

Fighting Discrimination



Specific Scholastic Issue

This card addresses the problem of discriminatory behaviours inside and outside the school environment, with emphasis on those which are based on race and country of origin.

The recent refugee crisis and the existence of minority groups (e.g. the Roma) have sparked heated debates and have accentuated the problem of racism and xenophobia in societies. Schools in Europe have been increasingly admitting foreign students as refugees and immigrants enter European countries every day, provoking ambivalent reactions. The issue of racism has not stopped to concern schools and the wider social community. Racism remains one of the main causes of violence and bullying at school, and can be based on race, but also appearance, gender, school performance, weight, social status, sexual orientation, and anything that is felt to deviate from an assumed norm. Racist behaviours very often stem from ignorance, lack of information or proper education and are further highlighted inside an individualistic society which is characterized by an unwillingness or incapability of placing oneself in another's position.

Discrimination is an outright human rights violation. Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights contains a prohibition on discrimination with respect to any of the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Convention. Discrimination in the school environment has devastating



Project Number: 2020-1-FR01-KA201-080108

consequences for the student who is a victim of it (negative attitude toward school, lack of motivation, marginalization, dropping out, mental health problems, etc.) but also has a negative impact on the school and the social community as a whole (it fuels bullying incidents, stereotyping, prejudices, xenophobic attitudes, shows a lack of flexibility and openness to the other, etc.). Therefore, fighting discrimination is not just a duty laid on schools by the European Convention of Human Rights, it is of the utmost importance for personal well-being and academic success.

Bearing all these into consideration, it is clear that tackling discrimination at school is of major importance. According to the Council of Europe, schools should tackle discrimination by promoting democracy, respect for human rights and citizenship. Human rights, democratic citizenship and EU values must, in other words, find their way into the school curriculum and students should be encouraged to discuss controversial issues, raise their voices and become actively involved in school matters. These can be achieved by prioritizing linguistic and intercultural as well as multicultural competences and by cultivating the capability for understanding multiple perspectives. This inclusion of other perspectives and understanding of 'otherness' lies at the core of the notion of empathy as a key skill that needs to be cultivated among students. It promotes genuine open-mindedness, it fights belief rigidity at its core, helps students develop critical thinking skills and has recently been proven to facilitate the learning process and thus help academic success.

Objectives

- Promotion of EU citizenship, EU and democratic values and human rights
- Enhancement of empathy outside school
- Development of empathic behaviour at school

Emotional Intelligence Areas

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Empathy
- Internal motivation
- Social skills

Learning Path

The activities shown in this card help students understand what it feels like to be someone else. They have been tried with groups of students who would generally be thought to be 'privileged' socio-economically, but who live in a society which has been struggling with an unprecedented refugee crisis, and which still nurtures racist and discriminatory behaviours in all its forms.



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It is recommended that the teacher starts with the activity SAILING TO A NEW LAND which asks from the students to place themselves inside an extreme scenario of having to embark on a voyage towards a new homeland. There is no need for activating prior knowledge at this point, because we want the students to be caught 'by surprise', by asking them to engage in this imaginative role play and feel what it is like having to flee towards an unknown destination keeping only the basics.

SAILING TO A NEW LAND was chosen for its immediacy and experiential aspect that helps students learn about human rights through an imaginative role play and through interacting with each other. Given that students have few chances of learning about such matters in other ways other those provided by formal education and school curriculum, the particular activity was selected because it places the students at the centre of the learning process with minimal teacher interference and because it can help practice strong communication and social skills. It also helps students see the connection between basic human needs and wants and the establishment of human rights. Young people in Greece are commonly regarded as not particularly interested in politics and citizen issues. Through this activity, they are taken into the heart of citizenship, which is individual contribution to a larger community. Moreover, the activity implicitly touches on the issue of migration, since it asks from students to pack up their most precious "things" and set sail for a new land, something which can help in sensitizing participants about the plight of migrants and refugees.

