

Teaching Tips | Family and the Aftermath of War

Essential Question

- How do people define a family and a home in the aftermath of war?

Supporting Questions

- How does violent conflict and war affect the lives of children?
- What is intergenerational trauma?
- What role does civil society play in helping families rebuild their lives after violent conflict or war? Should society play a greater role in rebuilding, why or why not?

Historical Thinking Skills

This resource provides students with the opportunity to practice the following historical thinking skills:

- Analyzing multiple perspectives
- Applying Geographical Literacy
- Understanding Diversity of Historical Experience

Use the following before, while, and after viewing suggestions for engaging students with this resource and with activities related to this topic.

Before Viewing

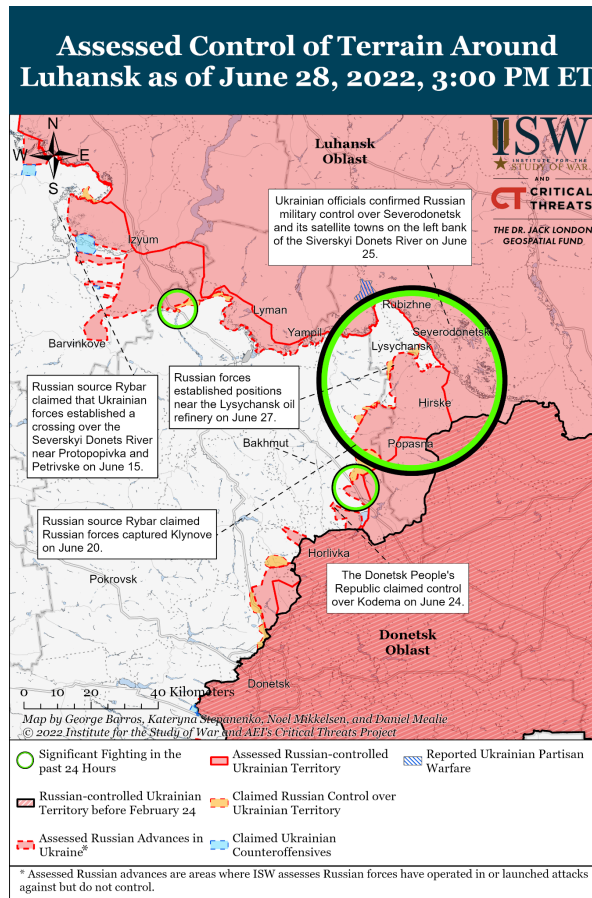
1. Ask students to discuss this prompt as a segue into an introduction for this lesson: “What are the consequences of war on children and their family life?” You may ask students to answer this question as part of a class discussion, small group, or as a short writing assignment.
2. Ask students if they have any background knowledge of the current war in Ukraine. Depending on the depth of their understanding, consider having students create a K/W/L chart by dividing a paper into three sections or creating a three-column Google Doc.

Have students label the first column with K and write the statement under the letter “What do I know about Ukraine.” Under the second column, write a W and the question “What do I want to know about Ukraine?”; in the third column write an L and the statement “What I learned about Ukraine.”

Have students complete columns K and W and explain that the L column will be completed at the end of the lesson.

3. Transition from the discussion and have students in small groups locate Lysychansk, Eastern Ukraine, on one of the two maps provided below and read the background of this area in the [POV Discussion Guide](#) p. 10-11. Ask that they discuss how the information in the discussion guide connects back to the essential and supporting questions.

[Map 1](#), [Map 2](#)



(Source: [Institute for the Study of War](#))

Setting the Context

Explain that before February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, a documentary film was made titled *A House of Splinters*. It takes place in The Lysychansk Center for the Social and Psychological Rehabilitation of Children in the Donbas region of Ukraine, which has been at war with Russia since 2014. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, separatists seized sizable chunks of the primarily Russian-speaking border territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. By the beginning of 2022, 14,000 people, including several thousand civilians, had died due to fighting in the region. The effects of the long battle

have depressed the area considerably. Poverty is rampant, as is alcoholism. Almost all of the children left at the center have parents who are alcoholics.

While filming *A House Made of Splinters*, Lysychansk lay in the government-controlled portion of Luhansk, around 20 km from the frontline (recovered from the separatists in 2015). As of July 2023, the city of Lysychansk fell to Russian occupation.

While Viewing

Educator Note: Explain to students that they will watch four short excerpts from the feature documentary. The scenes chosen were selected to explore the complexity of the essential question for this lesson.

