



'Khat, Sheikhour, in a residential building destroyed by the Syrian army in the first part of June 2012' ©dona bozzi

# Syria: Third Space

## Teacher Resources

Syria: Third Space is a major exhibition of new work by Syrian artists taking place at the British Council in London until February 18 2015. On display are artworks including films, photography, paintings and textiles that explore the current situation in Syria and how artists are representing and responding to the conflict, and the displacement of people.

The focus of this exhibition is on the human story of the conflict. The pieces tell individual stories of refugees having to leave their homes and move to neighbouring countries and of young people dealing with trauma and loss. They also raise awareness of issues relating to Syrian heritage and identity and demonstrate the part that art can play in recovery and resilience.

This resource pack provides activities to encourage your pupils to look really closely at some of the exhibits, and to provide creative and thought provoking responses to them, and by doing so gain a greater understanding of the lives and experiences of Syrian refugee children.

The discussions and activities can be used as starting points in individual lessons, or as elements of a larger cross-curricular project carried out with a partner school overseas, perhaps together with resources in the British Council's Living Together Refugee Education Pack. <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources/list/living-together>

\*Note for teachers – not all the artworks in the exhibition are suitable for children. The resources created below are based on works that have been deemed suitable to use with younger audiences, but please do check beforehand.

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## Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), almost half of all Syrians have been forced to leave their homes in search of safety since the beginning of the conflict in 2011. Over three million Syrians are now refugees living mostly in neighbouring countries and over half of those refugees are children.

Stitching My Syria Back by Mohammed Khayata, is one of the exhibits on display. It consists of a collection of photographs of people, each holding a colourful patchwork blanket sewn from material donated by refugees in communities across Syria. Everyone featured in the images, carried the blanket as they wished and imagined what it represents to them.



# Lesson Plan One: Stitching My Syria Back

**Learning aims and objectives:** To study and reflect on the Stitching My Syria Back exhibits and create a textile wall hanging that focuses on the theme of identity and belonging.

**Age range:** 10-14

**Curriculum links:** English, Geography, Art and design, Design Technology, PSHE

**Global citizenship themes, skills and outlooks:** Identity and belonging, conflict and peace, empathy, collaborating, creative and critical thinking

## Resources

Copies of photographs from Stitching My Syria Back or Internet access to view them online at:

[https://www.facebook.com/stitchingmysyriaback?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/stitchingmysyriaback?ref=br_tf) and <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/syria-third-space/>

Atlases, post it notes, large pieces of paper, fabric squares, scissors, needles, cotton, fabric pens, collage materials, glue, and digital cameras





## Getting started

Help your pupils to locate Syria and its neighbouring countries using atlases, globes or mapping software.

Ask what they know about what is currently happening in this part of the world and what they would like to find out. Research and discuss some of the latest news stories from the area using newspapers and trusted sources on the Internet after vetting these first. Perhaps show some of the material from relevant BBC Newsround programmes listed at the end of the pack. Talk about what it must be like to have to leave your home and friends in times of conflict and move to a new country.

Perhaps carry out the activity 'What would you take?' from the Living Together Refugee Pack: <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources/list/living-together>



## Discussion points and activities

Divide your pupils into small groups with copies of the photographs of *Stitching My Syria Back* or Internet access to view them online. Examine the images carefully and discuss the following questions in small groups. Collect responses using post-it notes or large sheets of paper and then report back your group's thoughts and ideas to the rest of the class.

- Why do you think the artist chose the title *Stitching My Syria Back* and what do you think is the significance of including pieces of fabric from different parts of Syria?
- Were there things that puzzled you or you have questions about in the photographs?
- Which is your favourite photograph of the twelve? Give your reasons.
- Can you imagine some of the thoughts and feelings of the person in the photograph as they hold the blanket? Why do you think they chose that pose? What would you like to ask them about their lives? Make a list of questions you would ask if you could.
- How would you describe the image to some one who has not seen it before?

Enlarge and print a copy of your favourite image or images. Add a thought bubble to indicate what the person might be thinking at the time when the photograph was taken and create your own title that sums up the image to you. Display these and exchange with your partner school if you have one.



