

xOut of Aleppo

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Film Summary and Push/Pull Factors Brainstorm:

Mohammad Shasho (age 17) made the perilous journey from Syria to Berlin and struggles with his family to set up a new life. Mentored by award-winning documentary filmmaker, Anja Baron, Mo finds his own voice and gives voice to his fellow refugees. He explores loss, art and hope in his debut film.

Since 2011, over 5.6 million people have fled Syria and its deadly civil war. Creating a tragic human rights crisis, this mass exodus has not only displaced millions of Syrians, but also rendered them largely voiceless. By documenting his experience and interviewing fellow refugees, 17-year-old Mohammad Shasho reclaims his narrative and lends a voice to refugees silenced by circumstance.

In 2013, under the pretense that they would take a prolonged holiday and return in a month, Mohammad's family left their home in Aleppo. As the conflict worsened, the temporary flight became a permanent escape. Mohammad and his family endured the treacherous journey to Turkey, from where his father—a surgeon—traveled on to Germany on a fragile raft to secure his family's safe passage. One year later, Mohammad, his mother and his four siblings, are reunited with their father and husband in Berlin.

Caught between painful remembrance and hope for the future, Mohammad's family simultaneously celebrates safety, longs for home and adjusts to their new life in Germany. As Mohammad and his family work to reclaim normalcy, a deadly attack on a Berlin Christmas market fills them with the defeating, familiar sense that danger lurks everywhere. Despite this disruption and the constant desire to return home, Mohammad anchors himself in a guiding principle: "Ride it, don't fight it."

While each family member processes the trauma of displacement differently, Mohammad finds solace in art. He writes poetry and addressing both himself and the reader with the pensive honesty of a teenager, relates that "it's different here, Mohammad." He participates

in theater, finds the silver lining in life's conflicts and challenges, and by portraying a fragile sense of happiness, creates it. Connecting poetry, theater and film, Mohammad highlights the plight of his fellow refugees. He lends a voice to new friends who, after traveling to safety without their families, do not know if they will ever see their loved ones again. In documenting the stories of these "unaccompanied minors" as they attempt to work through their complex set of emotions and the traumas they have endured, a particularly harrowing aspect of this humanitarian crisis emerges.

Mentored by Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker Anja Baron, Mohammad uses his artistic instinct to provide an underrepresented perspective. He does not preach; he does not indoctrinate; and he does not politicize. Instead, Mohammad shares the refugee experience with the candor and nuance of a teenager. (Source: [BYkids](#))

Push/Pull Factors Brainstorm:

- 1) *Push factors* are circumstances or events that force a person or group to leave their home and migrate to a new place. Based on the short summary above, what do you think were the push factors for Mohammad and his family?

- 2) What are other push factors that would force someone to leave their home?

- 3) *Push factors* are circumstances that encourage a person or group to settle in a new place. Based on the summary, what do you think were the pull factors that brought Mohammad and his family to Berlin, Germany?

- 4) What are other pull factors that would draw someone to a new place?

Background Reading:

Read one or more of the articles listed in each section, or find your own. Consider how this helps you understand Mohammad's family's experiences and decisions.

The Syrian Civil War:

1. [Syria's war explained from the beginning | News | Al Jazeera](#)

2. [Conflict in Syria | Global Conflict Tracker](#)
3. [Why has the Syrian war lasted 12 years? | BBC](#)

The Refugee Crisis:

1. [The Syrian refugee crisis, explained in one map | Vox](#)
2. [Syrian refugee crisis: All your questions answered | Al Jazeera](#)
3. [Syria Refugee Crisis Explained | UN Refugees](#)

Documentary notes:

Watch the documentary [here](#) (Content notes: violence, destruction, war).

As you watch, take notes in the chart below.

	Notes	Key moments or quotes that reflect this
Experiences in Aleppo (where the family lived before displacement)		
Experiences of displacement (the forced movement)		
Experiences of Syrian refugees in the refugee center in Berlin		
Moments of resilience and agency (agency = someone's ability to take control in their lives and take action, through strength and courage)		
Moments of joy and community		

- 1) After watching, summarize the push factors in greater detail than in your brainstorm. Provide specific examples from the film.

- 2) After watching, summarize the pull factors in greater detail than in your brainstorm. Provide specific examples from the film.

- 3) What are Mohammad's goals? And his family members' goals? What needs to change or occur to support these goals?

Compare with *Displaced But Not Defeated*

1. What similarities and differences can you draw between the push factors for María's and Mohammad's families? In particular, compare the conflicts and the impacts on people.

2. What similarities and differences can you draw between the pull factors for both families?

3. What emotions, fears, and hopes do the filmmakers of each film express?

4. How did refugees in each film use art (in particular, theater) as an outlet for healing? What lessons can we learn from this?

Current Events:

Using reliable news outlets, research recent events in Syria. Summarize them below.

Based on your learning from the film, how do you think these recent events have impacted Mohammad, his family, and others like them?

What are your hopes for Mohammad?

What organizations can you identify who are supporting refugees like Mohammad?

Using this learning about recent events in Syria, write an epilogue for *Out of Aleppo*. Summarize key moments and changes in Syria since the film was released, in particular, those that are most relevant to Mohammad and other refugees.

Poetry:

In the film, Mohammad uses poetry to work through his trauma, share his perspective, and express his views on the conflict and his circumstances. Write a poem about a refugee or immigrant story in your community. You might write about yourself or a family member, someone you know, or someone whose story you learn via online research.

Mohammad's Poem:

It's different here, Mohammad, completely different. It's not like in our home. Our traditions, our culture, our language is all gone. Everything's foreign, and only loneliness is in your friend. There's only the hole that strangeness leaves in my heart. Every day, it gets bigger and bigger.

See other examples of poetry written by refugees here:

- [Warsan Shire's Poetry About Home | Facing History & Ourselves](#) (see the content note before reading the poem)
- [Four poems about the courageous and inspiring journeys of refugees | UN Refugees](#)