

6-8 Lesson Plan Contents

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Grade Level: 6-8

Topic: Justice or Injustice?

Unit Goal(s): Students learn about human rights through a justice/injustice model that will bring students into their communities and communities into their classroom.

The students:

1. Participate in a human rights discussion.
2. Define justice.
3. Discuss justice.
4. Investigate justice.
5. Make a Wisdom Wall.
6. Identify human rights issues.
7. Match the observed issues to the UDHR.
8. Select an issue on which to take action.

The students:

1. Participate in story-telling.
2. Review the interview protocol.
3. Use the interview tools.
4. Participate in the Image Theater activity.

G. Communicate and demonstrate your human rights learning
How can we share what we learned within our schools, families, and communities?

- The students:*
1. Demonstrate their learning creatively.
 2. Make a Human Rights Booth.

A. Observe and identify the human rights issue
What is at the heart of this human rights issue?

B. Describe and share human rights stories
How have our ancestors worked to promote and protect this human right? Who within our schools, families, and communities promote and protect this human right?

- The students:*
1. Participate in small group discussions about the possible actions students could take in order to have a positive impact on their selected issue.

F. Reflect and draw conclusions on what you have learned about promoting and protecting human rights
What did we learn? Did our action have the intended impact?

- The students:*
1. Answer the reflection questions in groups.

Human Rights Process Model

E. Interview community members and collect information about the impact of your human rights action
What happened when we took action? Whose lives did we impact?

- The students:*
1. Use photography and video to document the actions.

D. Select a human rights response and take action
What is the best response or position?

- The students:*
1. Utilize resources and take action on a human rights issue.

C. Generate human rights responses and make predictions about their impact on the community
What could we do? What will happen if we do that?

Unit III

Grades 6-8 Unit Lesson Plan

UNIT III: JUSTICE OR INJUSTICE

Key Question: How can we identify the acts of justice and address the injustices around us?

Activity Goal(s): Students learn about human rights through a justice/injustice model that will bring students into their communities and communities into their classrooms.

Time: Approximately 15 hours depending on activities selected

Materials: See individual activities

Setting: Grades 6-8

Student Learning Goals

Students will understand the following human rights principles, language and values:

Activist	Justice
Affirmative Action	Legal Rights
Collective Rights	Moral Rights
Community Action	Persecution
Convention	Political Justice
Covenant	Racism
Cultural Justice	Ratification
Declaration	Self-Determination
Economic Justice	Social Change
Human Rights	Social Justice
Inalienable Rights	Sovereignty
Injustice	Systemic Change
Interdependent	Treaty
Intergovernmental Agencies	

Students will apply the following human rights standards:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA)

Students will demonstrate the following human rights skills and practices:¹

- Investigate the impact humans have on the environment.²
- Examine changing forms of cross-cultural contact, conflict, and cooperation that

¹ All footnotes are specific MN Educational Standards that correspond to the unit's human rights skills and practices.

² Science: Grade 8: III.A.- Earth Structures and Processes

- resulted from the interconnections between Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas.³
- Begin to use historical resources.⁴
 - Recognize the importance of individual action and character in shaping civic life.
 - Articulate the range of rights and responsibilities in a republic.
 - Understand the importance of participation in civic life and demonstrate effective civic skills.⁵
 - Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of principles and beliefs upon which our republic is based.⁶
 - Demonstrate knowledge of influential and fundamental documents of the U.S. constitutional government.⁷
 - Describe the relationship the United States has with other nations in the world.
 - Understand other governmental systems in the world.⁸
 - Create informative, expressive and persuasive writing.⁹
 - Locate and use information in reference materials.¹⁰
 - Demonstrate understanding and communicate effectively through listening and speaking.¹¹
 - Critically analyze information found in electronic and print media and use a variety of these sources to learn about a topic and represent ideas.¹²
 - Apply skills of mathematical representation, communication, and reasoning.¹³

Note: Many other skills can be fostered by using this material, depending on the areas of study and action plans undertaken by the students. See the Resource Section of this kit for a more extensive list of the Minnesota Education Standards.

