

Aleppo's underground orphanage

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

Choose the correct answers.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Aleppo is in ...</p> <p>a. ... Sudan.</p> <p>b. ... South Africa.</p> <p>c. ... Syria.</p> <p>d. ... Sicily.</p> | <p>2. Aleppo is a ...</p> <p>a. ... tiny community.</p> <p>b. ... small village.</p> <p>c. ... medium-sized town.</p> <p>d. ... large city.</p> |
|--|---|

What else do you know about Aleppo?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions below. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

refuge bereaved destitute bombardment thriving orphans haven

1. the state of someone whose close friend or family member has recently died _____ (title)
2. a place where you go to protect yourself from something dangerous _____ (subtitle)
3. children whose parents have died _____ (para 1)
4. an attack on a place made by dropping bombs from planes or by firing large guns for a long time _____ (para 3)
5. a place where people can feel safe and happy _____ (para 3)
6. having no money or possessions _____ (para 6)
7. very successful _____ (para 9)

endured dormitories ferocity incessant tackle civilian trauma

8. large rooms where a lot of people sleep, for example in a school _____ (para 11)
9. violence or extreme force _____ (para 12)
10. someone who does not belong to the armed forces or the police _____ (para 12)
11. continuing for a long time without stopping in a way that is annoying _____ (para 14)
12. make an organized and determined attempt to deal with a problem _____ (para 15)
13. a feeling of being very upset, afraid or shocked after a bad experience _____ (para 15)
14. suffered something difficult or unpleasant in a patient way over a long period _____ (para 16)

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Aleppo's underground orphanage offers a haven for children bereaved by war

Children from ages two to 14 sleep, eat and study in subterranean refuge while the bombing continues overhead

Emma Graham-Harrison

20 August, 2016

- 1 Two floors underground, Aleppo's luckier orphans sleep as safely as is possible in a city at war. But they are jolted awake regularly by bombs that rip apart the streets above them.
- 2 Watching over the children are Asmar Halabi and his wife, who knows the damage explosives can do because she still has injuries from an airstrike on a school in 2014.
- 3 The 50 children at Halabi's orphanage have already lived through years of bombing. The orphanage moved below ground when the relentless bombardment became too much for normal life to continue. Now, it provides an underground haven.
- 4 The children range in age from two to 14. Their parents have been killed or have become mentally ill because of the conflict, which is now nearly in its sixth year.
- 5 "They have adjusted very well to this terrible life," Halabi said. "For instance, they used to feel scared when they heard the sound of planes but, nowadays, they want to go out of the building and stare at the sky to see the jets or helicopters when they hear them overhead."
- 6 The orphanage opened in 2015 after people became worried about the growing number of destitute young people. It has space for another 100 children and new residents arrive with tragic regularity.
- 7 "We did a survey about the number of children who had lost one or both parents and, sadly, we found a large number," said Halabi, who was a trader before the war and has no children.
- 8 His team of 25 ranges from cooks and security guards to teachers. Among the most important figures at the orphanage are the psychologists, who have a special counselling area where they work with children such as eight-year-old Yasmeen.
- 9 After her mother and father were killed, Yasmeen arrived with a fear of the dark. Volunteers found her begging on the streets, Halabi said. Today she is thriving and top of her class.
- 10 "When children arrive, it is difficult because they have suffered so much but, after a few months here, they mostly improve," he said. "Our target is to protect them and educate them to succeed in the future. Most of the children's parents have died in the war; perhaps 5% have one parent who is still alive but is suffering mental problems so severe they cannot care for their own children."
- 11 Funded by a charity and by donations from individual supporters abroad, Halabi and his team spent six months in 2015 renovating a building into several stores of cheerful dormitories and classrooms.
- 12 It was a statement of hope in a city where buildings were regularly smashed to pieces. But as the ferocity and intensity of bombing raids increased and with many airstrikes hitting civilian targets, including homes, markets, hospitals and schools, the orphanage decided it was no longer safe to keep the children to an ordinary routine.
- 13 It was then that they moved mattresses underground, along with many of their activities, from classes to exercise, so the children could sleep, eat and study with the safety of a few metres of earth over their heads.
- 14 "When the jets come, we go down to the basements with the children," Halabi said, adding that they have almost stopped going outside. "We used to take the children to the gardens to have fun. Unfortunately, because of the incessant air raids, we had to completely stop. We want to ensure the safety of the children so I don't let them go out."
- 15 Their new home is full of colour, with swings, a handicraft area, computer sections and other games. It has a stage, where the psychologists and teachers try to help the children tackle some of their trauma through performance.
- 16 Unlike support teams in refugee centres, they have to tackle not only past horrors the children have endured but prepare them for possible suffering in the future.
- 17 Halabi and his wife considered leaving for Turkey with the children but decided they could not leave. Aleppo is their home and, besides, every day more parents die in the war, leaving behind children in desperate need, who for now have only one hope.
- 18 "We are like a big family here," Halabi said. "There is no other orphanage in Aleppo."

Hussein Akoush contributed to this report

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3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How many children are living at the orphanage and how old are they?
2. Why did the orphanage move underground?
3. What do you know about the married couple who set up the orphanage?
4. How is the orphanage financed?
5. Apart from the Halabis, who works at the orphanage and what do they do?
6. What do the Halabis say about leaving Syria for neighbouring Turkey?

4 Expressive language

When writing about topics such as this, everyday language does not always express the intensity of the situation, so the writer has to search for more expressive language.

Match the expressions from the article with their meanings.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. jolted awake | a. an awful way of living |
| 2. rip apart | b. attacks that never stop or lessen |
| 3. relentless bombardment | c. non-stop bombing by planes |
| 4. terrible life | d. break and destroy violently |
| 5. tragic regularity | e. broken violently into small parts |
| 6. smashed to pieces | f. often and in a way that is very sad |
| 7. incessant air raids | g. urgently requiring essentials such as food and clothing |
| 8. in desperate need | h. woken up suddenly by noise |

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5 Vocabulary

Find 16 words and phrases in the article that are connected with war and conflict and write them onto the word wheel.



6 Discussion

Summarize the article to your partner. Pretend they haven't read it. Use the language from tasks 4 and 5 to help you.

7 Webquest

Describe how you imagine the orphanage to look. Then, look at photos of it here:

www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/19/aleppo-underground-orphanage-haven-children-syria-war

How do the photos compare to the orphanage you imagined?

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KEY

1 Warmer

1. c
2. d

2 Key words

1. bereaved
2. refuge
3. orphans
4. bombardment
5. haven
6. destitute
7. thriving
8. dormitories
9. ferocity
10. civilian
11. incessant
12. tackle
13. trauma
14. endured

3 Comprehension check

1. 50 children; aged two to 14
2. because the ferocity and intensity of bombing raids increased and many airstrikes were hitting civilian targets, including homes, markets, hospitals and schools
3. Asmar Halabi and his wife run the orphanage. He was a trader before the war. She was injured in 2014 during an airstrike on a school. They have no children.
4. It's funded by a charity and by donations from individuals from abroad.
5. cooks, security guards, teachers and psychologists; They offer education and counselling, a safe haven, food, places to play and computers to use.
6. They considered it but decided they could not leave. Aleppo is their home and every day more parents die in the war, leaving behind children in desperate need.

4 Expressive language

1. h
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. f
6. e
7. c
8. g

5 Vocabulary

(possible answers)

at war, bombs, rip apart, damage, explosives, injuries, airstrike, suffering, bombing, bombardment, killed, conflict, jets, helicopters, bombing raids, civilian targets, air raids, trauma, horror