At first, we ask the students to imagine that they are getting ready to set sail for a new continent. No one is living there now, so when they arrive, they will be responsible for establishing a new country. Each group is given an envelope with a specific number of cards (depending on the number of groups formed and the number of students) which show different Needs and Wants: they include things such as a computer and Internet access, opportunities to rest and play, a comfortable home, protection from abuse, doctors, parents, etc. The teacher explains to them that these are the things they will be packing to start their life in the new country. Each group opens the envelope, shares out the cards and studies them for a while. The teacher allows some time to the students to settle, study the cards, etc. Simple props can be used to simulate a boat, such as desks and chairs. Then, the teacher begins narrating a story with the help of some music and sound effects.

At the beginning, the journey is very pleasant. The teacher can put on relaxing music and describe a serene atmosphere where the sun is shining and the sea is calm. Students can close their eyes and



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imagine their new life and the new land for a minute. As the story progresses, the passengers of this imaginative boat are faced with dangers and extreme natural phenomena (the teacher can use wind and storm sound effects to bring the scenario to life as much as possible). They need to gradually throw some of their cards overboard so that they keep their ship floating and safe. Every time this happens, the students must be quick to decide among them what to keep and what to throw overboard. The teacher can remind students to not discard items they will most probably need to survive in their new country. Students are given some time to discuss and make decisions.

During this stage, students have the opportunity to practice their social skills, since they need to discuss with their classmates the content of the cards, decide what is more or less important for their survival in their new life, defend what they think is right or compromise if they are persuaded against something they think is more important. They also soon realise what their true priorities in life are, and might end up facing very interesting dilemmas (e.g. doctors or parents?) , a procedure which builds their self-awareness and order of life priorities as well as their internal motivation in life. Interestingly, by immersing themselves into this imaginative story, they can also feel the emergency of fleeing refugees usually experience, the need to fight for their survival, to make harsh decisions and share their thoughts with others towards achieving a common goal.

At the end of the activity, the teacher can announce that the students have reached the new continent safely and are ready to build their new country. Each group can 'disembark' the ship and they are asked to make a collage of their remaining cards onto a cardboard paper, which they later present to their classmates explaining the importance of their choices together with the reasons behind their selection.

By putting all the collages together, students can make comparisons as to what each group has decided to keep as the most essential. We can ask students questions such as:

- What are the similarities and differences they see?
- Do they have all they need to survive to grow and properly develop?
- Which things would they have liked to keep but decided were not essential?
- What is their conclusion?
- Do all the people have the same wants and needs?
- What do they think of their final choices?



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- What do they think will happen next?
- Will they be able to survive in this foreign country?
- Will they be able to grow and properly develop?
- How did the group decide what to throw overboard?
- Are they surprised by the outcome?
- If they were to repeat this activity a second time, would they discard different items?

It is important to let students assess the activity freely and allow them the time and space to express their opinion, make comments, talk about what they have experienced, their feelings, what they have realized, if they have changed their heart about an issue, etc. It is a very important step of the activity and should not be left out.

When our students were asked to evaluate the activity, they said that what they found most interesting was the difficult choices they had to make, first individually and then in the group discussions (for example, they had to choose between having doctors or their parents with them in the new land). They started their journey by keeping superficial things such as personal gadgets and recreational cards but soon realized they needed to set priorities and think seriously about what they needed for survival and development as individuals and members of a community. The feedback received about the activity was positive so we would highly recommend this teaching source. Students enjoyed it because they had to feel, act and negotiate, they were active, and the role play felt engaging and even suspenseful at times. It helped students take the matter of human rights seriously as the activity resembled a personal experience.

As a second follow-up, the teacher can hand out copies of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights to each group. They can point out that simply told human rights are based on human needs: the things that people need to survive, grow, properly develop and live a dignified life. Each group studies the Declaration and find connections between their cards or even some of the cards they discarded and basic human rights. Do they have all they need?

We can then ask students:

- Which cards represent things we might want but don't have to have for survival?
- Which cards represent things we have to have for physical survival?
- Which cards represent things we might need to grow and develop well?



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- What would happen in this new country if you didn't have _____? (Choose several different examples from the cards.)

As a further follow-up to this activity the teacher can show students a short video about human rights (e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDglVseTkuE>).