³ Social Studies: WHist 4-8/III.F.- World Civilization Toward a Global Culture, 1500-1770 AD

⁴ Social Studies: Hist Skills 4-8/IV.B.- Historical Resources

⁵ Social Studies: Gov't & Citizshp 4-8/VII.A.- Civic Values, Skills, Rights, and Responsibilities

⁶ Social Studies: Gov't & Citizshp 4-8/VII.B.- Beliefs and Principles of United States Democracy

⁷ Social Studies: Gov't & Citizshp 4-8/VII.C.- Roots of the Republic

⁸ Social Studies: Gov't & Citizshp 4-8/VII.D.- Governmental Institutions and Processes of the United States

⁹ Language Arts: 7/II.A., 7/II.D. - 7/II.A. - Types of Writing

¹⁰ Language Arts: 7/II.A., 7/II.D. 7/II.D. - Research

¹¹ Language Arts: List/Spk/Vewg 6/III.A.- Speaking and Listening

¹² Language Arts: List/Spk/Vewg 8/III.C.- 8/III.C Media Literacy

¹³ Math: Mathematical Reasoning 7/I.

Overall Impact

When first thinking about your lesson plan, it is recommended that you keep in mind its intended impact on four levels: (a) student, (b) school, (c) family, and (d) community. Below are some examples of possible impacts that might occur at each of these levels. Identify possible impacts with your students, and discuss how you might collect information to decide on whether or not they have taken place.

Student Impact	School Impact	Family Impact	Community Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to describe examples of injustice in the community • Ability to present conclusions based on valid information • Ability to suggest possible solutions to address these social issues • Ability to describe why justice is necessary at local, national, and international levels, and how it contributes to the protection and promotion of human rights • Increase in understanding of the UDHR, CRC, and MHRA principles that relate to justice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a student-run club that addresses social justice issues • School commended by community organizations for its work on social justice issues • School becomes model for other schools in the district regarding social justice awareness • Students hold peer mediations on issues relating to acts of injustice • Decreased conflict between students due to greater appreciation of school regulations • Students are encouraged to create and implement rules/regulations to foster accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in discussions with family members about justice and injustice • Increase in discussions with family members about school-based projects • Decrease in family conflicts by educating students about the consequences of their actions on others. • Examination of how the above consequences are fair or unfair for the receiving person(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating school events open to the public that showcase student work on justice, e.g., photographs, videos, skits, stories, and art journals • Increase in volunteerism with social justice organizations • Response from municipal government to letter-writing campaign of students on the lack of community social services for battered women • Greater community cohesion as community creates and implements neighborhood agendas to deal with acts of injustice

Activity A: Observe and Identify the Human Rights Issue

Key Question: What is at the heart of this human rights issue?

Activity Goal(s): Deepen understanding of the meaning of “justice”.

Time: 5 1/2 hours — approximately 8 sessions

Materials: Game Board (see “What are Human Rights?” section), Handout 1: Investigate Justice

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Participate in a human rights discussion.

Use the HR Squares Game Board (see the “What are Human Rights?” section), and link the observations to human rights.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Activist	Persecution
Human Rights	Racism
Inalienable Rights	Sovereignty

Discuss the students’ understanding of these terms in relation to other familiar concepts of law:

- Where do rights come from?
- Where does law come from?
- What is the relationship between human rights, the U.S. Constitution, and Minnesota Law?
- What are civil rights?
- What does it mean to “guarantee” a right?
- How are human rights guaranteed? Civil rights? Constitutional rights?

Step 2: Define justice.

Ask students to define justice and injustice in their own terms. Record their responses on a large sheet of paper. When all of the students’ definitions have been recorded, provide them with several different definitions from dictionaries, famous activists, or other sources. Next, have the students review all definitions and write down a new understanding of justice and injustice to keep with them throughout the unit.

Step 3: Discuss justice.

Discuss the following questions related to justice and injustice:

- How do the following institutions promote justice? How do they protect people from injustice?
 - Government
 - Non-governmental Organization (e.g. United Nations, Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, etc.)

- Business
- Media
- Neighborhood/Community
- School
- Family
- Individual

Responses can be recorded on the blackboard or large easel-sized paper. Alternately, this activity can be assigned as homework and discussed in class after all ideas have been turned in.

Step 4: Investigate justice.

Help students to investigate justice and injustice in the environment around them and through their own experiences. Model how to record their observations concisely using Handout 1: Investigate Justice. Provide opportunities for practice in investigating justice and injustice.

Step 5: Make a Wisdom Wall.

