students should leave the third column, “What I Learned About Refugees,” blank for now.)

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions and complete the practice activity as a class. Highlighted words (all in the first article): *extremist*, *forged*, *fretting*, *harbored*, *optimism*, *refuge*, *ushered*. Optionally, print or share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity before class. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud are embedded in the interactive slides.

2. Reading and Discussing

60 minutes

“My Life as a Refugee”

- Have a volunteer read the **As You Read** box that appears on page 19 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.

- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the **lower-Lexile version** of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the article again and respond to the following close-reading questions.

Close-Reading Questions

(20 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **What is life like in Afghanistan under the Taliban's control?** (cause and effect) *Those who live in areas under Taliban control are forced to follow oppressive rules. Music, movies, and TV are banned. Women and girls are forbidden to go to school or have careers, and can only travel about in public if accompanied by a male relative. The Taliban is a violent extremist organization, so people live in fear of attacks and punishment.*
2. **What is the connection between the Taliban, the United States, and Afghanistan?** (key ideas and details) *On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States, killing thousands of people. The Taliban harbored these terrorists within Afghanistan, so one month later, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and set up a new government. The U.S. military remained in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years, fighting the Taliban, and left in the summer of 2021.*
3. **Why was there a surge of Afghans fleeing Afghanistan in August 2021?** (key ideas and details) *In 2020, the United States and the Taliban made a peace agreement—an ending to the nearly 20-year war between them. But as soon as the U.S. military left, the Taliban began seizing control of Afghanistan again. As a result, thousands of Afghans fled their country.*
4. **What do the statistics in the text feature “What to Know” help readers understand? What number or statistic was most impactful to you?** (text features) *The statistics in the “What to Know” text feature help readers understand that Afghan refugees like the Khalilbeak family and the many others who fled Afghanistan in 2021 are not the world's only refugees; there are multiple crises on multiple continents causing people to flee their homes. The author tells us that number is 100 million, the highest number in history, but it can be hard to understand what a number that big really means. The information that 100 million represents more than 1 in every 100 people globally may be more impactful.*
5. **Author Kristi Eaton writes that “refugees must navigate life in a new and often unfamiliar place.” What does the word *navigate* usually mean? Based on context clues, what does *navigate* mean as it is used in this sentence? How has Tulsa helped Shahrukh's family and other refugees navigate life in America?** (vocabulary, key ideas and details) *To*

navigate is to find the way to a place. A person might use Google Maps to navigate while driving. In the context of the sentence provided, navigate means “to make your way through a difficult or complicated experience.” Many people and organizations have helped Shahrukh’s family and other refugees navigate life in America: Catholic Charities helps them find housing, jobs, and enroll in school. Tulsa’s school system provides school supplies and emotional support systems. The City of Tulsa provides bus passes and driving classes to refugees, and community members volunteer to drive refugees to places they need to go.

6. **Eaton writes, “Today, Shahrukh serves as the main translator and guide for his parents. It’s a big responsibility, but Shahrukh insists that he wants to help. ‘It’s my turn,’ he says.” What do you think Shahrukh means when he says it’s his turn? (inference) Shahrukh likely means that his parents have helped and guided him and his siblings in countless ways as they’ve grown up and that now, during a time when his parents need help from him, he is happy to give it.**
7. **Consider Shahrukh at the end of the article. What kind of attitude does he have about life? (key ideas and details) Shahrukh’s attitude is positive and hopeful: He is excited about learning to drive from his new friends and is making plans for his future, like going to college and becoming a pilot. He feels optimistic because he sees the United States as a place where people can learn anything and pursue any dream.**

“How to Be Welcoming”

- Read the informational text as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View. Then have students answer the following critical-thinking questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Do any of the six suggestions in “How to Be Welcoming” seem especially interesting or doable to you? Which one seems the most challenging and why? Do you have any other questions or ideas? Answers will vary.**
2. **Consider the section “Be a Friend.” Striking up a friendship or even a conversation with someone, especially someone who is different from you, can sometimes be awkward and require a bit of courage. Why do you think this is so? Why is it important to do it anyway? Students might say that it can be hard or intimidating to talk to someone who is different from you because you’re not sure what you have in common with the person, you’re afraid of asking “dumb” questions, or you might not speak the same language. Interacting with people who are different from you is important because it can introduce you to new ideas and give you a better understanding of the world and the people in it. It can also help you realize how similar you are to**

people with whom you might not think you have much in common. Talking to someone who is new to your community can help that person feel welcome and less lonely.