This activity is taken and adapted from the following sources:

- <https://www.britishcouncil.gr/sites/default/files/life-skills-developing-active-citizens-en.pdf>
- http://www.eycb.coe.int/composito/chapter_4/4_27.asp

After trying this activity and have the students understand the foundation and the importance of human rights, the teacher can then try a less 'pleasant' activity, called CAN I COME IN?, which takes the matter of human rights onto another level. This activity is based on a role-play about a group of refugees who try to escape to another country. It directly addresses the plight of refugees and the social and economic arguments for giving and/or denying asylum.

Given the huge impact of the refugee crisis which is profoundly felt across Greece and other European countries over the recent years, this activity offers students the opportunity to experience and feel the plight and agony of refugees who find themselves running away from their homelands in order to seek a better fate elsewhere. It helps students understand through role-play and empathy the refugees' struggle as well as their expectations for a better life and their profound need for the fulfilment of their basic human rights. More specifically, the activity addresses the rights to seek asylum in other countries, the right of non-refoulement (the right not to be returned to their country where they can risk persecution or death) and the right to freedom from discrimination. The main strength of the activity is that it makes the students actually feel what it is like to be another person and place themselves into other people's positions. This element has been further strengthened by making use of an interactive video which again places the students into the refugees' position in a direct manner. Photographs showing scenes from the Greek borders full of refugees can also help bring the activity to life.

News stories of migrants and refugees arriving in Greece by all imaginable means are often broadcast on a daily basis and the country is struggling to tackle the issue. Public opinion is divided between those who claim that refugees should be accepted and accommodated and those who support that



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the country cannot afford to open the borders. Teenagers in our country are notorious for their lack of information on current affairs and their indifference towards important political and social issues. What's more, a part of the population seems to embrace a far-right to extremist perspective towards migration and hold views that could foster racism and discrimination. It was considered, therefore, of vital importance to choose an activity that touches on the issue of the refugee crisis which will put students inside the matter and help them see the situation through the eyes of those directly affected.

CAN I COME IN is an activity that fosters respect to the plight of refugees and their human rights, but is not one sided or simplistic and involves looking at the situation through multiple perspectives. The role play involved promotes empathy and encourages experiential learning and learning by doing, not just listening to the teacher or being lectured about the issue which would be far less effective in sensitizing young people.

This time, it would be advisable to activate prior knowledge of the students around the theme of refugees and migration. The teacher can ask students what they know or have heard on the news about the issue and have a short brainstorming session. Students can say why they think there are refugees, what causes people to flee their homeland, where they come from and the countries that they go to. This will help us later decide how to guide the debriefing and evaluation, and what additional information we may need to provide at the end of the activity. The points made can be written on a large sheet of paper or flipchart to refer to in the discussion later on. The teacher should not explain much at this point or make detailed comments on students' statements. The aim of this task is to see how much students know or think they know and use this information after the end of the activity to compare and juxtapose it with what they have learnt.

The teacher and students can set up the scene by using simple props such as chairs and desks to simulate the crossing border. Photographs showing real scenes from refugees gathered in country borders and border officials can be shown to enhance understanding of the situation.

Then, the teacher starts the activity by explaining the scenario to the students. There are a number of refugees on the border between two countries. We can use fictitious names of countries (such as New Lizesaint and Northern Deslands) or real names (i.e. Greece and Turkey). In our version, real



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countries were used. A large number of refugees have arrived. They want to cross into Greece. They are hungry, tired and cold and have travelled a long way from their home countries, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Some have a little money and only a few have identification documents or passports. The border officials from Greece have different points of view about the situation. The refugees are desperate, and use several arguments to try to persuade the border officials to let them in. The students are divided into three groups: the refugees, the border guards, and some witnesses/journalists. The groups need not be equal in number. In fact, it is better to divide them in proportion to real situations, so the group of refugees should be the largest in number, and those of the guards and the observers could be much smaller.

The teacher distributes the role cards and gives students time to reflect on their roles, discuss with other members of their group and prepare their arguments for the role play. Tell the "refugees" and the "border officials" to work out a role for each member of the group and what their arguments will be. Advise the observers about giving feedback. When the students are ready, they can start the role play. The teacher should ideally play a minimal, if any, role here and just let the students improvise based on their cards and arguments. Time for the role play can vary, but it is thought that approximately ten minutes should be enough for the roles to emerge and the situation to fully unravel.