- a) Use a wall surface and paper that can be easily moved around as the class adds and categorizes responses. Suggestions: Use a wall surface on which you can attach sticky notes, or a piece of rip-stop fabric sprayed with adhesive spray. Any paper will stick to the fabric temporarily. This procedure is called Wisdom Wall because it is a way to capture the “wisdom of the group.” Everyone’s ideas count and are displayed together.
- b) Distribute half sheets of blank paper and ask students to work individually to print one example of justice or injustice on each half sheet.
- c) As they write, collect and start placing the sheets on the wall.
- d) Ask the students to group like responses together, engaging students in categorizing and discussing the similarities and differences among the data they collected. During this process you may need to call on students to clarify written comments so they can be categorized correctly. Repetitions are acceptable.
- e) After all responses have been placed, ask students to help you label the categories. For example, there might be a group of responses all related to people being treated badly because they come from a different culture or race. This category might be “inequality” or “racism.” Guide the labeling process in order to end up with 5-8 categories.
- f) Photograph the Wisdom Wall. The photo can be used as part of the visual material at the Human Rights Fair (see Activity G for more information on the Human Rights Fair).

Introduce human rights vocabulary:

Cultural Justice	Political Justice
Economic Justice	Social Justice

Step 6: Distinguish Human Rights Issues.

Post sheets with single UDHR abbreviated articles. Facilitate a discussion of the articles. Help students link the data that they collected, reduced, and categorized (Wisdom Wall). Provide information about the UDHR (“What is Human Rights Education?” section). Guide students to distinguish human rights issues from narrower interpersonal issues that do not impinge on a person’s human rights. See the Needs/Wants activity in the “What are Human Rights?” section of this resource for a full lesson on this topic.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Convention	Ratification
Covenant	Self-Determination
Declaration	Treaty

Step 7: Match observed issues to UDHR.

Model how to use UDHR documents as references as you guide students to finding the human rights connection to the issues they observed and documented in the previous activity.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Legal Rights and all terms introduced so far

Step 8: Select an issue.

Help each student to select a topic suitable for further research using questions such as:

- Can you link the issue to at least one of the UDHR articles?
- Will you be able to find information about the issue?

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators:

- The student will demonstrate a deepened understanding of the meaning of “justice” through writing and discussion.
- The student will define the meaning of “justice” and provide examples to illustrate this.
- The student will identify issues of justice and injustice in relation to the UDHR.

Activity B: Describe and Share Human Rights Stories

Key Question: How have our ancestors worked to promote and protect this human right? Who within our schools, families, and communities promote and protect this human right?

Activity Goal(s): Discover a variety of viewpoints on justice and injustice through story-telling, interviews, analysis and interpretation.

Time: 2 1/2 hours — 4 sessions

Materials: Handout 2: Presenting My Story, Handout 3: About My Interview Subjects, Handout 4: Data Analysis Tool, Handout 5: Image Theater, “Getting to know the Activists Among Us” (see HR Fundamentals Section), paper and pen.

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Participate in story-telling.

Guide students through the Handout 2: Presenting My Story to describe how they are affected by issues of justice/injustice and their personal connection to the topic they selected for study. To help them select a story, guide a discussion using the following questions (relate them to the selected topic of study):

- Can you think of a time in your life when you were treated with justice (fairly)? What happened? What was special or unique about this event?
- Can you think of a time in your life when you were treated with injustice (unfairly)? What happened? What, if anything, did you do about it?
- Can you think of a time in your life when you observed someone else being treated with injustice? What happened? What, if anything, did you do about it?

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Use human rights-related vocabulary that emerges from stories.

Step 2: Review the interview protocol.

Provide students with ground rules about how to gather information through interviews, and help them to formulate appropriate questions. Sample questions and protocol for interviews can be found in the activity “Getting to Know the Activists Among Us” in the “What is Human Rights Education?” section of this resource. Limit the number of questions the students can select to three.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Community Action Social Change

Step 3: Use the interview tools.

See Handouts 3 and 4 before and after the interviews. The purpose of these tools is to guide students to look for multiple perspectives on the topic. Have students look for similarities and differences in the responses and account for each.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Collective Rights Systemic Change

Step 4: Participate in the Image Theater activity.

- a) Help students interpret and draw conclusions from their interview data.
- b) Teach students the image theater techniques (using the body to create and share images of the selected issue)—see Handout 5: Image Theater at the end of this unit.
- c) Provide focus questions and directions for movement response to the stories they heard through the interviews. Examples: What do the stories make you think? How do they make you feel? What do the stories inspire you to do?

