

Mia's Refugee Card



SUMMARY:

Children read an imaginary story and engage in a discussion on identity and refugee experience. They learn about a refugee experience of a girl named Mia and engage in creative work making welcome posters or “Welcome to our school” pebbles to help refugee children joining their school feel welcome and accepted.



Main age group(s) for activity or activities

8-10



Time needed

2 x 45 minutes



Materials needed

A variety of ID cards that students are familiar with (e.g teacher's ID, passport, club ID badge etc.), map to show Mia's journey from Sarajevo to Novi Sad, pens, paper, paints etc., OR pebbles with acrylic pens and acrylic paints



Objectives

- To enable students to begin to learn about the importance of social identity.
- To help students understand what a refugee or displaced person means.
- To help students realise that being different is sometimes very hard to manage.
- To consider how students can make refugees / displaced persons, or people who are just different, feel welcome and accepted.

Resources

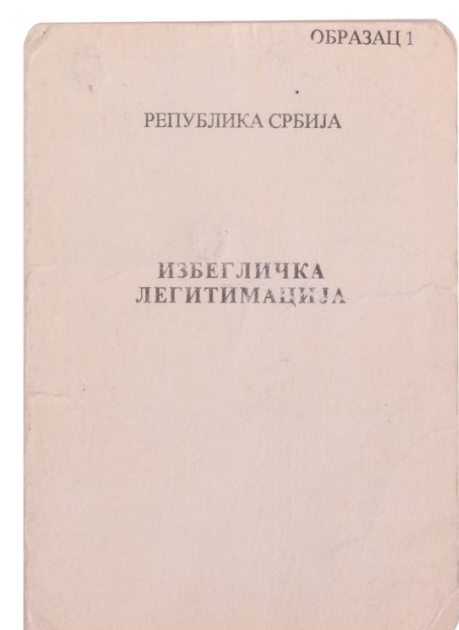
Refugee ID Card

In April 1992, my family and I left Sarajevo and arrived in Novi Sad—it was there I got this refugee identification card. The refugee ID card allowed me to move freely around Novi Sad.

Back then, I saw it not only as a confirmation of my new refugee identity but also as an opportunity to explore the city where I had previously stayed only in passing. For my family and me, it represented awareness that we saved ourselves and got the chance to rebuild our lives on new foundations.

This ID reminds me of some bad moments, such as the encounters with people on the bus who would say, “go back to where you came from”, but I also associate it with wonderful times spent with my new friends from class, who accepted me as one of my own. Today, this piece of paper with a picture of a ten-year-old me is there to make sure I never forget to be gentle towards that little girl who is still somewhere inside, asking why did the war have to happen.

Mia (F), b. 1982 (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

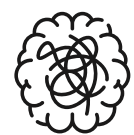


CATEGORIES



Themes

Becoming and being a refugee, identity (who I am - emerging and changing identities), finding safety, rebuilding (lives)



Emotions and feelings

Fear, sadness, hope, connection



Types of objects

Documents



Methodologies

Brainstorming, discussion, handwork, individual work, art

Short background

Mia was an ordinary 10-year-old girl whose life was turned upside down by the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet she survived and was able to lead a new life whilst never forgetting the 10-year-old girl who 'is still somewhere inside'. Mia's story demonstrates the resilience of children when facing unimaginable horror and is a reminder to us all that small acts of kindness towards one another can go a long way in supporting children who have suffered such a great deal.

Prep work by teacher/educator

- Find out how many different faiths and languages are represented in the class.
- Check if there are any new students who are refugees in the class / school and contact parents/guardians to inform them what the lesson is going to be about so that they can decide if they want their child to take part in the activities.
- Find out how many child refugees and asylum seekers are in the world and in their country and work out the percentage of population that these numbers equate to.¹
- Print off a map (from Google) of the route from Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Novi Sad in Serbia.

