



# MISSION UNACCOMPLISHED: GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

## SECONDARY RESOURCES



Afghan women of all ages gather in a house to learn to read. (Photo: Lauryn Oates, CW4WAfghanistan)

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- From 1996 to 2001, Afghanistan was ruled by a group known as the Taliban. The Taliban enforced a very strict form of Islamic law under which women had virtually no rights. They could not go to school or hold a job. They couldn't even leave their homes without permission and the accompaniment of a male family member.
- In 2001, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the United States, the Taliban government was overthrown by anti-Taliban Afghan militias, supported by NATO armies from the U.S., Canada and Britain. A new government was formed with a new constitution that restored rights for women.
- In 2001, only 5000 girls in all of Afghanistan were known to be attending school. In is currently estimated that more than 2.4 million girls are enrolled in school. Approx. 40 percent of all Afghan school children are girls. However aid organizations have expressed concern that many are not attending school every day due to poor conditions and security issues.
- A 2012 report by the UN agency UNESCO found that since 2003 approx. 5000 schools had been built or fixed up, but only half of school buildings were actually useable.

- Before 2001, Afghanistan's maternal mortality rate was estimated at 2200 mothers dying for every 100,000 live births—one of the worst rates in the world—because of poor health and nutrition education for pregnant mothers and poor access to good medical care. Because of better education and health care, the World Bank says the maternal mortality rate has fallen to 460. Canada's maternal mortality rate is 12.
- Under the new constitution, 68 seats in Afghanistan's parliament must be reserved for women, or 28 percent of the seats.
- In 2009, a law was proposed to make violence against women illegal. Because of opposition from religious conservative parliamentarians, it was not passed by the Afghan parliament. However, after pressure from other governments, the President enacted the law by presidential decree.
- The Afghan parliament is now passing a law that would prevent family members from testifying in court against each other. This would make it almost impossible to prosecute many cases of violence against women, because the majority of assaults happen in the home.

### NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

### KEY TERMS

**Literacy**—At its most basic level, the ability to read and write. Literacy can also include reading comprehension, purposeful writing, critical thinking and the aptitude to understand and purposefully employ words.

**Literacy rate**—The percentage of people in a group who are able to read.

**Maternal mortality**—When mothers die because of complications from giving birth to a child.

## THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- Themes: Education, Child Rights, Women’s Rights, Human Rights, War and Conflicts, Global Issues
- Course Connections: Canadian and World Studies, English, International Studies

## MATERIALS

- Copies of the Global Voices column
- Computer with projector, internet capabilities and a screen

## SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

## DISCUSS

1. The column opens with a quote from an Afghan mother: “You can move around, come here and see us. I am also a human, why shouldn’t I be able to do these things? When I see an educated woman like you, I think I want that too.” Explain what the Afghan mother is saying.
2. On March 12, the last Canadian soldiers returned from Afghanistan ending our 12-year military mission. Why were Canadian troops in Afghanistan? What was their mandate? Did they fulfill it before they left?
3. What is literacy? (Basic literacy is the ability to read and write. More advanced levels of literacy includes reading comprehension, purposeful writing, critical thinking and the aptitude to understand and purposefully employ words.)
4. What is UNICEF? What do you know about them? What do they do?
5. What is the Taliban? How were the laws the Taliban implemented during their time oppressive for women?
6. Why is it important that women are becoming more visible citizens in Afghanistan, e.g., women are in Parliament and on TV, billboards? Is it enough to just be visible? Why is it important to also take into consideration how women are portrayed in media?
7. Why do you think the success of a family (their health, education and income) is linked to the education level of the mother?
8. What is the difference between investing in schools and investing in education? Why do you think international develop can fall into the trap of investing in building schools rather than investing in education? How might this be considered quantity education over quality education? What might a sustainable school look like?
9. Do you agree that Canada “must” make a long-term commitment to funding Afghan girls’ education? Why or why not?

## DIVE DEEPER

Understanding unequal access to resources can be difficult for students who—for the most part—are provided with everything they need to learn. Help students understand what it might be like for girls in Afghanistan with the following activity.

Show students the “The Clock is Ticking” from The Girl Effect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0JtVg&feature=relmfu>

Following the video, use the following questions to foster conversation:

- What is the situation in the video?
- Why is the clock ticking?
- What happens to the girl who doesn’t receive an education?
- What is the difference for the girl who does receive an education?
- What is the girl effect?
- Is this a fair representation?
- Where is the boy in this story?
- What role should boys play?
- Does Canada have a responsibility to ensure girls receive a proper education in Afghanistan?
- How can we ensure that education for all is made an international priority?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ready Set Global [www.readyssetglobal.com](http://www.readyssetglobal.com)

Free The Children’s The Power of A Girl Toolkit <http://www.freethechildren.com/get-involved/toolkits/the-power-of-a-girl/>

UNICEF [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

The Girl Effect [www.girleffect.org](http://www.girleffect.org) “The Clock is Ticking” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0JtVg&feature=relmfu>