



LESSON – DALYA’S OTHER COUNTRY SYRIAN REFUGEES: AN INFORMATION AND NEWS LITERACY LEARNING CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

Syria has always been at the heart of the post-World War II struggle for the Middle East. Prior to the start of the Arab Spring in 2011, however, it was viewed as one of the more stable countries in the region, with a strong, autocratic and youthful leader in President Bashar Al-Assad. That mask of stability has slipped and today, after seven years of violent conflict that has left hundreds of thousands of Syrians dead, the country is at the nexus of every tension in the region: Iran versus Saudi Arabia, the United States versus Russia and even Islamist extremism’s resistance to secularism. Add the historical legacy of colonialism, as well as complex political systems that encompass tribal allegiances, monarchies, dictatorships and nascent democracies, and the complexity and horror of the ongoing war in Syria demands an examination of the ways in which policy issues play out in the real world.

Among current policy considerations for the countries bordering Syria, and increasingly nations farther afield, including the United States, are the ethics and efficacy of responding to atrocities committed in other countries and the challenge of absorbing millions of refugees. At the same time, nations, globally, are confronting the challenge of getting accurate information in an era of actual and imagined “fake news.”

This lesson addresses these combined global and media studies concerns by using clips from *Dalya’s Other Country* to deepen students’ media analysis skills. It asks students to grapple with multiple types of news and information sources, including an examination of the ways in which documentary films can humanize statistics, policy statements and news reports.

Video clips provided with this lesson are from:

[*Dalya’s Other Country*](#), which documents the experiences of a mother (Rudayna) and her high-school aged daughter (Dalya), both Syrian refugees. It helps students understand their choice to leave Syria and lets them see and hear current U.S. debates about Muslims through their eyes.

The lesson can be handled as a stand-alone or in conjunction with lessons for

[*The War Show*](#) (a group of young friends who became Arab Spring protesters/citizen journalists; the choice to risk standing up for justice)

[*Last Men in Aleppo*](#) (men who became White Helmet rescue workers; the choice to stay and remain a civilian, even when trapped under bombardment and siege)

It is also an excellent complement to the lesson for POV's 2015 feature [Return to Homs](#) which tells the story of armed resistance by the Free Syrian Army. Using all the films will give students a more diverse and comprehensive picture of Syria and the issues raised by the current situation.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn about the history and current status of the war in Syria
- Reflect on the human impact of current U.S. policy governing Syrian refugees
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of different types of news or information sources and understand why checking diverse sources is important

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12, college

SUBJECT AREAS

Current Events

English/Language Arts

Global Studies

Information Literacy

Media Literacy/News Literacy

Political Science

Social Studies

MATERIALS

- Internet access
- Film clips and equipment to show them
- Printed handouts of assigned news stories (if not reading on tablets or computer screens)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

2 class periods

FILM CLIPS

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcXBDd5hW-o&list=PL-I6g0KL2UVB-pEolhbHCxOVKSPUW7KsL> (3:27 min.)

The trailer provides an overview of the film and gives context for the clips.

Clip 1: “Why They Left” (1:10 min.)

The clip begins at 2:15 with a head shot of Rudayna driving. It ends at 3:25 with mother and daughter bowing in prayer.

Dalya's mother, Rudayna, explains why she and Dalya left Syria.

Clip 2: “Going to School” (1:10 min.)

The clip starts at 16:00 when Rudayna says, “When I came here...” and ends at 17:10 when she says, “Otherwise I’m going to be by myself.”

Rudayna talks about the challenges of adapting to life in the United States and going to college.

Clip 3: “American Experiences” (5:02 min.)

The clip starts at 18:50 with Dalya and a friend walking in a mall. It ends at 23:52 when Rudayna says, “We always teach them the right way and let them choose.”

Dalya has trouble finding halal food at the mall, recalls life in Syria, plays basketball and asks her mother for permission to attend her school’s winter formal (with boys), while Rudayna speaks of the values she is trying to instill in her daughter.

Clip 4: “Wearing the Hijab” (4:20 min.)

The clip begins at 47:40 with a flag being raised. It ends at 52:00 after Dalya tells her mother, “I don’t agree with you.”

A speaker at school talks about being a Muslim American woman; Dalya and her mother listen to a news report in which Donald Trump casts all Muslims as terrorists; Dalya and her mother argue about wearing the hijab.

Clip 5: “College Applications” (3:25 min.)

The clip starts at 54:20, when Dalya’s brother, Mustafa, asks, “What do you think the next step should be?” It ends at 57:45 with a group of girls singing.

Dalya’s brother gives her advice about her college application essay; the process leads her to think about her identity and her dreams. Dalya participates in the school talent show and has fun with friends getting ready to graduate.

ACTIVITY**Step 1: Introduction**

Begin the lesson by asking students to jot down quickly their answers to this question: If you had to find credible information about the current situation in Syria before class ended, where would you look? After 15 seconds or so, invite students to share their answers. What types of sources did they list? Why do they believe those sources would be credible (and what is the basis for that belief)?