¹ You can research this starting with: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> (Accessed: August 22, 2024, 13.50)

Activities

Step 1 – Talking about identity

Show students your own ID card, passport or other cards such as driving licence, EU card, health card etc. After that ask them:

- 1 Which other types of people would have different kinds of identity cards?
(Record students' answers. They might include examples such as: mum and dad for work, policemen, head teacher, sports coach, doctor, etc.)
- 2 Why do you think these people need ID cards like this?
- 3 Why do you think ID cards are important?
(Stress the safety aspects of being shown or having an ID card.)

Step 2 – What is a refugee?

- Introduce the word **refugee** and ask if anyone knows what it means. This is one explanation you could use to describe it:

- Refugees are people forced to flee conflict or persecution who cross an international border.²
- Explain how many refugees there are in the world and how many there are in their country.
- Tell them what percentage of the population are refugees and ask students to think about that for a moment. Is it a large percentage?
- If it is adequate, tell the students that there are refugees in their school too.

Step 3 – Imaginative reconstruction of Mia’s flight from Sarajevo

Read Mia's Journey, a short imaginary story based on a personal story from the War Childhood Museum's collection, to students (available in Annex 1 for printing). Don't mention to them that the story is imaginary just yet. After reading, ask some or all of the following questions:

- 1 Which parts of Mia's story made you feel sad?
- 2 Were there any parts that made you feel angry? Which and why?
- 3 Do you know of any child and their family from your community who are refugees?
- 4 What would you take with you if your family had to leave their home quickly?
- 5 How do you think Mia was feeling when her mum told her the news?
- 6 Do you think that it was fair that Mia had to leave her home, school and friends?
- 7 Was any of this Mia's or her family's fault?
- 8 Why do you think that Mia's mum was so keen to keep her identity card safe?
- 9 What would YOU have put in your backpack to take with you?

2 The explanation is cited from: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugees#:~:text=A%20refugee%20is%20someone%20who,risking%20their%20life%20or%20freedom.>
(Accessed: August 22, 2024, 10.54)

Step 4 – Mia’s identity card

- Remind students of the discussion about ID cards and explain that, in wartime, ID cards are even more important because people could be stopped at any time and asked to show their ID cards.
- Ask the students to say what they think should go on these identity cards. Make sure they mention photograph, name, age, and address.
- Now ask what else they think Mia would have needed on her ID card. (Students might suggest nationality, religion, race, ethnic group etc.).
- Hand out card, pencils, crayons etc. and ask students to do one of the following:
 - a) design what they think Mia’s identity card would have looked like, or
 - b) draw what they would have put in their backpack to take with them.

Step 5 – Mia’s life in Novi Sad

- Explain to the students that the story they previously read and discussed was an imaginary story which was based on the real personal memory that Mia has shared with the War Childhood Museum together with her refugee ID card that she preserved from the wartime.
 - Introduce Mia’s actual refugee ID card by handing out copies of the photograph of it and the personal story Mia shared with the War Childhood Museum (available in Annex 2). Read the story to the class.
 - Ask students to highlight in one colour all the good things about her new life in Novi Sad and highlight in another colour the bad things about her new life in Novi Sad.
 - Students can now share their findings and teacher/educator can moderate a short class discussion about other aspects of Mia’s life in Sarajevo that she might have missed.
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Optional activity - Social identity and personal identity

- Explain to the students the difference between social identity (what the state or country thinks they should know about you) and personal identity (those parts of your personality that make you a unique individual, e.g. being good at sport, an optimist, shy, avid reader).
 - Remind students that Mia now had a new identity, new address, and new country, and lived in a different type of area.
 - Ask students the following question: “From the evidence in her personal story we just read and which you’ve underlined with different colours, what sort of personality do you think Mia had and what aspects of her personality helped her adapt to her new life?”
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Step 6 – Making our refugees and displaced children feel welcome

NOTE: It is important that these actions are taken not only for refugee children who are new to the school, but for ALL new children who arrive in school. This will ensure that refugee children are not singled out, which could cause bullying and resentment later on.

