

### Activity Three: El Salvador

## CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR

When you visit me in El Salvador, we will dance, and go swimming in the river.  
—Vic Compher and Betsy Morgan, *Going Home*, p. 21.



This activity on El Salvador illustrates aspects of forced migration, which differs significantly from those flows of people tied to international economic forces. Forced migration means people have to leave their communities because of political conflict, violence, coercion, or disaster. The element of choice is crucial for all aspects of the process—the leaving as well as the returning takes on an added complexity. In the case of El Salvador, it is important to distinguish between displaced persons, (internal refugees) who have left their communities but have stayed within the national boundaries, and refugees who have left their communities for other countries.

The main impetus for migration of people in and from El Salvador was the war that was being fought by the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and the Salvadoran military forces. Some argue that the civil war in El Salvador dates back to the first offensive by the FMLN in January 1981. Others claim that the stage for the rise of this political and military conflict was being set decades prior to this event. What became the FMLN began as an integration of the left-wing political organizations discouraged that there was no alternative to reform other than armed struggle. On the other side of spectrum, the extreme right evolved into the ARENA Party led by Roberto D'Aubuisson, who represented both the land owners and the military. A peace treaty ending more than a decade of fighting in El Salvador was signed in January of 1992.

At that time, the estimates of the numbers of Salvadoran refugees living in the United States varied but some place the number at about 1 million. Calculating the number of displaced persons has been even more difficult; some sources claim that about 10 percent of the population was displaced. Approximately 500,000 fled to neighboring countries such as Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

The rebuilding process has begun in El Salvador with both sides of the conflict attempting to define their roles and their place in the future of El Salvador. A strong component of the rebuilding is the Salvadorans who have been living in the United States, legally or illegally, for almost a decade. During the war, the United States debated whether to consider Salvadorans political refugees or economic refugees. This debate caused many to remain undocumented for fear of being deported when they went to claim asylum. At the end of 1990, an 18-month "temporary protected status" was finally offered to Salvadorans, and 186,000

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registered to claim protection. Still, many did not identify themselves for fear that they would be deported, and for fear that their names would be released.

A powerful dimension of the case on El Salvador is that remittances to families back in El Salvador represents one of the three largest sources of foreign exchange. The connection between sending and receiving communities, which in this example ties the economies of the two countries, affects both the out migration and return migration. Families depend on these remittances. In many cases they have no other means to support themselves. Those sending the money are hesitant to return because they know that their families need this source of income.

What happens now that the war has ended? Will people return? A unique aspect of the repatriation of Salvadoran refugees is that many groups have returned as entire communities rather than as individual families. Refugees that started to cross the border to Honduras in 1979, establishing camps such as Mesa Grande, became the first to return to their homes in the mountains of northern El Salvador in 1987. Returning to their towns as a group gives them greater potential economic and political power. Others in the United States are waiting to see what happens, having been away for so long that in some cases the dream to return is long gone.

The war that caused people to leave their communities has had a profound effect on all dimensions of life in El Salvador. Children growing up during the years of conflict show the greatest impact of this war. The drawings in this activity reflect their view of the war.

### Outline of Activity

Students will examine drawings of the war in El Salvador done by children in refugee camps. In addition, they will read a letter from a father to a son describing the situation. The students will create a 3-dimensional sculpture that will incorporate the feelings they have examining the drawings, the issues brought up in their discussion, and the information they have about the forced migration of people from El Salvador.

### Extension Questions

1. How do you think Salvadorans, in the United States or in other countries, feel now that a Peace Treaty has been signed? What do you think they expect?
2. What does the word *refugee* mean to you?
3. The United Nations has an organization which helps to protect political refugees around the world. What other refugees have you heard about? What do you know about the situation in their countries? How does their case compare to the El Salvador case?
4. Compare how you might feel if you were forced out of your community or country and how you might feel if you chose to leave voluntarily.
5. Compare and contrast this case of migration with the other cases that have been presented. How is this case different? How is it similar?