Step 2: Analysis Tool

Choose an analysis framework that suits the experience level of your students and review it with them:

- F.A.I.R.: Fair, Accurate, Inclusive (of essential context and relevant perspectives) and Reasonable (logical)
- The [CRAAP Test](#): Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose
- CARS: Credibility, Accuracy, Reasonableness and Support

- [I'M VA/IN](#): Independent versus self-interested sources; Multiple versus lone or sole sources; source Verifies rather than asserts; Authoritative/Informed versus uninformed sources; Named rather than unnamed sources

Step 3: Practice

To practice using the chosen framework and also learn about Syria, have students independently read:

“Why Is There a War in Syria?” (BBC, April 7, 2017) www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229 - This is a general background piece in the form of a Q&A.

Then, as a class or in small groups, ask students to use the analysis framework to examine the piece. Have students focus on identifying the specific evidence they use to reach conclusions about each aspect of the framework.

Step 4: Screen the Film Clips

To help students see how much a second, divergent source can add to the picture, introduce the film. Show the film trailer so students have context for the clips they'll see.

Then show the clips, pausing very briefly after each one for students to process what they've seen.

After all clips have been shown, have students look again at the BBC backgrounder piece* and respond to the following:

1. List key facts or assertions in the article that the film clips affirm.
2. List key facts or assertions in the article that the film clips contradict.
3. What insight does seeing/hearing an individual human story add? What do you know or understand now that you didn't after only reading the article?

* Less advanced students might reexamine only the section on refugees rather than the entire piece.

Step 5: Discussion

Review responses to the three items and discuss what types of information (both factual and emotional) a documentary can convey that a typical news story does not. Help students see what they miss if they only look at headlines.

OPTIONAL Step 6: Practice

Assign students to analyze a second information source, using the news analysis framework and also thinking about how the documentary adds to what the information source says. Select a source that is different in form from both the BBC overview and the documentary film. Use your own source or one or more of the [UNICEF Monthly Situation Reports on Syrian Refugees](#) (research reports).

Step 7: Wrap-Up

Have students do a short free write: “What I learned today (or from this lesson) about Syria is... and that matters because...”

As time allows, invite students who are willing to share what they wrote with the class to do so. Discuss the connections to current policy debates over refugee bans.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

Repeat the lesson with *The War Show* and/or *Last Men in Aleppo*. Also consider following up with the lesson from *Return to Homs* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/returntohoms/lesson-plan/>)

Imagine that you are one of the young people featured in one of the films. It’s seventy years in the future and you are now a great grandparent. Your descendants are looking back on the destruction of Syria and asking what you did and why. Write a letter to them that explains your choice to stay/leave, how you saw the situation, what was most important to you.

Hold a pro/con debate: Until the United States can guarantee that no potential terrorists will fail to be identified, the country should close its borders to all Muslim refugees.

Choose a public policy issue related to Syria (e.g., the United States should send ground troops to protect Syrian civilians, or the United States should accept more Syrian refugees) and ask students to research it and write policy briefs reflecting their own conclusions. Have students share their briefs with their members of Congress and/or the president.

Read a novel or poem by a Syrian author. Compare stories told in print to those told in documentaries like the ones in the lesson. Check: <https://arablit.org/for-teachers/syrian-writers/> or <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/syria/articles/10-syrian-writers-you-should-know/> for suggested books.

RESOURCES

POV

Dalya’s Other Country: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/dalyasothercountry>

The War Show: <http://www.pbs.org/thewarshow>

Last Men in Aleppo: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/lastmeninalleppo>

Return to Homs: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/returntohoms>

4.1 Miles: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/4point1miles>

The sites include general discussion guides, as well as additional activity ideas and resources.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Fake News

Factcheck.org: "How to Spot Fake News"

<http://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>

NPR: "Fake or Real?: How to Self-Check the News and Get the Facts"

<http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/12/05/503581220/fake-or-real-how-to-self-check-the-news-and-get-the-facts>

Project Look Sharp

www.projectlooksharp.org

School Library Journal: "The Smell Test: Educators Can Counter Fake News with Information Literacy. Here's How."

<http://www.slj.com/2017/01/industry-news/the-smell-test-educators-can-counter-fake-news-with-information-literacy-heres-how/#>

School Library Journal: "Truth, Truthiness, Triangulation: A News Literacy Toolkit for a 'Post-Truth' World"

<http://blogs.slj.com/neverendingsearch/2016/11/26/truth-truthiness-triangulation-and-the-librarian-way-a-news-literacy-toolkit-for-a-post-truth-world/>

Syria

The Guardian: "Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests"

www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline

Institute for War and Peace Reporting: "Syria Stories"

<https://syriastories.net/>

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner: "Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic"

www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx

U.S. Department of State: "Syria"

www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/sy/

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RH.11-12.5 Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

SL.11-12.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

W.9-10.2d Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

W.11-12.2d Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and was past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.