

Grade 5 - Syrian Refugee Family Welcome Video

In response to the refugee crisis in Syria, the Paul Penna community decided to sponsor a refugee family from Syria. In the course of just a few weeks our community raised over \$30,000 to initiate this process and to help this family realize their dream of living in a free country, safe from war. Over the course of the 2015-2016 the Grade Five students learned about the ongoing refugee crisis, as well as how the world responded to it. As part of the Integrated Unit study of government, they explored how both governments and individuals have a responsibility to help those in need. They also explored various Jewish teachings including a text from the Mishnah.

To welcome our family upon their arrival, the students chose to create a video. They thought about what the family will need as newcomers to Canada and to Toronto. They considered the fact that the family would be entering a completely new culture and decided to film short segments on the topics of: The Yearly Cycle in Canada (holidays, events and weather), Popular Culture (music, movies, sports), Fun Things to do in Toronto, Getting around Toronto and Food. They then worked in groups to film short segments that have been combined in a video which will be given to the family upon their arrival later this summer.

To ground the project in Jewish text study, the students learned about the phrase from the Mishnah “על שלושה דברים העולם עומד...”, (The world stands on three pillars, most importantly acts of loving kindness.) Each student created a list of Hebrew nouns and verbs that he or she associates with acts of loving kindness. Then using “Wordle” (an application that creates word clouds), students inputted their lists of words and this collaborative visual representation was the result. The frequency of each word in the students’ lists determined its size in the Wordle.

Through this entire experience, our students gained a deep understanding of why Jewish tradition places such a high value on performing acts of loving kindness, “גמילות חסדים.”

Toronto Star Article Used as Unit Launch

'I made a friend,' young Syrian refugee proclaims as he starts school in Toronto

Ten-year-old is one of the first Syrian refugee children to show up this week in a Toronto classroom as part of Canada's commitment to bring 25,000 refugees here by the end of February.

By: [Louise Brown](#) GTA, Published on Thu Jan 07 2016



Standing in the middle of a bustling Toronto class, surrounded by chatter he does not understand and faces he does not know, 10-year-old Syrian refugee Ibrahim Sultan looks lost.

Yet as his Grade 5 teacher Joanne Mitchell here at George Webster Public School hands him a bilingual copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* — in English and Arabic! — and classmates, many of Bengali and Pakistani background, choose him as their basketball partner and show him around, he is becoming very much found.

This is what young Syria can look like as it begins its way in Canada; wide-eyed and quiet, smiling yet tentative, living with unimaginable memories — old schools bombed to rubble, neighbours blown to pieces — but now bursting to be one of the locals.

“The best thing about my first day? I made a friend,” says Ibrahim — call him Brahim — in Arabic through an interpreter Wednesday on his second day at the school near Danforth Ave. and Victoria Park Ave. With a smile, he points to classmate Hammad Sami, 9, who says he knows the Syrian refugees have come to Canada “because there’s a war there.”



Ibrahim Sultan, centre in blue sweater, lines up outside his new classroom at George Webster Public School in Toronto, where he is starting Grade 5. The Syrian refugee recently arrived in Canada with his family from Lebanon.

Brahim is one of the first Syrian refugee children to show up this week in a Toronto classroom as part of Canada's commitment to bring 25,000 refugees here by the end of February.

His family — mother, factory-worker father and two teenaged brothers — landed in Canada Dec. 18, sponsored by 12 members of a downtown Toronto church called The Meeting House. The group, which calls itself the Hands and Feet Project — “we act as the hands and feet of Jesus,” says real estate agent Lisa Lounsbury — raised \$23,000 towards the required \$31,000, with the rest provided by Ottawa under the “blended visa” sponsorship program.



Ibrahim Sultan, 10, gets settled in his new classroom at George Webster Public School in Toronto, just weeks after arriving in Canada with his family as Syrian refugees.



Ibrahim writes out his multiplication tables during math class at George Webster Public School.

This is the first time in more than three years the boys will have been in regular classrooms since their school back in war-ravaged Homs was blown to rubble. Any education they got in Lebanon's Sabra refugee camp was spotty and Syrians felt persecuted, the family says. Here at George Webster, where students speak 43 languages and staff has experience with refugees such as the current 40 Roma students, "we're not all from one culture, but we work together as a family — that's who we are," says Principal Kim Pividor. The school has part-time settlement workers, a community support worker and free medical services, "and our students are used to the idea that someone may not speak English and they need to take them under their wing."



