

GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Age range: 11 - 14

Time: 1 ¼ hours

Outline

Two major challenges facing school students in Afghanistan are poor facilities and a shortage of resources. For example, a survey carried out by Oxfam and its partners in 2011 found that only 42% of Afghan schools have a building. Girls are particularly vulnerable in this context.

This activity supports UK students to briefly experience what it is like to learn in an Afghan school and reflect on this experience.

Learning Objectives

- Students participate in a lesson where they briefly experience one or more of the key challenges faced by learners in Afghanistan on a daily basis.
- Students reflect on the challenge(s) by identifying the barriers to learning the challenge(s) impose.
- Students prioritise the needs of schools in Afghanistan based on this learning and make recommendations.

Resources

- Flip chart or A3 paper
- Sticky notes or similar
- Oxfam – 'Getting Started With Global Citizenship: A Guide To New Teachers' (2008) p15
<http://bit.ly/1jKVtNI>
- For further information on education in Afghanistan see Joint NGO Briefing Paper – 'High Stakes. Girls' Education in Afghanistan' (2011)
<http://bit.ly/1s5etcP>

Curricular links

England

KS3 & KS4 Citizenship (2014) – Purpose of study, aims, subject content.

Wales

ESDGC (Choices and Decisions) and PSE (Active Citizenship) – National Curriculum for Wales.

Scotland

Social Studies – Scottish Curriculum for Excellence.

Activity Outline

Teach an Afghan lesson (20 minutes)

This activity begins by asking UK teachers to simulate the learning environment faced every day by students in Afghanistan. The research this activity is based upon is from the report 'High Stakes. Girls Education in Afghanistan' (see Resources).

As this lesson will be an unusual one for UK students, teachers are advised to contextualise it by first showing students the assembly presentation that accompanies this activity.

Here are some of the challenges faced by Afghan students. Conditions in Kabul and other big cities are better than those listed below while conditions in rural areas may be significantly worse. For example, only 8% of schools in Balkh actually have a building.

- You often have a long walk to school – journeys of up to three hours each way are common, particularly in rural areas. Your parents are less likely to be happy about you making the daily journey if you are a girl.
- You are often bullied or harassed by adults on the way to or from school. This is worse if you are a girl.
- It is very likely your school will not have a building. More than half of schools in Afghanistan do not have a building.
- Your school is unlikely to have toilets and washing facilities. This is worse for girls.
- Your school may not have access to safe drinking water.
- Your school may not have adequate textbooks for each lesson and some schools have no books at all.
- Your school may not have desks and chairs.
- Your school is unlikely to have stationery: writing paper, pens and pencils.

Teach part of a regular lesson under as many of these conditions as are possible. This will vary depending on the circumstances, and students should be prepared to reflect on their experience. Where it's not possible to directly simulate conditions in Afghanistan, students could be asked to imagine them.

- Ask the students to imagine they have walked a long way to school; they may be tired and hungry. They may have been bullied or harassed along the way, particularly if they are girls.
- Students will not be able to drink clean water and there is nowhere private or clean to use the toilet. Afghan girls who are menstruating will find this particularly uncomfortable.
- Aim to teach the lesson, or part of it, outdoors. Under a tree may be a suitable location. If it's either very hot or extremely cold students in Afghanistan manage as best as they can (although if the weather in the UK is unsuitable students could be asked to imagine this experience).

- Teach without desks and chairs. Students should sit on the floor. It would be dusty and dirty in Afghanistan.
- Teach without textbooks, exercise books, pens, pencils and other school equipment. You may use a chalkboard and slates, if they are available.
- There should be at least 43 students in the class. Many classes are much bigger.
- The teacher is likely to be a man. There are few woman teachers. Girls may feel uncomfortable about this.

After you have taught some curriculum content bring the students out of role and back to their usual classroom setting.

Reflection (25 minutes)

Ask the students to work in groups and reflect on their Afghan learning experience. Groups could thought-cloud the following questions on flip chart or A3 paper and feed back to the class.

- What were the main differences between the Afghan lesson and the students' usual lesson?
- Was it difficult to learn in the Afghan lesson? Why?
- Do you think it is particularly difficult for girls to learn in the Afghan lesson? Why?

Recommendations (30 minutes)

Ask the students to identify and rank the improvements they would like to make to schools in Afghanistan. Groups should write these, one by one, on sticky notes or similar pieces of paper. Once they have finished writing down all their ideas they should pick the **nine** most relevant for answering the following question:

In order of priority		
1		
2	2	
3	3	3
4	4	
5		

- **How can schools be improved in Afghanistan to encourage girls to stay at school and complete their education?**

Students should discuss and rank the **nine** improvements they have listed in a 'diamond 9' (see Oxfam – 'Getting Started With Global Citizenship: A Guide To New Teachers' p15)

When they have completed this groups should feedback their top 3 recommendations to the class and suggest why they think these are particularly helpful for girls.

Are these improvements sustainable?

Finally, students should assess whether the top 3 improvements they have identified will be sustainable if poverty in Afghanistan remains so widespread.

They should do this by asking 'will xxxxx succeed if many people remain poor?' and feed back their ideas to the group. They could then revise their 3 top recommendations if they have changed their minds.

Alternatively this discussion could be organised as an 'opinion continuum.'

See <http://bit.ly/1jKVtNI> (pg 12) for how to organise this activity.

Follow up ideas

Completing this activity will provide students with the learning they require to begin the activities in the accompanying action guide.

Teacher content background notes

The executive summary (pgs 4-6) of 'High Stakes Girls' Education In Afghanistan' (2011) provides an outline of the particular challenges facing girls attending school in Afghanistan and recommendations for making improvements.

The challenges facing all students, girls and boys, in Afghanistan are daunting so it may be difficult for students to identify the particular vulnerabilities faced by girls.

The report highlights the following issues that you may wish to discuss with your students. These compound the challenges that affect both girls and boys, making girls attendance at school more vulnerable.

- A lack of female teachers is a major obstacle to girls accessing education. This shortage of female teachers is acute in rural areas.
- Distance to school is another major obstacle to girls' attendance at school. In one province enrolment dropped 16% for every extra mile a girl is required to walk to school. As girls approach adolescence distance, along with mixing with male students and male teachers, assumes greater importance.
- Combined with the distance to school, girls often face bullying or harassment on the way to school or near the school grounds.
- The lack of school facilities has a disproportionate impact on girls, particularly the lack of access to sanitation.

These issues occur against the background of extensive poverty and the corrosive impact it has on school enrolment and attendance.