After the role play comes to an end (that does not mean there should be a definite outcome out of the situation), the teacher can first ask the observers to give general feedback on the role-play. What they have witnessed, how they felt, and how they would narrate the events. Then we get comments from the other groups of students about how it felt to be a refugee or a border official. Did the activity help them see things from another perspective? The class then can move on to a general discussion about the issues raised and what participants have learnt.

We can ask questions such as:

- How fair was the treatment of the refugees?

Refugees have a right to protection under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Were the refugees given their right to protection? Why/why not?

- Should a country have the right to turn refugees away? When? For what reasons?



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- Would you turn someone away if you were a border official? What if you knew they faced death in their own country?
- How are refugees met at the borders of your country? Are any of their human rights being violated? Which?
- What can and should be done to stop people becoming refugees in the first place?

As a follow-up to this activity, students are divided into groups of no more than three and they are asked to share a computer. We then make use of Channel's 4 interactive video "Two billion miles". In the video, students follow in the footsteps of migrants and refugees as they face the hardships of months on the road. They have the chance to choose their route, make tough decisions and watch as the outcome of their decisions comes to life. The video uses real footage and is very realistic. We could let students start their journey from scratch if they wish and see what happens if they choose a different course of action. Each group can draw their route on a copy of a world map given to them at the beginning of the activity. Different groups of students compare the outcome of their journey. If there is time left, we can ask them to find some basic facts about refugees in their country. They can check how many refugees there are in their country and in other European countries, their main countries of origins and which countries they mainly want to go to. Give students a couple of useful websites they can find the information in, such as Amnesty International or the unhcr.org website to facilitate the research.

Students reported that they found the role of the refugee particularly emotional and were surprised to feel what it must be like to flee one's country and then be treated like enemies and outcasts. The video also helped towards this direction and reportedly felt very life-like and real. CAN I COME IN is an activity that we would definitely recommend. It is easy to set up, simple in its development and highly effective without requiring complex preparation. It forces students to see the critical issue of migration and refugee crisis through other people's eyes, namely those directly affected. It transforms a news story into a personal experience. It helps link emotions to arguments and develops social and communication skills.

Taken and adapted from:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/can-i-come-in->



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Channel's 4 interactive video:

<http://twobillionmiles.com/>

After having tried these series of role plays with our students, we chose to give them the chance to express themselves through art, and specifically through poetry and dramatization. As a second good practice, we used the poem "Home" by Warsan Shire to further sensitize students about the plight of refugees and then asked them to respond to the poem artistically in any way they wished. Our students chose to write their own poems.

"Home" describes vividly all the harsh realities of the life of a refugee. It is inspired by the tragic individual stories that formed part of the European refugee crisis and is a moving documentation of all the hardships these people go through in their way to a better future.

This poem was an excellent starting point for a discussion on the refugee crisis, the violation of human rights, xenophobia, violence, belonging, and displacement. It is written in a direct tone that touched the students and it enhances empathy as it explains in a few stanzas all the suffering and pain these people endure. The students realize the emotions that people who experience war go through. Poetry and generally art can be great practices in order to promote EU values. In this case, the immediacy of art makes it easier to create a sense of empathy which leads to the understanding of the position of weaker people and of people who are deprived of their human rights.

As a follow up activity, students discussed the living conditions of the refugees and how the locals treat them. They also watched videos from refugee camps in our country. Then they wrote their own poems and shot a video of a reading aloud of the poem directing it themselves.

Poetry can have a transformative power and research shows that there is a link between the reading of literary writing and the development of empathy. Poetry focuses on the psychology of characters and their relationships, it challenges our preconceptions and prejudices, it can reveal how people in real life actually think, feel, and behave, and it makes us use our minds and hearts to understand the intentions and motivations of the narrators. Thus, it is of great importance for schools to adopt such practices in order to promote empathy, EU values and the protection of human rights.



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Good Practice Highlighted in the Area 2 (Teaching Source)

- [Sailing to a New Land](#)
- [Can I come In?](#)
- [No one leaves Home \("Home" by Warsan Shire\)](#)

Best Practice Video



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