

Lesson Plan: The Roots of the Central American Asylum Crisis

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Featured resources

[KQED's The Lowdown: Why Are So Many Central Americans Seeking Asylum in the US? A Graphic Explainer](#)

[Above the Noise: How Does the U.S. Asylum Process Work?](#)



Opening quick write prompt:

What would it take for you to leave your home and seek asylum or protection in another country? What would have to be happening in *this* country? How would you feel about being forced to leave?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the origins and history of why so many people are seeking asylum in the United States from Central America.
- Students will compare/contrast the reasons why people are seeking asylum today vs. why they sought asylum earlier in the 20th century when U.S. asylum law was drafted.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Asylum (n.)	Protection given by a government to someone who has left their own country to escape harm <i>Many people seek asylum in the United States when they are being oppressed or threatened in their own countries.</i>
credible (adj)	Possible to believe, deserving belief <i>Asylum seekers must prove a credible fear of persecution by their own government.</i>
crippling (ad	Causing great damage or weakness <i>Many asylum seekers are also escaping crippling poverty in their home nations.</i>

extortion (n.)	<p>The crime of getting money from someone using threats or force</p> <p><i>"Your money or your life" is a well-known threat of extortion used by some criminals.</i></p>
influx (n.)	<p>The arrival of a large number of people</p> <p><i>The influx of asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle today has its roots in earlier U.S. immigration policies.</i></p>
persecution (n.)	<p>Treating in a cruel and harmful way</p> <p><i>People facing unfair persecution by their governments are often eligible for asylum.</i></p>
plight (n.)	<p>A bad, difficult or negative situation</p> <p><i>Being held in detention before going to immigration court is the plight of most asylum seekers today.</i></p>
To spike (v.)	<p>To increase greatly in a short period of time</p> <p><i>The number of asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle has spiked in recent years due to gang violence.</i></p>

Direct instruction and guided practice

- Define asylum using the definition above to make sure students are starting from a common understanding
- Discuss the quick-write prompt to help students think about the process of leaving your home country and traveling to another country to seek asylum.
- If students need more information about the asylum process in the United States, watch the [Above the Noise video](#), which gives a brief background and history.
- **Transition to independent practice:** Ask students to share what they learned about the asylum process in the video and explain that they will learn more about the origins of why so many Central Americans are seeking asylum.

Independent practice

- Individually or in small groups, students read [The Lowdown post](#), especially the graphic at the bottom of the post.

Assessment/Reflection

- As a class, students respond to the following questions in a discussion or in writing:
 - What is the origins of the serious gang problem in the Northern Triangle of Central America?
 - What role did the United States government play in causing the gang problem? What role do the governments of the Northern Triangle countries play?

- Do you think fear of gang violence should be grounds for being granted asylum in the United States? Why or why not?
- How should the United States government treat asylum seekers from any nation, in your opinion?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/Homework

Students make their voices heard on this issue by contacting their local representatives. For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.