

# Solidarity with Ukraine – College Students Use Technology to Help Refugees Find Housing

*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...

- grow in empathy for the people of Ukraine by learning more about what they are experiencing and the consequences of war
- see how creativity and wisdom are powerful traits and virtues that can enable us individually, and our society in general, to be more effective in helping others in need
- understand the power of technology in helping others in need
- become more aware of how we can establish real solidarity with others in need
- consider whether we have a duty to help others in need even if their suffering doesn't directly affect us

### Highlighted Virtues / Character Traits

**Compassion** - feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

**Creativity** - the ability to think of new ideas; to come up with new approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem

**Duty** - something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards or values, and the standards and values of groups that we are a part of such as our family, school, religious groups and larger community

**Empathy** - trying to understand another person's situation; entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

**Generosity** – giving freely of our own time, possessions and / or talent

**Solidarity** - unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group

**Wisdom** - ability to apply knowledge, understanding and experience in ways that are effective and good; the ability to discern what is true, right, or lasting

### Leader Introduction:

Most of us have likely heard about the war in Ukraine and terrible devastation that is occurring. Sometimes when a very large man-made or natural disaster occurs it is difficult to think about the perspective of individual people living through the disaster. In today's lesson, we will practice empathy in learning more about the experiences of individual Ukrainian families and then also how two American teenagers through creativity, wisdom and technology have come up with a way to help people fleeing the war.

First, let's learn more about the general situation of the war in Ukraine and how it's impacting millions of Ukrainian families. On February 24, the country of Russia invaded Ukraine to overthrow its government and destroy its military. Russia is ruled by the dictator Vladimir Putin. A dictator is someone who has near complete control over their country and does not have to answer to their people by either not allowing elections, having unfair elections and / or by

controlling what information their people can access. Russia's President Putin falsely claims that the government of Ukraine was planning on attacking ethnic Russians inside of Ukraine and this was the reason he gave for launching an all-out war on Ukraine.

Russia's military has not only attacked the military of Ukraine, but sadly is also attacking civilian apartment buildings, schools, entire cities and even a hospital dedicated to helping mothers deliver their babies. The Russian military is using some of its strongest bombs to attack these targets. As a result, millions of Ukrainian families have decided it isn't safe to remain in their homes and country and have decided to flee. People who are forced to leave their homes because of violence, or the threat of violence, are known as refugees. So far over 4 million Ukrainians have fled to other countries, half of them are children, and millions more have fled to other areas within Ukraine that they hope will be safer.

Imagine as a family seeing your own neighborhood, or communities nearby violently attacked by a foreign country and coming to the decision that to live you likely have to leave your country. How do you decide what to bring with you? In most cases you can only bring what you can carry as you are likely taking a train or car that is overcrowded with people fleeing. For most refugees, you know that if you make it to another country you then don't know where you will live. You leave with the hope that the other governments of Europe and families across Europe will offer to help you. At the end of your journey at the border, you then have to say goodbye to your father as all men up to the age of 60 are not allowed to leave Ukraine as they have to stay to fight for their country. These are horribly sad scenes as families know this may be the last time they will see their fathers alive.

Fortunately, many people around the world are stepping up to help the refugees. The governments and people of Poland and other countries bordering Ukraine such as Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Moldova are providing temporary housing, food and clothing, while families across Europe and even in America are opening their homes to Ukrainian families to live with them in their homes. In addition, people across the world are donating money to charitable groups that provide aid to the refugees and to the people remaining in Ukraine. Although many families in Europe and even in America want to help, they and the refugees looking for homes didn't know how to connect with each other and that's where the story of two American teenagers begins.

**Lesson Video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS92Tfgl-wo>

**Leader Summary:**

Avi Schiffmann and Marco Berstein show us how with creativity, wisdom and a lot of work and dedication we can provide significant help to others in need. Hopefully their story will inspire us to consider how we can be creative in addressing needs that we see in our own communities and even in addressing needs that are far away.

**Discussion Question Options:** *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

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

1. Have any of you seen news broadcasts or read articles about the war in Ukraine?

What are some of your initial thoughts about what you have seen or read about in the news, and what we have learned today on what individuals and families are experiencing in Ukraine?

2. What did Avi first do to express his **solidarity** with the people of Ukraine?  
(He attended a protest march in San Diego)

What did Avi experience at the march that led him to take action, and what virtues did he live out in this experience?