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

All terms introduced so far

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators:

- The student will show a greater knowledge of diverse viewpoints on justice and injustice as exhibited in their Image Theater activities.
- The student will summarize results from his/her interview process.

**Activity C: Generate Human Rights Responses and Make Predictions
about Their Impact on the Community**

Key Question: What could we do? What will happen if we do that?

Activity Goal(s): Brainstorm in small groups about possible actions that could be taken to address selected issues of justice and injustice

Time: 50 minutes

Materials: Paper and pens, Handout 6: Stories of Students Who Took Action

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Participate in small group discussions about the possible actions students could take in order to have a positive impact on their selected issue.

- What action(s) do you propose?
- Have you ever taken an action like this before?
- What barriers might get in the way?
- What supports are available to help you?
- Who will be affected, and in what ways, if you take this action?
- How will you know if your action is effective?
- How long will your action take?
- What resources are required to take this action?

There are numerous websites devoted to ways in which young people can take action. See Handout 6: Stories of Students Who Took Action.

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators:

- The student will discuss and respond to questions regarding possible human rights action plans.
- The student will summarize group discussion related to possible actions.

Activity D: Select a Human Rights Response and Take Action

Key Question: What is the best response or position?

Activity Goal(s): Take action to address injustice!

Time: Variable, depending on action taken — approximately 1 hour of teacher instruction

Materials: Variable, depending on action taken

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Utilize human rights resources.

a) See the following resources to help students with letter writing, petitions, service projects, artistic expressions, editorial essays and cartoons, community flyers, contacting legislators, and networking with governmental and non-governmental agencies: Resources taken from Human Rights Here and Now:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Default.htm>

[Handout 7: 10 Tips for Taking Action](#)

[Handout 9: The Power of the Pen](#)

[Handout 10: The Power of Petitions](#)

[Handout 11: Sample Letter to the Editor](#)

[Handout 12: Examples of Human Rights Service Learning Projects](#)

www.hrusa.org/league/essaycontest/essay.shtm

b) Encourage students to use information that they gathered from Activity B above.

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Affirmative Action and all terms so far

c) Guide students in the use of [Handout 8: Action Plan Worksheet](#) or the Online Action Process Model

<http://www.hrusa.org/thisismyhome/project/resources.shtml#processmodel>

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators:

- The student will select and implement an action plan that addresses justice and injustice.
- The student will explain why he/she decided to adopt their particular plan for action.

Activity E: Interview Community Members and Collect Information about the Impact of Your Human Rights Action.

Key Question: What happened when we took action? Whose lives did we impact?

Activity Goal(s): Use photography and video to document actions taken

Time: Variable, depending on action taken — approximately 1 hour teacher instruction

Materials: Variable, depending on action taken

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Use photography and video to document the actions.

Guide students using [Handout 8: Action Plan Worksheet](#).

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicator:

- The student will demonstrate effective use of photography and video to document human rights action plan.

Activity F: Reflect and Draw Conclusions on What You have Learned about Promoting and Protecting Human Rights

Key Questions: What did we learn? Did our action have the intended impact?

Activity Goal(s): Answer focus questions for reflection on human rights action.

Time: Variable, depending on action taken — approximately 1 hour

Materials: Variable, depending on action taken

Setting: Grades 6-8

Step 1: Answer reflection questions in groups.

One group member should record answers for use in Activity G. Example focus questions for reflection:

- How do you feel about the outcome of your action?
- What is the most important thing you learned by doing this?
- What were your biggest successes/disappointments?
- What could we have done differently/better?
- Did you have enough time to spend on this action?
- What impact did your project have? How do you know?
- What personal connections did you make or strengthen through this action?
- Is this something you would like to continue or repeat?
- What recommendations would you make to others who might like to take action concerning this issue?

Introduce and reinforce vocabulary:

Interdependent

Intergovernmental agencies

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators:

- The student will reflect on the success of their human rights action plan.
- The student will restate responses to group reflection questions.

Activity G: Communicate and Demonstrate Your Human Rights Learning

Key Question: How can we share what we learned with our schools, families, and communities?

Activity Goal(s): Present skits, stories, photo journals, art journals, or collages to younger students, and create a story booth to communicate what students learned about justice and injustice

Time: approximately 3 hours — 2 sessions

Step 1: Demonstrate your learning creatively.