Ibrahim and his new friend Mammid Sami play catch in gym class.

Brahim's big brothers Mohammad, 15, and Abed Al Basset, 14, are waiting to be assessed later this week so they can start high school. Mohammad says he dreams of becoming a "Canadian doctor so I can be part of Canada." His father Abed Al Jawad Sultan hopes to find a factory job. Mother Raghda is eager to learn English and become "involved," she says through an interpreter.

Here, they are ready to belong. “Brahim said he wants to make friends and he’s afraid it’s going to take a while because he doesn’t understand what other people are saying, but I told him it won’t,” says Michael Homsy, managing director of the non-profit group Friends of Syria, which is supporting sponsored families like the Sultans.



Teacher Joanne Mitchell explains a task to Ibrahim during class on Wednesday.

With two periods of English classes at the school each day, English-as-a-Second-Language teacher Elaine Hick says it won’t be long until Brahim starts cracking the language barrier.

“He’s bright, all right — he taught me how to switch the keyboard into Arabic.”

Plenty of helping hands:



Sponsor Lisa Lounsbury, right, uses the Google Translate app on her phone to chat with Ibrahim and his older brother.



Ibrahim leaps during exercises in gym class led by teacher Joanne Mitchell.

Ibrahim Sultan's family has come to Toronto from Syria on the wings of committed Canadians.

The dozen families from The Meeting House church that sponsored them have divvied up the many tasks involved in settling a refugee family; someone acts as liaison with schools, another provides them with transportation, another takes them to medical appointments, and real estate agent Lisa Lounsbury, who lives in the same Crescent Town apartment tower that the family now calls home, pops down for all manner of questions.

"We found them a three-bedroom, 1,200-square-foot apartment on the 27th floor overlooking the lake and parks and the Victoria Park subway station, and stocked it with furniture and lamps and bedding and Arab food and three laptops for the boys to use for school work, we said — not games." Quipped Lounsbury: "We'll see how long that lasts."

As well, the non-profit group Friends of Syria also supports newly arrived refugee families like the Sultans, and offered son Mohammad a warmer winter coat Wednesday from its warehouse full of donations at the Toronto Port Authority office. Managing director Michael Homsy said his volunteer group will offer ESL classes soon for refugees and hopes to find funding to allow it to ship donated clothes, food and medical supplies to refugee camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, which he calls "the worst place on Earth."

At George Webster Public School, Ibrahim's teacher Joanne Mitchell is making a point of choosing activities that allow for non-verbal communication — like drama — to help Ibrahim connect before he learns English.

"I think it's great the Syrian refugees have come," stated classmate Urshia Sameen, 10, who led Ibrahim to the lunchroom on his first day.

"If they didn't come here, they might die at home," she said. "It's bad there."

Syrian Family's Needs in Canada and Who is Responsible for Meeting Those Needs

[illegible]

Student-Generated Plan for the Video:

1. Small group 'Welcome to Canada' in Arabic
2. Small group 'Welcome to Ontario' in Hebrew
3. Small group 'Welcome to Toronto in French
4. Small group 'Welcome home' in English
5. The Yearly Cycle in Canada (holidays, events and weather)
6. Popular Culture (music, movies, sports),
7. Fun and Free Things to do in Toronto
8. Getting Around Toronto (transit system, neighbourhoods)
9. Food.
10. Whole school 'Welcome to Canada'

Template for Hebrew Component

"צדק צדק תרדוף." The Power of 3

פרקי אבות - PERKEI AVOT 1:2

שמעון הצדיק היה משיירי כנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר, על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים

He (Rabbi Shimon HaTzadik) used to say, The world stands on three things: on the Torah, on worship, and on acts of loving-kindness

פרקי אבות - PERKEI AVOT 1:18

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר, על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על הדין ועל האמת ועל השלום

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, The world stands on three things: on truth, on justice and on peace

Group Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can you see any similarities between Shimon HaTzadik and Shimon ben Gamliel?
- 2) Why do you think that Shimon HaTzadik believes that the Torah is one of the three things the world stands on?
- 3) What would be the three things that you believe the world stands on?

Individual Work

1) Please write 5 – 10 Hebrew words that you would best associate with “Acts of Loving-kindness”

[illegible]