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### Related Issues

- Involvement of the United States in the war in El Salvador
- Rebuilding El Salvador
- Refugee camps along the borders of El Salvador
- Democracy in El Salvador
- Effects of war on children

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## CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR ACTIVITY CARD

El Salvador, a country about the size of Massachusetts, is located in Central America and has a population of approximately 5 million people. A civil war tore the country apart for more than a decade. During this time, a third of the population was displaced. This means that they had to move to another location because they were in danger or because their homes were destroyed. Many lived in refugee camps on the borders of El Salvador, in countries such as Honduras or Guatemala. A refugee is a person who has gone to another country to live because he or she felt endangered. Some, who had family and friends in the United States or in Canada, moved to these countries. Many children were orphaned during the war.

In January 1992, the two sides fighting in the war, the Salvadoran government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) signed a peace treaty. Both sides are rebuilding the country. People who were living in refugee camps are now returning to El Salvador. Some of the Salvadorans living in the United States are waiting to return.

Drawings and pictures can sometimes tell a story better than words. Look at the drawings by Salvadoran children between the ages of eight and fourteen who were living in refugee camps. These are expressions of their feelings and of what they remembered. Read the letter from a father to his son who is living in the United States.

With your group discuss the following questions:

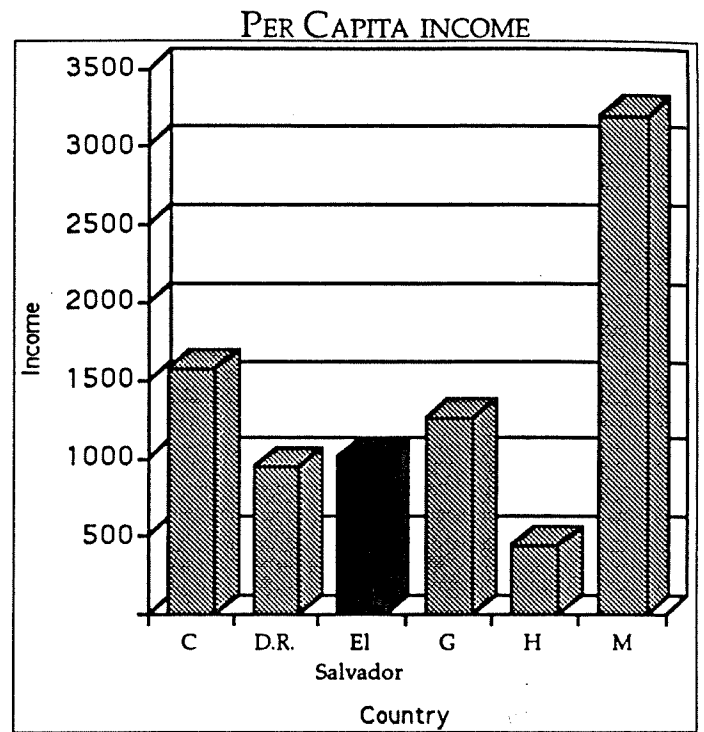
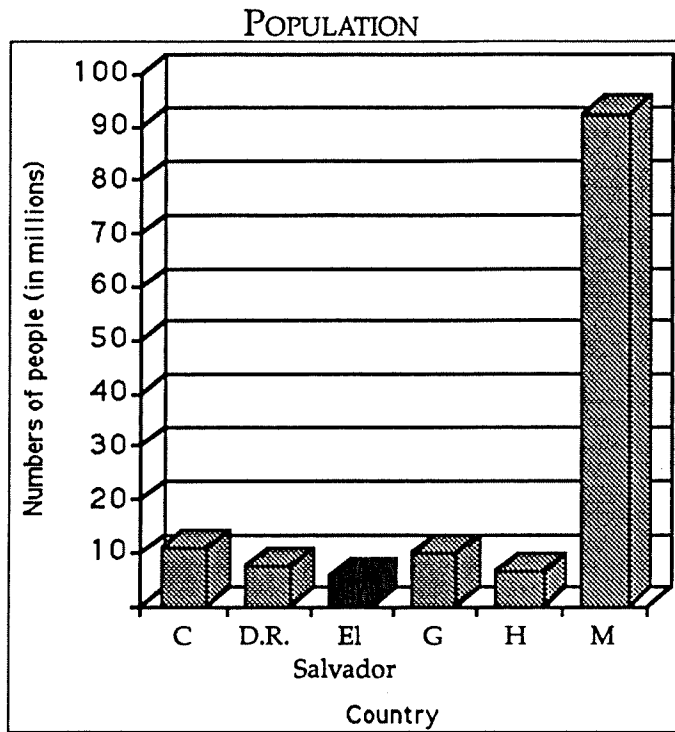
1. What do you see in the drawings? Describe what is happening in each of the drawings.
2. Share what you feel looking at these drawings and reading the letter.
3. Think about what was happening in El Salvador from what you see in the drawings and from the description in the letter. Why do you think the family in the letter made the decision that the son should leave?
4. Discuss whether the son had a choice about leaving the country.
5. Migration in El Salvador includes both people moving out of the country and people moving inside the country. How has migration in El Salvador affected that country?