Present a story or skit to younger students, or an alternate activity: display a photo journal, art journal, or collage in school or a community location.

Provide focus questions for reflection. Students can use their reflections to create ways to communicate their project ideas to others.

Step 2: Make a Human Rights Booth.

Direct students to gather all of their projects to create a booth that would tell the story of their project from beginning to end.

Provide a checklist to help students plan what to include in their booth.

Example:

My booth shows that I can...

- ___ Communicate using human rights vocabulary in writing and speaking
- ___ Describe, with examples, how human rights are upheld or withheld
- ___ Gather, organize, and display data about a human rights topic
- ___ Consider more than one perspective in collecting and making sense of data
- ___ Draw my own conclusions based on the data I have collected
- ___ Communicate human rights concepts in ways my audience can understand
- ___ Create something appealing that will make people interested in finding out more about the human rights topic I chose

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicator:

- The student will communicate effectively what was learned about justice/injustice and human rights.

Possible Evaluation/Assessment Indicators

It is important to examine the impact of human rights actions on families, school and community. However, assessing these impacts is more subjective than assessing impact on the individual level. In order to address this, discuss measures that indicate impact in the areas of families, school, and community PRIOR TO BEGINNING THIS UNIT. Refer to the possible impacts on four levels: (a) student, (b) school, (c) family, and (d) community (p.69). Create a checklist that can be referred to over the course of the unit to gauge impact using these impacts, or the more specific student-focused indicators found at the end of each activity:

The student will:

- Demonstrate a deepened understanding of the meaning of “justice” through writing and discussion.
- Define the meaning of “justice” and provide examples to illustrate this.
- Identify issues of justice and injustice in relation to the UDHR.
- Demonstrate a greater knowledge of diverse viewpoints on justice and injustice as exhibited in their Image Theater activities.
- Summarize results from his/her interview process.
- Discuss and respond to questions regarding possible human rights action plans.
- Summarize group discussion related to possible actions.
- Select and implement an action plan that addresses justice and injustice.
- Explain why he/she decided to adopt their particular plan for action.
- Demonstrate effective use of photography and video to document human rights action plan.
- Reflect on the success of their human rights action plan.
- Restate responses to group reflection questions.
- Communicate effectively what was learned about justice/injustice and human rights.

Investigate Justice

1. Read/Discuss:

Read the following quotation by Eleanor Roosevelt, the first Chair of the UN Human Rights Commission which created the UDHR, to participants:

Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In places, close to home— so close and so small that cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the large world.

Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Great Question* (NY: United Nations, 1958).

2. Brainstorm:

Write four problem areas (e.g., homelessness, hunger, lack of adequate health care, inadequate employment wages, and conditions) on a chalkboard or chart paper. Discuss the following questions, recording responses as declarative sentences, (e.g. “People are homeless.”)

- Do the problems exist in our community? Are they severe? What are our sources of information? Are they reliable and complete?
- From what individuals, groups, or organizations can we get informed data about the problem in our community?
- Are there other more pressing concerns that we should study rather than those suggested above?

3. Discuss:

Introduce the UDHR and indicate how the brainstorm activity relates to this document. In particular, call the group's attention to Articles 22-27 in the UDHR. Have them identify those articles that refer to the issues being discussed and, if time permits, have them read the relevant articles aloud. Discuss any language that is unclear and identify definitional problems.

Note: For advanced groups, also introduce the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. Explain briefly how it relates to the UDHR (e.g., the UDHR is a statement of principles while the International Covenant is a binding agreement.)

Taken from the “Human Rights, Economic and Social Justice” Topic Book from the HRE Series at: <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/tb1b/Section2/activity4.html>

HANDOUT 2

Presenting my story:

In presenting your story, make a skit or an art journal that will help to educate other children about the human rights issue that has affected you. Be sure to be creative and include how you felt about your research process.

Step 1: Make a beginning:

(What is one example of justice or injustice that I have experienced?)

Step 2: Make a middle:

(What did I decide to do? How did I do it?)

Step 3: Make an end:

(What happened? What effects did the action have? What could happen in the future?)

HANDOUT 3

About My Interview Subjects...

In the table below enter information about each of your interview subjects to show that they represent different perspectives. Look at the boxes. Two ways your subjects may differ are given—age and where they live. In what other ways do your subjects differ that might affect their knowledge, understanding, and feelings about issues? Write other kinds of differences in the other boxes. Then give the information about each subject in the boxes below.

