

Classroom Lesson - Fridtjof Nansen

What's this lesson about?

Fridtjof Nansen began his career as a scientist and polar explorer. Later, he would use his position and fame to promote social and political causes. His crowning achievement was the Nansen passport, which allowed refugees to travel across borders, as they could now prove their identity. Human rights topics explored in this lesson include the right to seek asylum and the right to freedom of movement. Students will learn about Nansen, the Nansen passport, and participate in a fictional classroom scenario to help them understand the position of a refugee, and what it means to seek asylum and freedom of movement. They will also be asked to identify current refugee crises in the world to connect the past to the present.

Learning Goals

- Students will learn what it means to be a refugee and why the Nansen Passport was a milestone for refugee rights
- Students will understand what social entrepreneurship is.
- Students will understand why it is important to help and care for others.

Materials

- Lesson slides
- Image of refugees (example: [Rohingya of Myanmar](#))
- Computer with internet access and screen to stream video for class
- Poster paper to label 4 corners

Time: 40 minutes +

Steps:

1. Introduction (3 min)

- Using the lesson slides, show students [this image](#) of members of Myanmar's Rohingya ethnic minority walking through rice fields after crossing the border into Bangladesh (or choose an image of your choice depicting a current refugee crisis)
 - Ask students to examine the photograph and jot down what they see, who they see, and what they think is going on in this picture.
 - Have students share their thoughts and observations with the class, or turn and share with a partner
 - Reveal the true story behind this photograph: "This photograph shows members of Myanmar's Rohingya ethnic minority walking through rice fields after crossing the border into Bangladesh near Cox's Bazar's in the Teknaf area. It was taken on September 5, 2017."
- Set the stage for what students will be learning today. Key points to mention are:
 - Fridtjof Nansen began his career as a scientist and polar explorer.



- Later, he would use his position and fame to promote social and political causes.
- His crowning achievement was the Nansen passport, which allowed refugees to travel across borders, as they could now prove their identity.

2. Guided learning (12 min)

- Show students this 6-minute TED-Ed video, "[What does it mean to be a refugee?](#)"
- Use the lesson slides to introduce Nobel Laureate Fridtjof Nansen to students.
 - Nansen developed a program to address a social cause—refugee rights.
 - Organizations that are developed to address social causes, such as hunger, poverty, the environment, are sometimes called a "social enterprise."
 - The people who start these social enterprises are called "social entrepreneurs."
 - Nansen was a social entrepreneur, because he created the Nansen Passport not to earn profit, but solely to address a problem in the world he saw needed action, and directly to help and improve the lives of other people.
- After watching the video and learning about Nansen, ask students:
 - How would you describe each of the following terms in your own words: "migrant," "refugee," "asylum"
 - Where are current refugee crises in the world today? Who is being affected, why, and what is being done?
- Explain: Nansen developed a program to address a social cause--refugee rights. Organizations that are developed to address social causes, such as hunger, poverty, the environment, are sometimes called a "social enterprise." The people who start these social enterprises are called "social entrepreneurs." Nansen was a social entrepreneur, because he created the Nansen Passport not to earn profit, but solely to address a problem in the world he saw needed action, and directly to help and improve the lives of other people.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Migrant - a person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions.

Refugee - a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Asylum - the protection granted by a nation to someone who has left their native country as a political refugee.

3. Four Corners (20 min)

- Set the Stage: Ask students to imagine that a war breaks out where they live and that they live in an area with heavy fighting. What would they do? Ask



student to take a moment to think about it but keep the thoughts to themselves for now.

- Play *Four Corners*:
 - Place signage up in four corners of the room with the following statements:
 - *I would stay here and hope for the best.*
 - *I would flee to a neighboring country.*
 - *I would stay but move to another part of the country that is further away from the fighting.*
 - *I would flee faraway to a safe country.*
 - Repeat the scenario and ask students to move to the corner of the room that states what they think they would do in the event of war. Remind students that there are no wrong answers.
 - Once students have decided where they would go and move to their chosen corner ask them to think about what they chose this option. Have students turn and talk to a classmate to share their thinking. Ask each group to explain their reasoning.
 - Once each group has shared its point of view, make sure the students notice the distribution among the groups. Count out loud how many students are in each group. Is one group larger than the others? Is one much smaller? Do they think this distribution is representative of the reality?
 - Change the scenario and play a few more times. Consider variables such as the lack of identity papers, lack of resources (money, transportation, etc), family considerations, etc.
 - Follow each round with a discussion about why students made the choices they made.

4. Share and reflect (5 min)

- There are millions of refugees in the world today struggling for the right to asylum and freedom of movement. While the Nansen Passport program ended in 1938, Nansen's work was a significant milestone in the fight for refugee rights. As Dorothy Thompson, a journalist in 1938 wrote, "There is no doubt that by and large, the Nansen certificate is the greatest thing that has happened for the individual refugee [...] it returned his lost identity."
 - What is your greatest takeaway from today's lesson on Nansen and what he did for refugees?
 - What is one question you still have about Nansen or refugee rights today?

Teacher resources:

Article: ["Social Entrepreneurship: 7 Ways to Empower Student Changemakers"](#)

Article: ["People Without Papers"](#)

