

# STUDENT'S HANDOUT

## Eritrea -- Sudan -- Ethiopia

THE HORN OF AFRICA:  
CRADLE OF MANY  
CONFLICTS



### Background Information

In the 1960s, internal tensions, continuing droughts and armed revolts caused important population shifts in many African countries such as in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea.

Depending on conflicts or lulls in uprisings, civilian populations were forced to migrate towards the most peaceful areas. What is strange is that Ethiopian refugees can be found in Sudan, and Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia. Because of acts perpetuated by rebel forces, one group fled from the war with their neighbour Eritrea, and the other tried to escape the massacres in southern Sudan.

In this troubled context where conflicts follow one after another, the victims most affected are young children. Sometimes torn from their



family by the unforeseen events of war, these children do not live a normal childhood and few can count on a full education. Many end up in refugee camps, where they find peace, but they do not often have access to water, food, nor proper medication.

### Instructions

In order to better understand realities of displaced populations carefully read the following story. While reading, you will have to make decisions which will take the story in new directions in which you will discover different things about the victims of armed conflicts.

### Maalek the Refugee

In 1990, Maalek Ben-Sayed was six years old. He lived with the ups and downs of Eritrea, a province of Ethiopia, in which a civil war was ongoing for more than twenty years. Around this time Eritrea's independence was proclaimed and the status of Ahme, the father of Maalek, became questionable since he was a member of a conservative political party which always fought against Eritrea's independence.

Choose one of the following scenarios. Faced with this situation Maalek's family decides:

- A) to stay and wait in the hope that the situation improves. Go to paragraph 1.
- B) to flee to the neighbouring country, Sudan, in order to avoid possible reprisals against Maalek's father. Go to paragraph 2.



### Paragraph 1

It is now 1998, Maalek is fourteen years old. For eight years, his family has been very cautious for fear of reprisals. Life in Eritrea is not always easy and violent confrontations are still the norm in the young country. Yesterday, an announcement on the radio mentioned that war was declared with Ethiopia, a neighbouring country. Today in the early morning, armed and masked insurgents came to knock on the door of the Ben-Sayed family. Maalek was thus forcefully enlisted in the army. Being only fourteen years old, he could barely carry the weight of his heavy Kalachnikov. To add to his misfortune, he had to fight against the Ethiopian armed Forces, the country that his own father considered his homeland.



**Choose one of the following scenarios. Maalek has to make a decision:**

- C) to stay enlisted in the army and be careful not to expose himself to dangerous situations. Go to paragraph 3.*
- D) to desert the Eritrean army and to flee to Sudan, a neighbouring country. Go to paragraph 4.*

### Paragraph 2

Even after the Ben-Sayed family saved up some money and borrowed from a few richer close relatives, their trip to Sudan in the middle of the night guided by a shepherd through anti-personnel minefields is difficult. The number of refugees is overwhelming and the Ben-Sayed family doesn't know where to go. People are saying that in the south of Sudan, there are serious hostilities between different religious groups and the Moslem minority government. As well, in Khartoum, the capital of the country, refugees must content themselves with the underdeveloped areas outside the city limits. However, people are saying that the WFP, the World Food Programme that Canada supports through the CIDA, is providing food to refugees, and especially to children who are continuing their primary school education in refugee camps...



**Choose one of the following scenarios:**

- E) Si tu considères que la famille de Maalek devrait poursuivre sa route vers Khartoum, va au paragraphe 5.*
- F) Si, par contre, tu voulais que la famille Ben-Sayed retourne sur ses pas et revienne en Érythrée où la guerre menace, reviens au paragraphe 1.*

### Paragraph 3

Describe in ten sentences what Maalek's life would be like in the Eritrean army. Use your imagination and describe how Maalek might feel living under these conditions. As well, you should mention Maalek's rights, which are likely to be suppressed as a child soldier. Your story will, however, have a happy ending: in 2000 a peace treaty was signed with Ethiopia. Maalek is discharged from the army on his sixteenth birthday and can once again return to civilian life.

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#### Paragraph the 4

The risks and dangers of exile are numerous for Maalek, who has to travel alone so he won't be spotted by the troops of the two opposing armies. He succeeds, nonetheless, in crossing the Sudan border without stepping on a land mine and feels a certain sense of freedom upon entering this neighbouring neutral country which takes no note of the conflict going on in his homeland. Maalek is, however, not at the end of his perilous route. The road is long towards the capital, Khartoum, and Maalek is penniless. He barely manages walking under the harsh desert sun, and thirst makes him think he sees mirages. He chews on leaves and gnaws on pieces of wood to ward off hunger. On his way, he sees whole families who, like him, fled the war in their homeland. Everyone is headed in the same direction, Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, where a piece of dry earth is given to all refugees displaced by war. On this road of hope, there are rumours which say that countries like Canada, through their international development agencies, help and support the efforts of peacekeeping and the protection of people affected by armed conflicts.

*G) Continue on to paragraph 5.*



#### Paragraph 5

In this part of the story, you must write ten sentences of the everyday life of Maalek in the refugee camp. Does he have access to drinking water, a roof over his head or food? Does he go to school? Is he finally living happily, without the risk that an armed conflict will arise and that he must once again live amidst violence? Use your imagination to finish the story on a positive note when, a few years later, Maalek is just about to celebrate his sixteenth birthday. If you want, compare your own childhood with Maalek's.

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-- THE END --

AN INITIATIVE OF THE  
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