(Avi practiced **empathy** in learning about the suffering of the refugee families. Avi also experienced a strong sense of **compassion** in wanting to help the refugees in a meaningful way.)

3. How did Avi live out **creativity** and **wisdom** in determining how he wanted to help the refugees fleeing?  
(Avi was creative in coming up with a new way to solve the problem of refugees looking for housing. Avi demonstrated wisdom in using his skills in programming and problem solving to create an effective solution with technology that directly connects refugee families with host families.)
4. Avi and Marco have decided to spend a significant amount of time and energy helping others in need half-way around the world. Do you think we have a **duty** to help others in need outside of our own families and community? Let's read over the definition of duty again before answering this to help frame our discussion.  
(If students don't do it on their own, encourage them to identify the specific values and beliefs they and their various communities have that speak to a situation like helping refugees fleeing a war. Some of these values are justice, respect for others and caring.)

*This question is also a journal writing option below.*

5. How does Avi and Marco's endeavor to build Ukrainetakeshelter.com speak to the value of teamwork?  
(Avi and Marco couldn't have built the site on their own. Similar to most worthy endeavors, it took a team of many people to accomplish their goal. Ask students if they can remember the various people and skills required to build the site - programmers, translators, security specialists, testers and the host families.)
6. Let's talk about some specific problems or goals within our school or community that you think we can approach differently and with creativity and wisdom achieve a better result?

*This is also an extended team activity below.*

7. Younger people have been criticized for engaging in internet activism and "slactivism" in addressing serious issues where people just vent their opinions but aren't engaged in actual work to improve a situation. Do you think that's a valid criticism?
8. What did Ari and Marco and the interviewer say about how we can learn about making a website?  
(There are many resources online, including on YouTube that can help us to learn valuable skills such as programming)

What other resources are available online that you have heard about that can help us with school work and other fun projects?

(Khan Academy, Bill Nye the Science Guy)

Let's share some examples of when we were able to learn something interesting and with our school work through an online resource.

### Journal Writing Options

1. Write a short essay on why you think we do have a duty to help others who are not in our family or community. Write about the values that you have individually, as a family and as part of some of the groups that you are a part of that tell you we should help others in need, regardless of where they are.
2. Write about a time you faced a problem, or wanted to achieve a goal, and your first attempts didn't work and then by coming up with a different approach you were able to become more effective and solve the problem or achieve your goal.

### Extended Activity:

1. Organize students into 5 teams and ask each team to research one of the 5 charities listed in the New York Times article (has four) and the International Committee of the Red Cross with the links below. Each team should make a presentation to the class as a whole on the needs their charity is addressing and how the charity is addressing those needs. Following the presentations, the class as a whole should vote on which one or two charities they want to support.

Other teams should also come up with creative ways your class or school can raise money for the charities. Some examples are students creating thread bracelets or T-Shirts that demonstrate support for the people of Ukraine. Bracelets could be made from blue and yellow thread that are the colors of the Ukrainian flag and t-shirts could have a slogan of support for Ukraine such as "We Stand with Ukraine". These items could be sold at a profit with the money donated to the charities your class chooses.

NT Times review of four charities in Ukraine

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/03/02/opinion/ukraine-charity-donation-guide.html?campaign\\_id=39&emc=edit\\_ty\\_20220303&instance\\_id=54756&nl=opinion-today&regi\\_id=76772044&segment\\_id=84514&te=1&user\\_id=bf7cf441452b572b76394777c8917483](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/03/02/opinion/ukraine-charity-donation-guide.html?campaign_id=39&emc=edit_ty_20220303&instance_id=54756&nl=opinion-today&regi_id=76772044&segment_id=84514&te=1&user_id=bf7cf441452b572b76394777c8917483)

International Committee of the Red Cross

<https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/europe-central-asia/ukraine>

2. Organize students into teams and ask each team to decide on a specific problem or goal within our school or community that they think we can approach differently and with creativity and wisdom achieve a better result? Each team should make a presentation to the class on the need or goal they are addressing, their proposed new approach, how their approach is creative and wise and the expected results.

Next, have students vote on which team's idea is most creative and wise. If you like, you can then lead a discussion on whether your class should implement the winning plan.

# Character Action Media

*Connecting Virtues to Our World*

[www.characteractionmedia.com](http://www.characteractionmedia.com)

Parent Links in Education

Copyright 2016