### GROUP TASK

Make a three dimensional sculpture expressing what it was like for people to leave El Salvador. As part of this sculpture, include objects representing why they had to leave. Try to incorporate the feelings they might have had leaving El Salvador. Use what the group has discussed about the drawings and the letter in the sculpture.

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## CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR DATA AND MAP CARD



MAP OF EL SALVADOR



**activity three: el salvador**

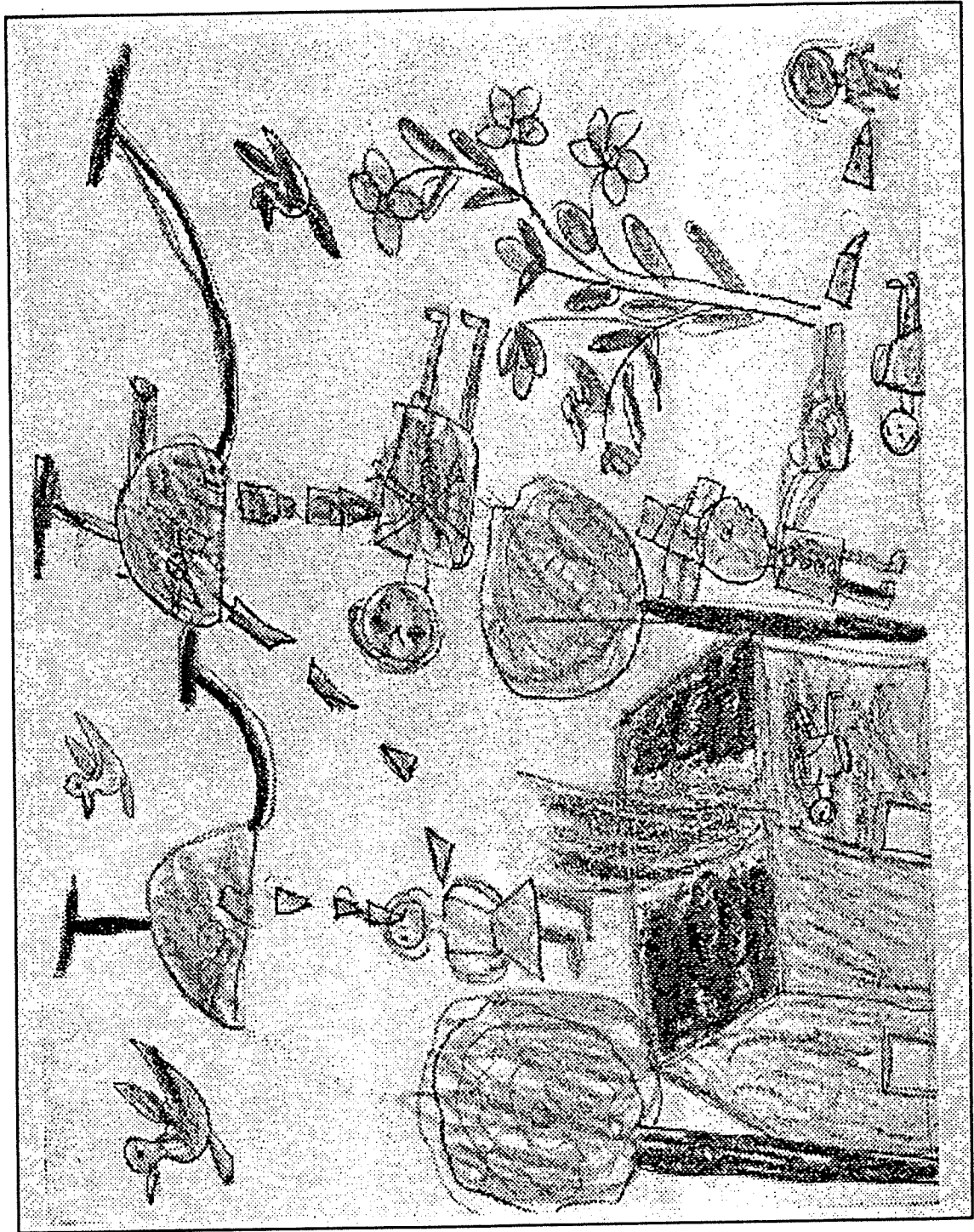
CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR  
RESOURCE CARD 1