My Interview Subjects represent the following demographic differences:

Subject's Name	Age	Where they live	Where they work	

Here is What I Found Out...

On this table enter your subjects' responses (in the form of brief notes) to each interview question.

Question	Subject #1	Subject #2	Subject #3

Subjects had similar views regarding the questions listed below (by number):	Subjects had differing views regarding the questions listed below (by number):

My thoughts about the similarities and differences in responses among the subjects: (can the similarities and differences be linked to the demographic differences?)

The most important thing I learned from these interviews was:

My overall impressions based on the information from the interviews was:

New questions that occur to me based on what I have learned from the interviews:

Here is how I will use this information to continue to explore the issue:

DATA ANALYSIS TOOL

Name: _____

Answers to Question #1:

Answers to Question #2:

Answers to Question #3:

How are the answers to Question #1:

Similar:

Different:

How are the answers to Question #2:

Similar:

Different:

How are the answers to Question #3:

Similar:

Different:

Why do you think the answers are different and what causes the differences?

What do you think makes the answers similar?

HANDOUT 5

Image Theater

Overview: Participants give physical form to human rights concepts.

Time: 30-45 minutes.

Materials: None.

Procedure:

1. The facilitator provides the group with a concept (e.g., oppression, liberation, justice) and asks the group to create a human machine that represents that concept.
2. One at a time, each person adds his or her body to the "machine," repeating a consistent sound and motion that represents the concept for them.
3. When all participants are part of the machine, the facilitator freezes the activity and helps the group reflect on their experience. Questions like "What were you doing?", "What did you notice?", and "How did you feel?" can help participants to reflect on the concept.

Source: Demonstration by Hameed Williams, Bolinas, CA workshop, March 1999.

Taken from Human Rights Education Handbook

at: <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hrhandbook/activities/12.htm>

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hrhandbook/activities/12.htm>

Stories of Students Who Took Action

Overview

Students read and discuss case stories of young human rights advocates. They then consider what problems exist in their community or school and relate them to human rights principles. They role-play these problems and possible solutions and discuss student activism.

Time: 1-1/2 hours or 2 class periods

Materials: Copies of Handout 1, Stories of Students Who Took Action, and Handout 2, Questions about the Stories, for each group

For older students: Copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and/or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Setting: Elementary school

Links: Should be preceded by activities that introduce rights principles and the UDHR (e.g., Part III, Activities 1-6).

Procedure

1. Read the case stories to students or ask older students to read them to each other in small groups.
2. Divide the class into 6 groups. Give each group a copy of one of the stories and discussion questions. Ask the groups to read their stories aloud and answer the questions on the sheet.
3. When each group has finished the questions, discuss the different responses and interpretations elicited by the stories.
4. Ask which human rights issues appear in each of the three cases and list these on the board. Ask older students to link these to specific articles in the UDHR or CRC.
5. Discuss:
 - **What are some human rights problems in our community? In our school? (List issues as they are mentioned.)**

- **Which of these problems could be affected by students taking action?**
- **Which specific human rights are involved in the problems that students might address? (List the rights; ask older students to match them with articles of the UDHR.)**

6. Ask students, working in the same small groups, to choose one community or school problem from their class list and use it to create a short role-play. Role-plays should:

- **Identify the human right problem**
- **Identify the community member(s) affected by the problem**
- **Illustrate a possible solution**

7. After each group has presented its role play, discuss some of these questions:

- **Who has responsibility for human rights? Individuals? The government? Young people? Adults? Can the class provide examples of each group's responsibility?**
- **Can students really make a difference? Are the case stories unusual, or could they happen in this community or school?**
- **When students reconsider the list of problems generated in Step 5, which ones do they think could be affected by the actions of people like themselves?**

