

TAKE ACTION: OUT OF ALEPPO



In 2013, under the pretense that they would take an extended holiday and return in a month, Mohammad Shasho's family left their home in Aleppo, Syria. As the conflict in Syria worsened, the temporary flight became a permanent escape. Mohammad's father—a surgeon—traveled to Germany on a fragile raft. One year later, Mohammad, his mother and his four siblings endured the treacherous journey to Turkey by raft and were reunited with their father and husband in Berlin. As Mohammad and his family work to reclaim normalcy, a deadly attack on a Berlin Christmas market fills them with the defeating, familiar sense that danger lurks everywhere. In his film *Out of Aleppo*, Mohammad lends a voice to new friends who, after traveling to safety without their families, do not know if they will ever see their loved ones again. In documenting the stories of these “unaccompanied minors” as they attempt to work through the complex set of emotions and the traumas they have endured, a particularly harrowing aspect of this humanitarian crisis emerges. Our 17-year-old filmmaker explores loss, art and hope in this documentary. When thinking about these issues of citizenship, nationality, family and safety, consider Articles 9, 13, 14, 15, and 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 9:

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 13:

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14:

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15:

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 27:

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

For Teachers: Research

Ask your students to consider the movement of people around the world, today and over time. Throughout the history of humankind, there have been refugees—people escaping violence, famine or persecution to find a new, peaceful life. From the early humans to biblical times, from ancient civilizations to colonial times till now, there have always been people wandering the globe in search of a safer, better, freer life. Ask students to research some of these diasporas. Choose up to 5 examples of refugees from around the world and throughout time. What were these people escaping from? Where did they go? What was their journey like? What or who met them when they arrived? In what ways have they assimilated over time? In what ways have they managed to maintain and preserve their cultural ways? Create a map of the earth and trace their journeys in different colors. What do these groups have in common? How do their experiences differ? How are the treatment and attitudes toward refugees different in different places or different time periods? What have these different groups of refugees brought with them, or contributed to their countries of residence?

For Students: Reflect

Mohammad and his family struggle with their identity as Muslims and Syrians in their new home in Germany. They are grateful for the safety and support they enjoy but miss their homeland, a feeling that is particularly poignant because they know they may never be able to return to Syria. Consider your own experiences. Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in, that you didn't belong? Have you ever felt like a "stranger in a strange land?" How can you relate to the struggles and heartache of Mohammad and his family? In his film, Mohammad uses poetry and theater as therapy for his feelings of exclusion, confusion and loss. How have you used art to express and counteract big feelings in your own life? Choose an artistic modality—film, music, visual art, poetry or performance—and create your own response to Mohammad's film, based on your personal reflections. As you are creating your piece and thinking about your or your family's experiences with exile, movement, loss and discovery of home, consider the articles listed from the UNDHR above, particularly Article 13, (2): "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

For All Of Us: Respond

1. Sign a petition or start one of your own to raise awareness of refugees, refugee aid, and global policies that affect refugees at: www.change.org
2. Every day, volunteer rescuers who call themselves the White Helmets rush to the scenes of bombings to pull people out from under the rubble and carry them to safety. They have saved hundreds of thousands of lives in the war zones of Syria. Learn more about what they do and how to support their efforts here: www.peoplesmillion.whitehelmets.org/donate/peoples-million
3. Host a community or private screening of *Out of Aleppo* to raise awareness of this humanitarian crisis and how storytelling through film can help deepen our understanding of global issues. Email info@bykids.org for more information.
4. Support Syrian refugees by hosting a community bake sale, book sale, or charity drive for the International Rescue Committee: www.rescue.org
5. Unsure of how to help? Write a letter to a refugee telling them they're not alone, even from worlds away: my.care.org/site/SPageNavigator/CARE_SpecialDelivery.html