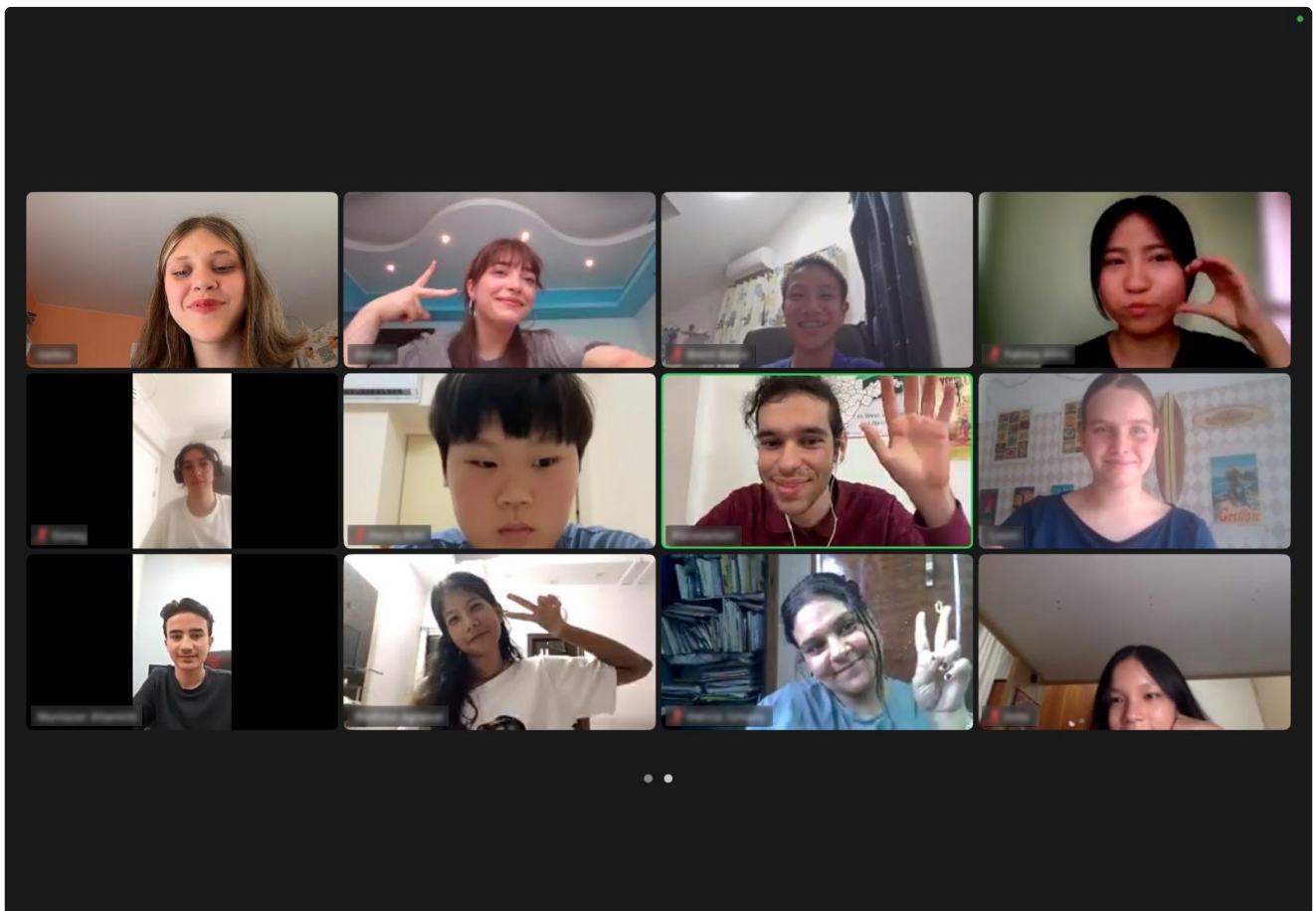


UWC SHORT COURSE · JUNE-AUGUST 2026

# Many Ways to Be Human

*A first look at our first UWC short course*

207 applications. 53 countries. Two cohorts.