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Default.htm>

Ten Tips for Taking Action

- 1. Choose a problem.** You might want to work on improving conditions or issues you observe in your community or that you hear about in the news. You could also choose a problem you learned about through a school course or your own reading. Finding a problem isn't hard, but staying focused on one problem is. Try writing out a definition of exactly what you want to address. Deal with just one problem at a time.
- 2. Research the problem.** Survey your school or community to find out about the problem and how people feel about it. Call officials for information. Write letters. Read newspapers, magazines, and reports on the issue. See Action Activity 5 for more on research and planning.
- 3. Brainstorm possible solutions and choose one.** Brainstorm everything you can think of, which relates to solving the problem. Then choose one or two solutions that seem the most possible and likely to make the most difference.
- 4. Build coalitions of support.** Find as many people as possible who are concerned about the problem and agree with your solution. Survey your community. Ask teachers, officials, community activists, and young people. The more people on your team, the more power you will have to make a difference.
- 5. Identify your opposition.** Find out who the people and organizations are who oppose your solution. They may not be the "bad guys", but rather people with different opinions. Consider meeting with your opponents: you might be able to work out a compromise. At the least you will understand each other's point of view. In every case, always be polite and respectful of other opinions.
- 6. Advertise.** Let as many people as possible know about the problem you are trying to solve and your proposed solution. Newspapers, radio, and television are usually interested in stories of youth action. Some TV and radio stations offer free air time for worthy projects. Write a letter to the editor (See [Handout 9: The Power of the Pen](#)). The more people who know about what you are doing, the more who may want to support you.
- 7. Raise money.** This isn't essential, but sometimes you can be more effective with money to spend toward your solution.
- 8. Carry out your solution.** Make a list of all the steps you need to take, and once you've prepared yourself for action, just do it!
- 9. Evaluate.** Is your plan working? How do you know? Try to define some indications for what progress means. Are some efforts effective and others not? Have you tried everything? Keep thinking creatively about how to solve the problem.
- 10. Don't give up.** Problem solving means eliminating all the things that don't work until you find something that does. Don't pay much attention to people who try to tell you that the problem can't be solved. Keep on keeping on!

Source: Adapted from Barbara A. Lewis, *The Kid's Guide to Social Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Press, 1991).

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ACTION PLAN WORKSHEET

NAME: _____

Action Plan TOPIC/ISSUE:

Position:

Desired Impact:

Overview of the Plan:

Steps to carry out the plan of action:

1. Identify people/places/agencies that are working toward the same goal
2. Identify the opposing view
3. Reach out to the community—friends, family, neighborhood. Let them know what you're doing. Advertise
4. Do the action
5. Clean up, take down posters, thank helpers, return borrowed materials

The Power of the Pen

Overview

Participants plan, execute, and assess a letter-writing action about a human rights issue of concern to them. Note: Participants should be offered a range of topics and positions to ensure that their letters are freely undertaken and reflect their own views.

Time: Variable

Materials: Stationery and envelopes, stamps

Setting: Upper Elementary School - Adult groups

Links: An appropriate follow-up for almost every activity in Unit III. Excellent for ESL and adult literacy programs.

PART A: Planning the Letter

1. **Define:** Help participants identify the issue that they wish to write about, which may develop from a particular unit of this text, a service learning project, or an issue of personal concern. Arrange participants with similar concerns in small groups.

2. **Strategize:** Working in small groups, strategize about who to write to:

- Is this a local, state, national, or international issue?
- Is this an issue that needs to be more widely known? Would a letter to the editor of a newspaper be effective? What community response is desired?
- Is this an issue that needs attention from government agencies? Which agencies are involved? What kind of response is desired?
- Is this an issue about which legislation is needed? Who are the legislators that this issue should concern?

3. **Research:** Work cooperatively to gather the information needed to write an effective letter.

- Verify and expand your information.
- Identify the best person(s) to write to and gather the necessary contact information.

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The Power of Petitions

Petitions are a great way to show support for your efforts, get the attention of the community and of decision makers, and bring about change. Petitions demonstrate group strength. Officials may ignore you, but the more names you have on your petition, the harder it will be to ignore it.

The following tips will help to make your petition effective:

1. **Appearance** – In general, use standard 8-1/2" x 11" paper. However, for some actions you may want to be more inventive, for example, creating a giant petition on a roll of butcher paper. The petition should not be too hard to mail, however.

2. **Title** – Give the petition a title so that both the signers and the receivers know immediately what it is about.

3. **Purpose Statement** – Write a statement describing the problem your petition is addressing, the solution you are proposing, or the response you would like to get from officials. This should appear at the top of every petition page so that people know what they are signing.

