

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>

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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).

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

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.

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

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