

NOTHING LIKE MY HOME

Using the arts to engage U.S. high school students in the Iraqi refugee crisis

Nothing Like My Home, a collaborative project of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility and photographer Lori Grinker, uses the arts and interactive classroom activities to engage young people and their communities in a vital issue: the plight of the 4.7 million Iraqis who have been forced to flee their homes because of war and violence.

As part of the project, schools install Lori Grinker's gripping exhibit of 20 color photos, "Scars and Exile," which captures the physical and emotional wounds inflicted on Iraqis and their families by the ongoing violence in their country. In tandem with the exhibit, teachers engage students in an interactive curriculum developed by Morningside Center's staff developer Marieke van Woerkom. The activities, discussions and assignments draw on students' own experience and knowledge to help them understand and empathize with the situation of Iraqi refugees. Toward the end of the project students organize a culminating event to share what they have learned with community members and the media.

During its pilot phase last year, Nothing Like My home traveled to high schools in New York, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In addition, educators from the New Haven and Boston areas engaged in Nothing Like My Home training workshops before taking the project back to their schools. Schools that have implemented Nothing Like My Home agree that it has a powerful effect:

"It was the best thing we've done all year." — Student

"Whenever I'm being taught something, I just get taught the facts instead of being given time to actually understand the person's point of view or why they may have acted that way. These activities gave me a more personal way to learn." — Student

"The project has deeply impacted my students by giving a face to the people who have been most gravely affected by the war in Iraq. The photos are able to humanize a crisis that is geographically distant, and the curriculum has engaged them in grappling with some of the emotions and dire circumstances that refugees of this war are forced to live in." — Teacher



Bronx students with Lori Grinker's exhibit. Photo by Carolina Kroon.

The project's name comes from an Iraqi proverb: "I went to the house of God [the Ka'bah in Mecca] and returned, yet I found nothing like my home." A grant from the Open Society Institute funded the development of the project.

Please contact Morningside Center deputy executive director Tala Manassah if you'd like to consider bringing Nothing Like My Home to your school! Email: tmanassah@morningsidecenter.org. Tel: 212-870-3318 x35.

