Subject: Social studies, geography, government.

Background:
Students have probably heard about the crisis in Sudan on the news, and this lesson offers them background about the situation in Darfur. It can also serve as reference material for students studying other humanitarian and environmental disasters. The lesson covers the current conflict between the people of Darfur and the Janjaweed militia, its historical and religious roots, its impact on neighboring countries, and the international response.

Introduction
Ask students to discuss what they already know about Darfur from news reports. Ask them if they know of any similar crises in Africa in recent years. This opening discussion might take place the day before the lesson begins, with the students reading web articles as introductory homework.

Tell students that while the situation in Darfur is complex, the factors underlying this humanitarian catastrophe bear a striking similarity to the economic, ethnic, and political motivations that have contributed to other incidents of genocide throughout the world.

You may wish to share some general information about the development of the conflict before proceeding with activities.

The Darfur region of western Sudan is approximately the size of Texas. Over the past twenty years, drought and the encroachment of the desert have made water and arable land scarce in Darfur. As a result, the population of herders (primarily Arab Muslims) have come into increasing conflict with farmers (primarily black Muslims). A rebellion erupted in Darfur in early 2003 when two loosely allied rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLA, previously known as the Darfur Liberation Front) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), attacked government military installations. At that time, rebels in Darfur, seeking an end to the region's economic and political marginalization, also took up arms to protect their communities against an on-going campaign by government-backed militias recruited among groups of Arab culture in Darfur and Chad. These "Janjaweed" militias have received government support to clear civilians from areas considered disloyal. In July 2004, the U.S. Congress unanimously passed a resolution declaring the situation in Darfur "genocide."
Activities

Activity 1:
Ask students to read BBCnews "Screams of Sudan’s Starving Refugees"
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/3840427.stm. Have them explain in an essay or in a class discussion why the United Nations has called Darfur "one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world." Ask students whom the article indicates is responsible for the crisis in Darfur.

Activity 2:
Ask students to divide into four groups, to do Web, library, and newspaper searches to find information about the following topics:

1. The Janjaweed
   - BBC: Sudan’s Shadowy Arab Militia http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3613953.stm
   - Slate: Who are the Janjaweed?—A Guide to the Sudanese Militiamen http://www.slate.com/id/2104210

2. Water and Food Shortages in Darfur
   http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article27630

3. The impact on Chad and other neighboring countries

4. The international response to the crisis in Darfur
   - International Crisis Group: Crisis in Darfur http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3060&l=1

Have each group prepare a presentation to the class on its topic.

Closing:
Have the class give group presentations of their research, followed by a class discussion of the crisis.

Suggested Student Assessment:
Ask students to discuss as a class or in small groups whether they think such a humanitarian crisis could happen in North America or Europe today. Why or why not? In a class discussion or written essays, ask them to defend their conclusions.

Extending the Lesson:
Have students research the activities of international aid organizations such as CARE, Doctors Without Borders, and Mercy Corps in the Sudan and other countries.