*One of the June cohort's two groups, during a seminar session together*

# What this is, at a glance

Our mission is to counter the roots of violence, caused in part by a crisis of attention among the next generation. We do that by running guided, dialogue-based courses in classical literature that help teens learn to listen, think, and speak in ways that create connection. Many Ways to Be Human, our first UWC short course, brings that mission to students from dozens of countries who would otherwise never meet, putting them in the same seminar to wrestle over the same page together, with no lecture and no assigned conclusion.

UWC, United World Colleges, is a global network of 18 schools built on the idea that students from different countries learning side by side is one of the most direct paths to peace. We brought them the idea for this course ourselves; they liked it, and after we went through their endorsement process, it let us open this course to students from that whole network.

207

TOTAL APPLICATIONS

53

COUNTRIES APPLIED  
FROM

46

STUDENTS ENROLLED

22

COUNTRIES  
ENROLLED FROM

Nearly a quarter of all 207 applications came from six active conflict zones: Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Palestine, Ukraine. The need for this kind of course is global.

## THE FORMAT

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# Eight texts. No lecture. One question each.

Each session runs about ninety minutes over Zoom. Students get a short text a few days ahead, read it closely, and come ready with one thing: a unique observation and a question. There's no lecture and no predetermined conclusion, just the group working through the text together. Kanstantsin leads the discussion, with Amir as co-facilitator.

The reading list, eight short works from across the world, was chosen deliberately to show what it means to be human from as many different vantage points as possible. We form each group of students the same way, kept as diverse as we can make it, on purpose. The idea isn't to tell students that someone unlike them deserves to be understood, it's to put them in a seminar where they have to work that out for themselves, together.

### June cohort reading list

Michel Montaigne, France · *"On Cannibals"*

Vladimir Nabokov, Russia · *"The Doorbell"*

Yasunari Kawabata, Japan · *"The Grasshopper and the Bell Cricket"*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Colombia · *"The Handsomest Drowned Man"*

Alice Munro, Canada · *"Red Dress, 1946"*

William Faulkner, United States · *"Barn Burning"*

Rabindranath Tagore, India · *"Cabuliwallah"*

Plato, Ancient Greece · *"Apology"*

August's cohort read a different set of five texts and films, chosen the same way.

## TWO COHORTS

# 46 students, two cohorts, one course.

### JUNE COURSE

Students accepted **26**

Dates **June 21 - July 5**

Full scholarships **25%**

### AUGUST COHORT

Students accepted **20**

Dates **August 5 - August 12**

Full scholarships **20%**

# 62

## Five free community seminars

For everyone we could not accommodate in the course itself, standalone Socratic seminars open to anyone, 62 registrations total. Every student who applied was offered something. No one was turned away.

## WHAT WE FOUND

# The numbers behind the change

On our own pre and post course surveys, students moved from 3.83 to 4.25 out of 5 in June, and from 3.83 to 4.04 in August, on questions about speaking up, sitting with hard ideas, and understanding someone unlike themselves. Four of the five things we track moved in both cohorts; the fifth, seeing a situation through the eyes of someone very different, moved in June but held flat in August, five sessions may just not

be enough time for that one. On UWC's own separate evaluation, every student who completed it said they'd recommend the course, with an average satisfaction of 4.67 out of 5.

**Confident** 11/18

**Critical** 9/18

**Sociable** 9/18

**Active** 6/18

**Creative** 6/18

**Hopeful** 5/18

*Words UWC's own survey asked students to pick for themselves after the course.*

## VOICES FROM THE COURSE

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# In their own words

**Haya** · Syria

*"After the course, I became more patient. Patience is mandatory in dealing with everyone, younger or older than you. But to become patient, you need to ask a lot of questions and listen to what they have to say."*

**Fatima** · Afghanistan

*"Before the course I thought that if I think something is right then it is 100% right. But now I understand that people can have different opinions because of the circumstances they were born into and the way they were raised."*

