
DAMASCUS GATE

Grade Level:

Elementary (K-5)

Middle School (6-8)

High School (9-12)

[Damascus Gate](#) restaurant opened in January of 2019, an initiative of Dr. Ahmad Nasef, who came to Milwaukee from Syria and now assists Syrian refugees to establish themselves.

The S2U documentary short tells the story of the American Dream, through the experience of those who have lost everything, only to be embraced in a new home. To welcome and support the Syrian refugees who are the heart and soul of the restaurant, 30 Serve 2 Unite students from Mt Horeb High School in rural Wisconsin travel two hours each way to enjoy a lunch of Syrian fare at Damascus Gate. While breaking bread together, they heard stories of how their hosts came to flee their beloved home, and what it means to them to be accepted here in the United States.

Resources: [Damascus Gate short documentary](#) (On [The Gift of Our Wounds YouTube channel](#))

Useful teaching strategies that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards:

- Identify and define key vocabulary words: displacement, hopelessness, rejection, refugee, compassion, migration, asylum, acceptance, welcome, cuisine.
- Have students do an activity called "Think-Pair-Share," where they work with a partner to discuss refugees in our society and how we might be able to help them get established in a new place. and/or discuss food that they associate with their culture and its importance.

1. Prior to showing the video above, briefly explain the primary themes of the video. Use some or all of the following questions (include at least one writing prompt). Define hopelessness and rejection, inspiration and acceptance, and discuss how those feelings can affect someone.

- Create a [KWL chart](#) (a chart that highlights what they know, what they want to know, and what they learned).
- Discuss problems that can arise that may lead people to be forced from their homes and out of their countries.
- Discuss the benefits to individuals and community when refugees are accepted and empowered.
- Discuss how cooking and eating together is important to culture.
- Have students generate questions about what they want to learn and chart those questions in the W sections of the chart.

2. After watching the video, engage students in a dialogue about Ahmad, Mahmoud, Damascus Gate restaurant, and refugees in general using some or all of the following questions (include at least one writing prompt):

- What is special about Damascus Gate restaurant?
- How important is it for people to feel a sense of home?
 - What positive effects does a sense of home bring?
 - What negative effects does a sense of homelessness bring?
- What did Ahmad think of the students who visited the restaurant?
 - What benefits does interest in new cultures bring to both the person interested and to the people whose culture it is?
- Where did Ahmad go to medical school, and what was the condition he had to comply with in order to do so?
 - Did Ahmad have freedom of speech when he lived in Syria?
 - How did the lack of social media affect Ahmad's view of his country?
- When did Mahmoud first visit the United States, and why?
 - Why and how did his family decide he should stay?
 - Why did Mahmoud feel happy to move to the US?
 - Why did he feel sad too?
- How did Mahmoud feel about going to a new school at first?
 - How did his new peers feel about him?
 - How important is it to feel accepted?
 - What can happen when people feel rejected?
- What gave Ahmad the idea of starting Damascus Gate restaurant?
 - What factors make it very difficult for new refugees to start restaurants or other businesses on their own?
 - What benefits do new businesses bring to society?
- What does Ahmad think of American people in general?
 - What does "faith in humanity" mean, and how can it affect our relationship with society?
- Who is Nawad, and what is her role at Damascus Gate?
 - How did the news of the students' visit make her feel?
 - Nawad doesn't speak English, and the students don't speak Arabic. What are two ways that they were able to communicate?
 - What is the secret ingredient in Nawad's cooking?
- What ways to empower refugees did Ahmad talk about?
- What did Mahmoud think about the students' visit to the restaurant?
 - What's the difference between learning about a new culture in person via food and conversation as opposed to just reading and studying?
 - What does Mahmoud believe people can learn when they interact in person over meals and storytelling?
- What were the students' reactions to visiting Damascus Gate?

3. Complete the L section of the chart by indicating what was learned. Look back at the questions in the W section to see if those questions were answered or if more information is needed.

Extension Activities

- Find restaurants in your area that are owned/operated by refugees, or restaurants that make a point of hiring refugees. Organize a field trip for your group to have a meal there.
 - Find local non-profits/charities that serve refugees and/or philanthropists that could pay for the meal.
 - Ask if any of the refugees involved in the restaurant are able to share the meal with your group and talk about their stories.
 - Brainstorm ways to document those stories and share them with the world.
 - After the meal be sure to have each student in the group who enjoyed the meal write a review for the restaurant and post to Google/Facebook/Yelp/etc. Include lots of photos!
 - Brainstorm other way your group can leverage social media and other tech to bring more people to the restaurant.
- Organize a service project that advocates for refugees in your area.
 - Research the benefits that our society receives when accepting refugees.
 - What misconceptions are there about refugees?
 - How can we address them?
 - Example data: [Heritage Report Shows Refugees Are Not a Major Threat](#)
 - Compile a list of individual refugees like Ahmad, Mahmoud, and Nawad, and explain how they make countries that welcome them a better place.
 - Example: [Young Physician's Initiative](#)
 - What can your country do to better support refugees?
 - How can your group bring this message to the public?
- Find organizations in your area that support refugees.
 - Organize a fundraiser for them.
 - See what sort of volunteer help they need and organize ways of providing it.