## Activity Two

Artists have used tapestries and embroidered textiles across different cultures and periods of time, to tell stories about their history and identity. This can be seen in the Syrian blanket being held by people in the *Stitching My Syria Back* images in the exhibition, the Bayeux tapestry and Grayson Perry's *Comfort Blanket* currently on display at The National Portrait Gallery as part of the *Who are You?* Exhibition. He describes it as a "portrait of Britain to wrap your self up in, things we love and love to hate." It includes images and names of people, places, phrases and objects from past history and Britain today. Everything from William Wallace to Tim Berners-Lee, Magna Carta, The Archers, curry and a nice cuppa tea!

Create your own textile portrait of identity, by asking each member of the class to design and create a square of collaged fabric that represents something about themselves or their family history. They can include stitching, as well as words, pictures and phrases. When complete, attach all the squares together to create a large textile wall hanging that features each student as individuals and as part of the class. You could also photograph class members posing with it in different ways and exchange with your partner school if you have one.



## Additional activity

Children at Groarty Integrated Primary School, Derry~Londonderry, looked at historical and current maps of their locality to see how their area has changed over time. They traced sections of the maps onto paper, and then enlarged these shapes onto squares of silk before painting the shapes with silk paint. These silk squares were then joined together to create a large artwork. You could carry out a similar project looking at how your locality or that of your partner school has changed by using maps and other sources of information from different periods.









'Khan Sheikhoun, in a residential building destroyed by the Syrian army in the first part of June 2012' ©dona bozzi

## Getting started

Bring in an object that is precious to you concealed in a bag or box. Tell your pupils that they have ten questions to try and work out what the object is and why it is precious to you. You can only reply yes or no. Reveal your precious object to the class and explain its significance to you.



## Activities

Encourage the pupils to talk with a partner about things that they own that are precious to them. Where did the object come from, why is it special and how would they feel if the object was lost or destroyed?

Ask them to write a creative description of their chosen object. As a stimulus you could read the following examples written by other pupils. Encourage the use of accurate description and similes to produce a piece of writing that really creates a picture in words. You could display their writing alongside photographs of their objects, but be sensitive if some children do not wish to talk openly about their precious things.

*My precious object is a teddy, which I was given when I was three. I used to take him everywhere with me. He is the colour of a cheetah, has rough worn patches on parts of his body, a tatty ear, and the remains of a tartan ribbon round his neck. He is very special to me and I keep him in a box with all my other precious stuff. Once I lost him when I was out in the park. My Dad searched for him until it was dark but couldn't find him. He put up cards with a picture of him and our phone number and amazingly about a week later someone rang us up after seeing one of the cards stuck on a lamppost. They had found him and taken him to a nearby nursery. We went there and he was there waiting for us on the teacher's desk.*

*My precious object is a gold necklace. The chain has a criss cross pattern and Arabic writing on it. It is shiny, as light as a feather and sparkles in the sunshine. I wear it on special occasions. My Nan who lives in Pakistan gave it to me. Whenever I look at it, it reminds me of her. I haven't seen my Nan in a long time so it's nice to be reminded of her. If it got lost I would feel so upset because I would have nothing left to remind me of her.*

In times of conflict, and separation when people are forced to leave their homes, even the most ordinary objects can become precious. The installation **Memoire(S) des Femmes** in the exhibition, includes recordings of testimonies from Syrian women who have been forced to leave their homes, alongside photographs of ordinary objects that hold significant and special memories for them.

Read the following transcripts from the exhibition:

### Heart Key Ring



*"This key ring, shaped like half a heart, was given to me by a friend. One day we were walking and then sat at a restaurant. We had an argument but then we made up, so we decided to buy something together. We bought this key ring. I took one half of the heart, and she took the other."*

### Keys



*"I still keep the keys to my house, because I know some day, I'll come back to visit."*

### Ring



*"This ring, this wedding ring, is one of my friend's. He has been arrested, arrested for nine months. He gave the ring to me, to give to his beloved, to wear on her necklace."*

Look at some of the other objects portrayed in the photographs in the exhibition. Work with a partner and discuss what memories might be triggered by these objects.

