

From Refugee to Business Owner: How One Young Man is “Gaming for Good”

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- understand the challenges and suffering that refugees endure and to have empathy for their situation.
- appreciate the beauty and selfless acts of love that motivate family support and how it can empower us and others to achieve our goals.
- see how the support of individuals, organizations, and businesses working for a greater cause can empower people to do amazing things.
- consider the importance of humility in becoming more aware of other people and organizations who have helped us, and giving credit to them.
- see how setting and achieving positive goals is possible when we make realistic plans to achieve our goals, live with perseverance in working through obstacles, and have the help of others.
- understand the importance of faith in ourselves and others, especially when something seems so impossible and out of sight, which enables us to persevere through obstacles.
- become inspired to encourage and help others strive for their goals now and throughout their lives.
- see the wisdom in using technology for the good of ourselves and others.

Primary Virtues / Character Traits

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Family Dedication / Support: complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Faith: a firm belief or confidence in something, in our self or someone else, even where there is not yet proof

Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Humility: modest opinion of one's own position; an honest self appraisal of one's strengths and weaknesses; a lack of false pride; realizing that we don't have all of the answers and being open to learning from others

Leader Introduction

For the past several decades, civil wars have raged in South Sudan, a small country in East Africa and although the last civil war ended in 2018, people are still dying from continued violence, the lack of food, water and medication.

The wars and desperate poverty of South Sudan have driven 3.5 million people to seek refuge in other countries. Most of these refugees have found sanctuary in refugee camps built in nearby countries. Their trips often last for days of walking with very few breaks through dangerous tracts of desert or jungle, leaving nearly all of their personal belongings behind, and hoping to find shelter.

Accommodating refugees in the tens to hundreds of thousands is a difficult task. Most towns and cities don't have the space or resources to house these people, so organizations from around the world have created places of shelter for the refugees, known as refugee camps. The refugee camps are typically set up in deserted, barren fields. Due to the vast number of refugees and lack of resources, each family normally lives in a very small shack-like home. Although their living conditions are difficult, it's often the best these organizations can do with limited money and materials.

The refugee camps often lack many of the everyday luxuries we are used to in the United States. Many of the camps don't offer school for the children, don't have plumbing, have limited or no electricity, very limited food and water, and an intense amount of manual labor is required to keep these communities stocked with firewood and other essential supplies.

The refugee camp may provide shelter from the war, but the people that live in these communities are still fighting for survival on a daily basis. You may think, "that's not so bad, it's only a temporary fix before these people can return to their homes, right?" But in reality, most of the people living in these camps, like the man from our story today, have lived there for a large part of their lives. Lual Mayen's mother was pregnant with him when they fled for safety from the war. Before making it to their destination, his mother gave birth to him, and two of his sisters died on the journey. Mayen lived in the refugee camp for his entire childhood and wasn't able to make it out until he was 22 years old. Let's watch the incredible story of Mayen and his family.

#1 Video on Lual Mayen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz7YiSM-qEE>

Lual Mayen certainly did not have the typical "childhood" of your average video game designer and business owner! Let's watch one more story to dive a little deeper into Mayen's story and hear who he credits for his success and resilience while living in such trying conditions and to see how he is now "paying it forward" to others who are still in the refugee camps today.

#2 Video on Lual Mayen:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9MtulGpXR0>

Leader Summary

With support from his family and his own hard work with the help of other organizations, Mayen managed not only to just overcome what seems like an impossible situation but also to help others. Let's discuss the virtues that Mayen lived out on his incredible journey from a child born as a refugee to the owner of Junub games based out of Washington D.C.

Discussion Question Options (discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points if needed)

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What are some of the reasons people decide to leave their country and to become a refugee? (fleeing violence, hunger, poverty)
2. What are some of the challenges that refugees face both in their journey and living in the camps?
(Risk of dying while traveling to another country, leaving nearly everything they own, lack of food and water, often no school, living in poor conditions without electricity or plumbing)
3. How did Mayen's mom live out the virtue of dedication to her family?
(She saved up money working as a camp seamstress over 3 years to buy her son a computer, and likely gave up using that money for things that would have benefited her.)

What are some examples of **family dedication and support** that you have witnessed in your own family or other families? Let's talk about significant bigger examples of family dedication and support. Let's also discuss the many small ways family members support each other. [\(Also a journal writing option below\)](#)

4. Mayen admitted that wanting to have a computer in a refugee camp was a "crazy" idea. Why was it crazy?
(There was no place close to where he lived to learn how to use it, to charge it and no money to buy it)
5. What virtue did Mayen and his mom live out when deciding to buy a computer despite the "craziness" of the idea and many obstacles?
(**faith** – in that they had confidence in themselves and each other that they would somehow work it out)

How does having faith help us achieve our goals?