4. **Blank Lines** – Provide blank lines for people to write any or all of this information:

- Name
- The class, grade, or group to which they belong
- Their school or hometown
- Their address and telephone number

Some petitions require addresses as proof that the signers are taxpayers in the area. Also you may wish to contact some of your signers again (e.g., to let them know the results of the petition)

5. **Number the lines for easy totaling.**

6. **Plan** – Strategize the times and places where you are likely to collect the most signatures.

IMPORTANT!

**If you plan to take your petition door-to-door, never go alone.
Always get a parent, teacher, or other adult to go with you.**

7. **Smile** – The better you treat the people you approach, the more likely they are to sign your petition.

8. **Stay Calm** – Some people you ask to sign may disagree with your ideas and try to argue with you. Be ready to explain your ideas clearly, but remain polite and respectful. Never speak or act rudely.

9. **Photocopy** – When you’ve finished collecting signatures, photocopy all the pages. Keep them in a safe place. You may need proof of the signatures, and the addresses may form the basis of a mailing list.

10. **Present the Petition** – Choose the recipient carefully. It should be someone who has the power to act on your ideas. Try to arrange to present it in person. Bring along a camera or the press!

Source: Adapted from Barbara A. Lewis, *The Kid’s Guide to Social Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Press, 1991)

Sample Letter to the Editor

3540 Limestone St.
Bloomington, IN 47401

December 10, 1998

Editor
Bloomington News
3540 Limestone St.
Bloomington, IN 47401

To the Editor:

I like the comic section of the Bloomington News very much, but lately I have become upset with the comic strip "Street Smart." In the last few days, "Street Smart" has been making fun of homeless people.

I don't think being homeless is funny. In fact, it's a human rights violation. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says –

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care... .

I think the cartoonist, Marcia Chapman, is very inconsiderate to make fun of homeless people. I don't find it the least bit amusing or entertaining. The problem of the homeless is serious and these people have a right to be helped.

Jamie Davis
8th Grade
Bloomington Junior High School
Bloomington, IN

http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-4/9_action-activity5.htm

Examples of Human Rights Service Learning Projects

Human Rights Badges: A number of Scout troops and Campfire Girls in the Northeast have created human rights badges for which youngsters write letters, create posters, watch and discuss human rights videos, and study human rights problems.

A Human Rights Quilt: Pillsbury Elementary students in Minneapolis created a quilt containing symbolic representations of the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a catalogue to explain each article. The finished quilt went on tour to public buildings and other schools.

The Big Letter: Some elementary and middle schools write the BIG LETTER. Students make a splash on campus by co-writing a letter about a human rights issue or victim on 3' x 4' butcher paper, collecting many signatures, and mailing it to a public official in a very large envelope.

Day of the Dead Memorials: Students at Vintage High School in Napa, California, constructed traditional Hispanic Day of the Dead memorials honoring friends, family and personal heroes who have advocated for social justice. The memorials were displayed in the school from the Day of the Dead, November 1, until Human Rights Day, December 10.

Democracy Wall: A few years after the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, students in a Boston school put together a huge Democracy Wall in the cafeteria. Fellow students were invited to attach poems, essays, drawings, and collages celebrating what democracy means to them.

Donation Stations: A young member of a California synagogue created a human rights activity for Passover, which included five stations that members of the congregation visited, each dealing with a basic human right: canned food donations to address the right to life, donations of books for flood victims, clothing donations, letter writing, and petition signing on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

Petitions against Pollution: A group called Kids Against Pollution (KAP) in Closer, NJ, is circulating a national petition advocating the adoption of state and national constitutional amendments to guarantee citizens the right to clean air, water, and land.

Dramatic Presentations: A middle school class in the Midwest wrote a human rights play based on an Amnesty International Urgent Action appeal and performed it for the whole school.

Youth Speakers Bureau: High school student members of Amnesty International on the San Francisco peninsula formed their own speakers bureau to make presentations to classes and assemblies at high schools and elementary schools in the area. They were especially busy on Human Rights Day, International Children's Day, and International Women's Day.

Celebrating Diversity: Hmong students in a class at Powderhorn Community School in Minneapolis taught other students how to make Hmong embroidery, called Pa'ndau or "flower cloths." The completed Pa'ndau were sold at a local crafts fair and the proceeds donated to a Hmong refugee organization.

A "Lock-in": Students at a high school in the Midwest arrange a weekend "lock-in" one Saturday night each year with plenty of pizza, pop, and letter-writing. Hundreds of students attended, generating several thousand letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-4/4_project-examples.htm