## Lesson Plan Three: Without Sky

**Learning aims and objectives:** To watch and reflect on the Without Sky exhibit and facilitate a discussion amongst pupils in response.

**Age range:** 10-14

**Curriculum links:** English, Art and design, Music, PSHE

**Global citizenship themes, skills and outlooks:** Identity and belonging, conflict and peace, empathy, collaborating, creative and critical thinking

Without Sky is a moving animated film, only 2 minutes 56 seconds long, by Mohammad Omran and Bissan AlSharif, which depicts the destruction of a city. It was created by two artists who are a set designer and sculptor.

Without Sky can be accessed here: <http://vimeo.com/101641347>





## Questions to think about:

- Why do you think these particular artists chose to use animation for this piece? Is it an effective medium? Give your reasons.
- What are your thoughts on the sound effects that accompany the film? What mood do they create? Can you think of other pieces of music or sound effects that might also create an effective sound track to this piece?
- Why do you think the artist called the film Without Sky? What other titles might also be appropriate for this exhibit?
- Do you think the stimulus behind this film might be the destruction of parts of real cities?
- Who might have lived in these buildings? What would happen to them when they had to abandon their homes?

Show the animation again perhaps more than once. Ask your pupils to jot down any descriptive words or phrases that come to mind about their thoughts and feelings as the city grows and is then destroyed. Invite them to then draw two sketches of the city before and after its destruction and write the words and phrases they chose within the buildings on their drawings. Alternatively, they could create their own piece of poetry or creative writing to accompany the film.

## Additional Activities

You could look at examples of some of the many beautiful historic buildings and houses in Syrian cities before the conflict and compare with photographs of the devastation of many of these heritage sites today. You might also carry out some of the activities from the Living together Refugee pack, about what home means to you and then complete the following sentences:

- I know I'm home when... and
- It's nice to be home when...



## Find out more

An online version of the exhibition will be available after the formal exhibition launch on 21 January 2015:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/syria-third-space/>

The British Council Living Together Refugee Education

Pack can be found at: <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources/list/living-together>

BBC Newsround reports on the background to the

Syrian conflict: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186>

Information on the Bayeux Tapestry and Great

Tapestry of Scotland can be found at: <http://www.tapestry-bayeux.com> and <http://scotlandstapestry.com/>

Information on Grayson Perry's Comfort Blanket at the

National Portrait gallery: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/oct/21/grayson-perry-tapestry-portrait-gallery>

Activities for the Red Cross Refugee week can be

found at: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/Quick-activities/Refugee-Week-2014>

Information on the Syrian refugee crisis from UNHCR:

[http://donate.unhcr.org/gbr/syria?gclid=CMCqipq\\_wMICFca4fAodPkgA4g&gclsrc=ds.ds](http://donate.unhcr.org/gbr/syria?gclid=CMCqipq_wMICFca4fAodPkgA4g&gclsrc=ds.ds)

Further information, resources and access to opportunities to work and collaborate with schools

overseas can be found at: [www.britishcouncil.org/schoolsonline](http://www.britishcouncil.org/schoolsonline)

