

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

Choose the correct answers.

- Aleppo is in ...
  - ... Sudan.
  - ... South Africa.
  - ... Syria.
  - ... Sicily.
- Aleppo is a ...
  - ... tiny community.
  - ... small village.
  - ... medium-sized town.
  - ... large city.

What else do you know about Aleppo?

#### 2 Key words

Find the key words in the article and write them next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- the state of someone whose close friend or family member has recently died \_\_\_\_\_ (title)
- children whose parents have died \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
- extremely unhappy and lonely \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
- people (often children) that you are responsible for and take care of \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- underground \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- a place where people can feel safe and happy \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
- clothes that are old, torn and dirty \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
- having no money or possessions \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
- made or used for just one purpose \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
- very successful \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
- large rooms where a lot of people sleep, for example in a school \_\_\_\_\_ (para 13)
- violence or extreme force \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)
- continuing for a long time without stopping in a way that is annoying \_\_\_\_\_ (para 16)
- make an organized and determined attempt to deal with a problem \_\_\_\_\_ (para 17)

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 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 anyone can in a city at war, though they are jolted awake regularly by bombs ripping apart the streets above them.
- 2 Watching over them are Asmar Halabi and his wife, who knows in intimate, painful detail the damage explosives can do because she still carries injuries picked up in an airstrike on a school in 2014.
- 3 The suffering of the Syrian city's children, who have lived through years of bombing, was thrust back into the headlines recently by a photograph of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, bereft and bloodied in the back of an ambulance.
- 4 Halabi's 50 charges at the Moumayazoun (Outstanding Guys) orphanage are some of the most vulnerable individuals left in the city. The orphanage moved below ground when relentless bombardment became too much for normal life to continue and it now provides a subterranean haven.
- 5 The children range in age from two to 14. Their parents have been killed or become mentally ill, or have been snatched away in some other cruel fashion by a conflict now moving towards its sixth year.
- 6 "They have adjusted in an extraordinary way 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."
- 7 Many had been made homeless, like siblings Omar, 12, and Mufedah, 13, found sleeping in rags on the stairs of their uncle's block of flats. He had forced them into the ruined city to beg for food and small change after their father died and their mother had a nervous breakdown and then disappeared, Halabi said. Although their relative had barred them from his flat, his doorway still seemed safer to the children than the streets.
- 8 The orphanage opened in 2015 after activists raised concerns about the growing number of destitute young people scraping a living alone. It has space for another 100 children and new residents arrive with tragic regularity.
- 9 "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 of his own.
- 10 His team of 25 ranges from cooks and security guards to teachers. Among the most important figures at the orphanage are the full-time psychologists, who have a dedicated counselling area where they work with children such as eight-year-old Yasmeen.
- 11 Having lost her mother and father, Yasmeen arrived with a fear of the dark after volunteers found her begging on the streets, Halabi said. Today, she is thriving and top of her class.
- 12 "When children arrive, we suffer a lot with them because they have been through so many situations 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 have lost both their parents in the ongoing war; perhaps 5% have only lost one but the other parent is suffering mental problems so severe they cannot care for their own children."
- 13 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 storeys of cheerful dormitories and classrooms.
- 14 It was a statement of hope in a city where buildings were regularly being 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 entrust the children's lives to an ordinary routine.
- 15 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.
- 16 "When the jets come, we go down to the basements with the children," Halabi said, adding

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

### Level 3 • Advanced

that they had all but stopped going outside. "We used to take the children to the gardens to have fun. Unfortunately, because of the incessant shelling and air raids, we couldn't feel free, then we completely stopped. We are pretty keen to ensure the safety of the children so I don't let them go out."

- 17 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.
- 18 Unlike support teams in refugee centres, they have to tackle not only past horrors the children

have endured but prepare them for suffering that might lie ahead.

- 19 Halabi and his wife considered leaving for Turkey with their charges 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.
- 20 "We are like a big family here," Halabi said. "There is no other orphanage in Aleppo."

*Hussein Akoush contributed to this report*

© Guardian News and Media 2016

First published in *The Guardian*, 20/08/16

### 3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How many children are currently living at the orphanage and how old are they?
2. Why did the orphanage move underground?
3. What do you know about the 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 the possibility of them leaving Syria for neighbouring Turkey?

### 4 Expressive language

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

Find the following two- and three-word phrases in the text.

1. woken up suddenly by noise
2. break and destroy violently
3. returned into view suddenly and violently
4. attacks that never stop or lessen
5. removed by force
6. often and in a way that is very sad
7. broken violently into small parts
8. non-stop attacks from military explosives
9. urgently requiring essentials such as food and clothing

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

Level 3 • Advanced

### 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, pretending 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](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/19/aleppo-underground-orphanage-haven-children-syria-war)

How do the photos compare to the orphanage that you pictured in your mind?

## Aleppo's underground orphanage

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### KEY

##### 1 Warmer

1. c
2. d

##### 2 Key words

1. bereaved
2. orphans
3. bereft
4. charges
5. subterranean
6. haven
7. rags
8. destitute
9. dedicated
10. thriving
11. dormitories
12. ferocity
13. incessant
14. tackle

##### 3 Comprehension check

1. 50 children; aged two to 14
2. because the ferocity and intensity of bombing raids increased, the city above was being ruined 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 do handicrafts, 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. jolted awake
2. rip apart
3. thrust back
4. relentless bombardment
5. snatched away
6. with tragic regularity
7. smashed to pieces
8. incessant shelling
9. in desperate need

##### 5 Vocabulary

(possible answers)

at war, bombs, ripping apart, damage, explosives, injuries, airstrike, suffering, bombing, bereft, bloodied, bombardment, killed, conflict, jets, helicopters, ruined, bombing raids, civilian targets, shelling, air raids, trauma, horror