Students could:

- Find out how many different languages are spoken in their locality.
- Make 'welcome' posters in multiple languages and include a variety of those spoken in their locality.
- Paint 'Welcome to our School' pebbles in multiple languages to give to new pupils who arrive at school, maybe include chocolates and a pencil case with pens, pencils (see example of welcome pebbles in Annex 3).
- Put signs up around the school in the majority languages of their school.
- Ask the head teacher to send out newsletters in the majority languages of their school.
- Ask the school to introduce artists from countries where refugee children in their locality originated from.
- Ensure that food in the dining hall reflects different cultures and faiths.

ANNEX 1

Mia's Journey

It was 8.00 am one morning at the beginning of March 1992 when 10 year old Mia woke up. Everything was strangely quiet. No traffic buzzing up and down the street, no people shouting to each other from one apartment window to the other, and no children scurrying down the street below, desperate to catch the bus for school. She opened her curtains and looked out of the window. Just in the distance she could see the glint of the river Miljacka that flowed right through the centre of her city, Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. You could cross it by so many different and beautiful bridges, but Mia's favourite was the bridge that led directly to a famous place in history, where an archduke was killed and World War I began.

Thinking of war made Mia feel really sad and she suddenly remembered why the streets below were so quiet. It was April 5th and, a few days ago some men had gone up into the hills that surrounded Sarajevo, (our city is just like a circus 'Big Top' with a circus ring surrounded by seats that rise high into the rooftop, she sometimes thought). Some men had begun to dig holes and there were rumours that they had taken guns up there ready to shoot people down in the city below. People were calling them snipers. That's why nobody is out and about, she thought. Maybe the rumours are true?

Mia's school teacher had begun to explain the differences between children at her school. For instance, Mia was actually a Bosnian Serb, her friend Meliha was a Bosnian Muslim, and her best friend Ivona was actually a Bosnian Croat. It was really difficult to understand why these differences seemed to matter so much.

Just then her mum opened Mia's bedroom door, came in and sat down on her bed.

"I have some important news for you, Mia" she said.

Mia noticed that her mum had been crying.

"Very soon we are going on a long journey to a place called Novi Sad in a country called Serbia. We took you there when you were a baby so you won't remember it much. Just some time ago, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were in the same Republic called Yugoslavia, but now the countries are splitting up. First a country called Slovenia voted to become independent, then Croatia voted for independence, and now the results of Bosnia and Herzegovina's vote are due tomorrow morning. The President of Serbia doesn't like this, and it's probably going to start a war. So, your dad and I think that it will be safer for us all to go to Serbia.

Your dad and I packed all your clothes and I have our Yugoslavian passports and ID cards packed safely in my suitcase. But just to be sure, I've also sewn your name and the name of our contact in Novi Sad inside your puffa jacket. Oh, and I've left room in your backpack for you to take one of your favourite things with you. But it has to be small enough to fit in your backpack as well as your water and food for the journey."

"Does this mean that we are refugees like Anne Frank was?" asked Mia. "We learned about her in school. Her family fled from Germany to the Netherlands, but then she was caught and died." Mia started crying.

"Will this happen to us, mum?"

Mia's mum was too upset to answer, so Mia smiled, gave her mum a hug and said "Don't worry, mum, we will be alright. We've got each other."

After her mum had left the room Mia sat back in bed and thought "life for me will never ever be the same again".

ANNEX 2

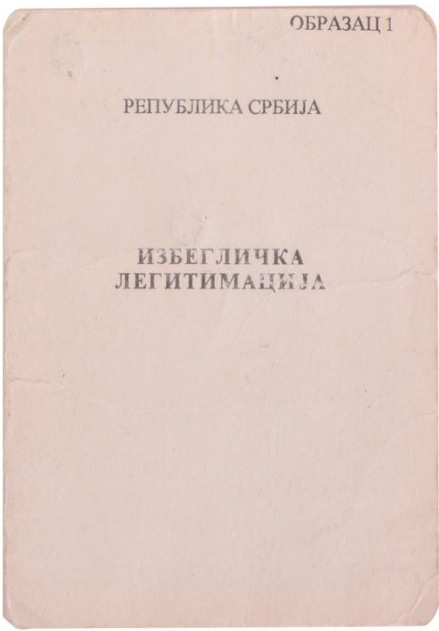
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ANNEX 3

Painted pebble – Welcome to our School example