Before viewing the film clips for the lesson, to provide some context to the arch of the documentary story, share this overview from the [POV Discussion Guide](#) (p. 5):

“Near the frontlines in eastern Ukraine, a safe haven provides refuge for children who have been temporarily separated from their parents. *A House Made of Splinters* chronicles the experiences of three displaced kids who, despite the perils surrounding them, find moments of joy and friendship with the aid of dedicated social workers who work tirelessly to protect them from harm.”

As well as the brief biography of the main participants (p. 8 in the Discussion Guide).

Have students watch and listen carefully for critical points in the video that help answer questions you pose. You can ask students to take notes as they watch. They may watch the video more than once as needed.

After viewing each film clip, share the discussion questions, allowing students to debrief their reactions and feelings in a class discussion.

Clip One: 5:52-7:10 (runtime 1:18)

1. The first sentence in this opening film clip is a voiceover from one of the women who staff The Lysychansk Center for the Social and Psychological Rehabilitation of Children. She says, “In eastern Ukraine, people still feel the echo of war. Life has always been hard here, but the war [the annexation of Crimea war] made things even worse.” How do you understand the phrase “the echo of war?”
2. After watching this opening scene, what new information did you learn about this region? How does this information expand your understanding of what home and family might mean to the children and caretakers featured in this film?

3. Why do you think the filmmaker chose *A House Made of Splinters* as the title for this film?

Clip Two: 25:30 - 28:35 (runtime: 3:05)

1. How is the shelter attempting to build a home for these children?
2. What connections do they make with one another? Would you define this as a family?
3. How is this home and family disrupted by the violent conflict around them?

Clip Three: 46:49 - 50:18 (runtime: 4:29)

The narrator shares something she recognizes over her years of working at the shelter in this scene:

“When you’ve worked here for a long time, you start to notice an underlying pattern. A vulnerable child is removed from a broken home and brought here. Parents, who cannot better themselves, eventually lose their parental rights. Time flies. The girl grows up and becomes a mother herself, but times are hard. She also starts drinking. She copies what she saw in her childhood. One day, she returned to our shelter, but now, she’s here to visit her kids. We meet again, and she asks: ‘Do you remember me?’ Yes, I do. I wish I didn’t, but I do.”

1. Ask the students to define, in their own words, the term “intergenerational trauma” using context clues from the opening clip and background knowledge.
2. Share [this definition](#) of intergenerational trauma published by the American Psychological Association. Have them compare and contrast their definitions with the APA definition.
3. Have students share their reactions to this clip within the context of intergenerational trauma either in small groups or in a brief written reflection?

Clip Four: 58:40 - 1:04:51 (runtime: 6:11)

1. In this last scene, we see the transition process of one child out of the shelter. But we also see so much more.
 - a. What stands out to you from this film clip?
 - b. What feelings and emotions does this film clip touch in you?

After Viewing

Review responses to the While Viewing questions above. Then, follow up with questions below and discuss as a class.

1. After watching the four film clips, return to the original discussion on the documentary's title. Ask students to reflect again and share in small groups how they interpret the filmmaker's decision to title this story *A House Made of Splinters*. How does the title engage with the compare and contrast with violent upheaval and desire to maintain or find a family and home?

Taking It Further

1. Research, through reputable news sources, the current status of Lysychansk within the war in Ukraine. With the Human Rights Watch update in mind. In small groups, discuss how the occupation by Russian forces would affect this children's shelter.
2. [Article 50 of The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War](#), passed on August 12, 1949, clearly explains how children in institutions should be protected during war. Contextualize the Geneva Convention: when and why it was created. Present the "General" section to the class as a whole, then divide [Article 50](#) into four sections (Par. 1-4) and have four groups update their section in relation to the current war in Ukraine. What is missing from Article 50 given today's circumstances?
3. Have students research organizations listed in the Resources section of the [POV Discussion Guide](#) (p. 20). If students are interested, have them organize local efforts to support their work.

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1. What new insights emerged for you about the consequences of war on children?
2. How do you think violent conflict and war affect family cohesion? How does intergenerational trauma affect families and family cohesion in the long-term?
3. Do you think civilians, particularly children, should have special protections during wartime? Should the international community hold aggressor nations accountable when children are impacted by acts of violent aggression? Why?
4. In what ways did you see the shelter in Lysychansk create a home and a family for these children?

About the Author:

Blueshift Education

Our work at [Blueshift Education](#) is to develop curriculum, resources, and relevant tools to deepen understanding on social justice issues in order to empower people, foster empathy, and bring about meaningful and lasting change.