This is the situation in our country. The people in the armed forces are killing all of our brothers. They murder everyone equally, they kill us all, children, women, and old people."

Este es la situación de nuestro país los de la fuerza armadas nos están asesinando a todos nuestros hermanos asesinan todos por igual nos asesinan niños mujeres y ancianos.

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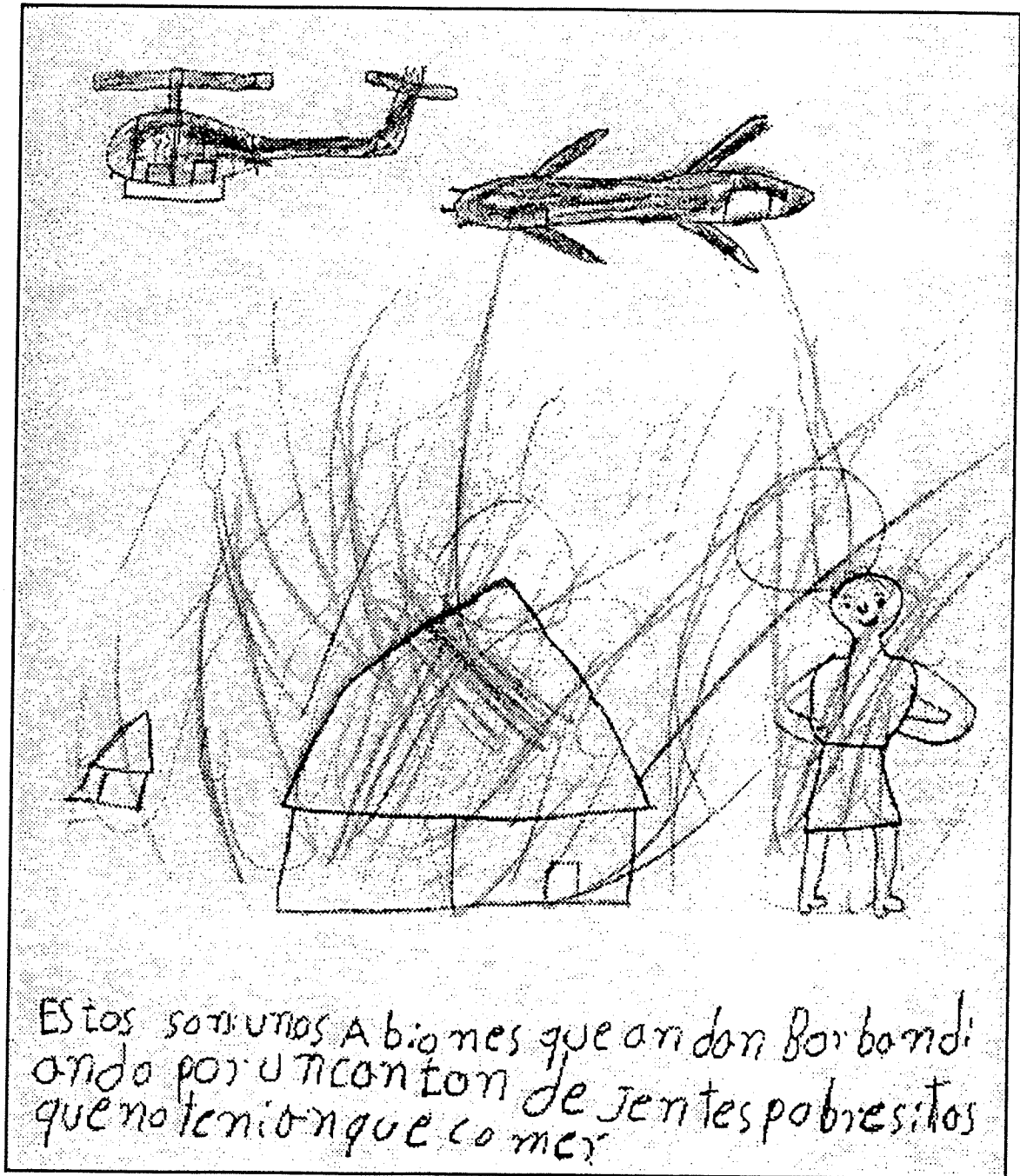
CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR  
RESOURCE CARD 2



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### CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR RESOURCE CARD 3



"These are some planes that go bombing a bunch of poor little people who have nothing to eat."

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CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR  
RESOURCE CARD 4

San Salvador, El Salvador  
September 30, 1985

Armando Rodriguez  
Los Angeles, CA

Dear son:

I hope you find yourself well.

I give thanks to God that you are there because it is very dangerous for you here, because one of these nights some men from the barracks came looking for you and they went looking around and searching the house and they asked me where you were and I pretended as though you were still at school and when I told them this they all loaded their rifles and one of them was very angry, he told me that if they found you you were going to pay because you were a guerrilla and you already knew what happens to them if they get ahold of them, they came several nights and one of those they even threw me to the ground and threatened me, and they put a rifle to Daniel's head just like with me. When they left we couldn't sleep right anymore thinking they were going to return, they now come by here in the alley more often and Daniel has told me it would be better if we went from here to another colony and we're going to sell this house, I thank God you aren't here, although there is a pain in my soul, but it is better that you are far away. Also, would you believe, some men went to take away Chamba's brother-in-law Armando from the house in the early morning the week before, but luckily they didn't find him, they just searched the house, they say it's because of a photo that he took, I wonder what photo it is as he works with an American company, so the poor man sometimes comes home to sleep and sometimes not.

My mom and my brothers and sisters are well, everyone is studying, I haven't gotten sick. I send you these vitamins. When can you call me on the phone? Study, learn English because that is going to be useful to you in the future, take care of yourself. The neighbors send you greetings.

I love you

R. Isabel

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CHILDREN OF EL SALVADOR  
INDIVIDUAL REPORT

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did people leave El Salvador?