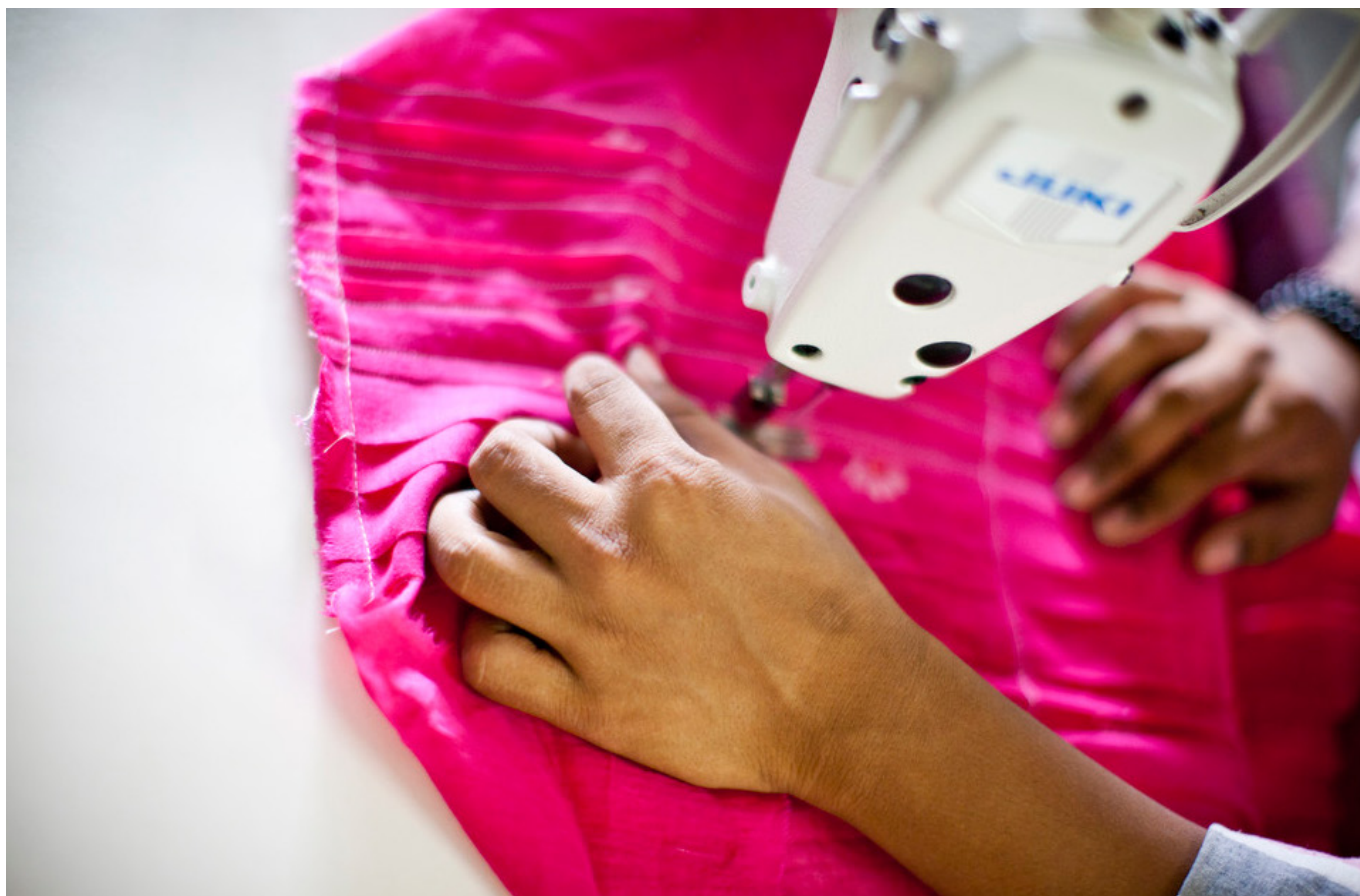
Facebook page with photos from Stitching My Syria

Back: [https://www.facebook.com/stitchingmysyriaback?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/stitchingmysyriaback?ref=br_tf)

Without Sky can be accessed here: <http://vimeo.com/101641347>

In Place of War site with other artists' work: <http://www.inplaceofwar.net/british-council-grants-for-syrian-artists-programme>







**Photography:**

Front cover and page 10, 'Khan Sheikhoun, in a residential building destroyed by the Syrian army in the first part of June 2012' ©dona bozzi

Page 3, *Stitching My Syria Back* © Mohammed Khayata

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Page 7 © ITN Productions

Page 8 Silk painting wall hanging by children at Groarty Integrated Primary School, Derry~Londonderry

Page 9, 11 *Memoire(S) des Femmes* © Bissane Al Charif

Page 12 © Without Sky © Mohammad Omran and Bissan AlSharif

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