**Alexandra** · Mexico

*"Nowadays it's really complicated for me to pay attention to something fully and lay aside everything else. The course has definitely helped with my attention span."*

**Mark** · Bulgaria

*"Even if I disagree with someone's interpretation or thinking, I try to follow their way of thinking and try to understand them better."*

**Brent** · Philippines

*"I learned to look at things from another person's perspective and understand that our values and principles are often shaped by where we come from."*

**Leoní** · Spain

*"I am not someone who enjoys confrontation, so I always used to just agree with the other person. After this course I always try to be respectful, but I do speak up for myself more."*

**Anonymous** · UWC course survey

*"I would definitely keep the diversity we had, because hearing different perspectives from people with different backgrounds made the discussions more meaningful and helped me see things from new points of view."*

## What they built after

A seminar can change how someone thinks, but that shift doesn't always leave the room on its own. So every student now builds a project after the seminar ends, taking a specific line, moment, or question from the text that stayed with them and turning it into a real action in their own community. We call it Svet Projects: from thought to action. 37 students across both cohorts have built one so far. Three examples below; all 37 are listed in the full report.

### Fatima **AFGHANISTAN**



Banned from school herself as a woman in Afghanistan, Fatima couldn't shake the question behind Faulkner's "Barn Burning," about a boy who decides not to stay silent in the face of what he knows is unfair. She designed and ran a seminar of her own, «There Is Still a Way,» for seven other girls in her community shut out of school too, brought in an educational counselor as a guest speaker, and introduced the girls to online school options they hadn't known existed. She built a WhatsApp group to stay in touch afterward, and several of them have since enrolled.

"Even small actions can make positive changes in people's lives," Fatima wrote. "All they needed was an opportunity."

### Mark **BULGARIA**



Mark's project started with a line from Montaigne about the gap between seeing a problem and actually being able to act on it. He organized a charity bazaar in central Sofia with about seventeen friends, six hours of handmade jewelry, paintings, and secondhand clothes, with the proceeds going to CAAI, a local NGO working against factory farming, and spent the day handing out flyers about the cause around the city.

center too. The bazaar raised 277 euros, but what stuck with him more was what he overheard in conversations that day: several friends said afterward they wanted to volunteer with CAAI again, or that they'd try cutting back on meat.

## Omar **EGYPT**

Omar took the gap Tolstoy's "Alyosha the Pot" shows between people who are placed above others, and used it to film a video on Egypt's own class divide with his sister and a friend, now past 10,000 views on TikTok.

A few more of the 37, as examples:

**Nadzeya, Belarus.** Made a short film about the different ways women understand their own roles, inspired by Nabokov's "The Doorbell."

**Güneş, Turkey.** Visited a nursing home in Istanbul and talked with residents about what actually makes a moment meaningful, inspired by "The Grasshopper and the Bell Cricket."

**Liubov, Russia.** Interviewed friends about small, ordinary moments of happiness and published what she found as essays in both Russian and English. She's now founding her own Socratic method club at her local youth organization.

## LOOKING AHEAD

# What's next

This first year taught us the demand is real and that the course works. Eighteen of June's twenty-six students, and more from August, have already turned what they read and argued about into something outside the seminar. We're already thinking about what it would take to run this at a larger scale, more cohorts a year, and more groups within each one, so more of the students who want a seat can get one.

### What one small course already reaches, in order

- 1 It reaches us. Getting to build this full time, and watch it come together the way it did, is what makes the work feel worth it.
- 2 It reaches the students. 46 of them sat in our June and August courses, plus 32 more in our five community seminars.
- 3 It reaches their communities. Eighteen of June's twenty-six have already turned what they read and argued about into something outside the seminar, reaching people who never took our course at all.

*This report covers our first year running Many Ways to Be Human twice, in June and August of 2026. We wanted our newsletter community to see it. We're always glad to welcome new supporters if this is ever something you'd like to be part of. Thank you for following along, we'll keep sending updates as this grows.*