(various answers, faith makes it easier for us to persevere against obstacles and to remain hopeful in difficult situations. Having faith in ourselves/others makes for the confidence required to accomplish our goals)

What are some examples from your own life? Is there someone you know or a story of a famous person where they had faith in achieving a goal that at first seemed impossible and then did succeed? [\(Also a journal writing option below\)](#)

6. Mayen had faith that he would succeed but what actions did he take to succeed and what virtue does his work and effort reflect?
(Mayen walked 3 hours each way to a UN camp just to be able to charge his computer, and then spent hours each day learning how to code. His actions reflect his **perseverance** in working hard and continuously to overcome the obstacles in his life.)
7. Mayen said about himself, "I'm not a self-made person. The day my mother bought a laptop [for me] was the day that disqualified me from being a self-made person." What do you think Mayen meant through this statement and do you agree with him?
(Mayen is saying he did not succeed on his own, but only through the help of others like his mother.)

What virtue does Mayen's statement reflect? (**humility** in being honest that his success wasn't only due to his efforts.)

8. Who else, besides his mom, contributed to Mayen's life and his success? (The United Nations that built and to this day maintains the refugee camps in Uganda, the individuals working at the camp who allowed Mayen to use their charging stations and the international gaming organizations that invited Mayen to come to their conferences and highlight his work were all key to his success.)
9. Just as Mayen didn't succeed on his own, what are some of the organizations in our lives that can help us grow as a person and help us strive toward our goals? In answering this question think about our larger environment and community, and what organizations fund the things we rely on. (school including the local and state governments that fund them, clubs, sports teams, the infrastructure of our community such as roads, water and public transportation and the local, state and federal government entities that finance them)

In thinking about how all of these different entities, and especially government support, can affect our ability to pursue our goals, does it change your view on how involved we should be in supporting and participating in some of these organizations? How exactly can we do this now and in the future?

(Now: do our best with our school work, sports teams and clubs and help others when we can, even if it's simply offering encouragement. Now and in the future: present our views to all levels of government on how to best support the schools and other services that make a difference in our lives, and support and in the future vote for candidates that reflect our views.)

10. How is Mayen standing in **solidarity** with the refugees that are still in camps? (the app purchases for his games benefit real life refugees by buying food and medicine for them)

Besides purchases financially benefiting refugees, how do you think Mayen designing the game to be played from the point of view of a refugee can also build solidarity? (People playing the game will likely think more about the plight of refugees and have greater empathy for their situation.)

11. How has Mayen lived out the virtue of **Wisdom**? (By creating his video game, Salaam, he has created an effective way to promote what is good and noble – helping others understand the needs of others and to actually help others.)

[Please see first extended activity below that is also a discussion option](#)

Journal Writing Options

1. Write about a time in your life where family, or someone else close to you, has supported you? How has their support helped you? What are ways you have already and / or can in the future put their support to good use and thank them for their help?
2. Write about an example from your own life, someone you know or even the story of a famous person where you or they had faith in achieving a goal that at first seemed impossible and then did succeed?

Extended Activities:

1. Ask students to discuss with their families their own immigration story and to share stories with your class or group. Some of the discussion points to include are the reasons their families left their home countries and decided to come to America— how did they journey to America, what challenges did their families face as immigrants and what support from other individuals or organizations helped them? Also encourage students to share stories where their families didn't choose to come to America but came by force through the slave trade.

2. Help your class or group learn more about the global refugee crisis. Organize students into teams that will each research and then present to your class a whole a different aspect of the crisis. The different topics are:
 - give a general overview of the refugee crisis; how many are there, where are they, major causes
 - give an in-depth explanation of one of the current wars, conflict, or internal situation within a country or region that is causing many people to flee their homes. Some current examples are the war in Syria, and violence and poverty in a Central American country
 - give a detailed explanation of what daily life is like in a refugee camp for the adults and for children
 - explain what major aid organizations are helping refugees, what are they doing to help refugees within the camps, and for those refugees settling in new countries
 - describe what is America's current policy toward refugees, how many do we let in each year, how do we determine who is allowed in and who isn't.
3. After reviewing America's policy toward refugees, organize a discussion of what students believe is good and right about our policy and what they think is wrong and should be improved. Encourage an open discussion with multiple perspectives. Challenge students to present reasons in defense of a policy or perspective that they disagree with to encourage critical thinking skills and respectful openness to others' opinions and perspectives.
4. Ask student teams to come up with a cause or need that they care about and would like to positively impact. Ask each team to come up with a video game that can help the cause by either raising awareness of it and / or generating support. Be sure to include the plots and goals of the game, character ideas, and how it would financially benefit the team's cause or address a need. Each team should then present its cause and need and game concept to the group.

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