3. **Why is it important to learn about refugees?** *Students may say that it is important because refugees are people in crisis who need help. Learning more about their lives can evoke empathy and kindle support.*

“Mediterranean Blue”

- Direct students’ attention to the inset photo and caption beneath the poem. After reading the caption, have students find Palestine, the Mediterranean Sea, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe on a map.
- Have students listen to poet Naomi Shihab Nye read her poem aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Reread the poem. Then use Kylene Beer’s Pointed Reading Strategy to dig deeper into the poem:
 - Have students read the poem silently to themselves, underlining three words or phrases that feel most important to them—in meaning, in sound, or in the images they create in the reader’s mind.
 - Read the poem aloud one last time, with students joining in on the parts they have underlined.
 - After reading, have students turn to a partner and share why they chose to underline the parts they did.
- As a class, discuss the following questions.

Poetry Discussion Questions

(7 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **What does the poet want readers to understand about seeking refuge?** *The poet wants readers to know that seeking refuge can be a dangerous, frightening, and sad experience that requires great courage. The poet refers to refugees who do not know how to swim crossing the sea on rafts. She describes her father, who was a refugee, swimming “through sorrow.” She says that refugees are “the bravest people on earth right now.” (Answers will vary.)*
2. **What does the poet want readers to understand about what happens after finding refuge?** *The poet wants readers to understand that even after finding refuge, people face many challenges. She describes her father as having something inside him that was “always paddling home,” perhaps referring to how he always longed for the place he came from and the people he left behind. She describes the sea as “too wide for comfort,” suggesting, perhaps, that the vast*

body of water separating people from where they came adds to feelings of separation and homesickness. The poet also writes that those who have found refuge have “nowhere to receive a letter for a very long time,” referring to the sense of disconnection from home, family, and friends that people who have found refuge may experience. In addition, the poet wants readers to understand that after finding refuge, people still need help; that is what she means when she writes “And if we can reach out a hand, we better.” (Answers will vary.)

3. **Why do you think the poet titled her poem “Mediterranean Blue”?** *Perhaps the title refers to the color of the Mediterranean Sea and also, with the word “Blue,” to the feelings of sorrow felt by those who cross that sea as refugees. (Answers will vary.)*
- Have students fill in the last column of their **KWL Chart**, “What I Learned About Refugees.” Invite students to share their lists.

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete the **Writing Planner: Reaching Out a Hand**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the prompt on page 24 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Connected readings from the *Scope* archives to build knowledge about September 11 and the Taliban:

Narrative Nonfiction: [“Rescue at the Water’s Edge”](#) (September 2021)

Narrative Nonfiction: [“Malala the Powerful”](#) (October 2020)

Literature connections—novels and graphic novels that explore the experiences of refugees and displaced persons:

Displacement by Kiku Hughes

Escape from Aleppo by N.H. Senzai

Illegal by Eoin Colfer

Inside Out & Back Again by Thanhha Lê

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park

The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani

Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga

The Only Road by Alexandra Diaz



Paired Texts, pages 19-24

Featured Skill: synthesis

The Red Pencil by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Refugee by Alan Gratz

Shooting Kabul by N.H. Senzai

We Are Displaced by Malala Yousafzai

We Are Not From Here by Jenny Torres Sanchez

We Had to Be Brave by Deborah Hopkinson

When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed

The Year the Maps Changed by Danielle Binks