



Understanding Human Rights

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Theme

Introductory class to the concept of human rights and its related contradictions and challenges

Context

Human rights are regularly mentioned and used as justification or legitimization of certain actions in society (e.g. public demonstrations), but students rarely get the chance to explore the paradoxes, challenges, contradictions and difficulties inherent in the tensions between the human rights theory, and practice. This lesson plan seeks to offer an opportunity to expand the students' understanding of human rights in their complexity and to inspire their curiosity and interest in this topic.

Goals

- Raising awareness about human rights
- Building critical thinking about human rights and tensions between their theory and practice
- Avoiding the simplified approach to human rights that focuses on rights alone, and omits the focus on responsibilities, duties and obligations
- Providing opportunity for students to re-examine their own attitudes
- Building students' argumentation and public speaking skills
- Interactive, whole-class involvement throughout the 45 minutes class

Learning Outcomes

- Students are able to name and explain several human rights, and the duties, obligations, responsibilities that could be linked to them
- Students can critically assess and identify the source of several human rights dilemmas
- Students are able to argue multiple perspectives on a given human rights dilemma or controversy

Material & Equipment Needed

Projector, laptop and speakers; soft ball (plush toy) for throwing; Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR infographic, if needed: www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/Ch11_Image06_2.jpg)

Duration: 45 minutes (standard lesson)

Overview of lesson activities (process)

Introduction & Exercise: 10 minutes

The class starts with an introductory TED-ed short film by Benedetta Berti, 'What are the Universal Human Rights?': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDglVseTkuE>

The film watching is followed by the **Rights Vs Responsibilities exercise**.

The exercise starts with all the students standing up, and needing to 'earn' their 'right' to sit down.

The activity runs as follows: the teacher throws the soft ball to the first (random) student, who needs to list/identify one human right. (If needed, they have to explain what this human right is about, give an example.) The student can then throw the soft ball to another student (randomly), and take a seat. The teacher asks the second student to identify to possibly corresponding responsibilities, duties, obligations in relation to the human right that the first student identified. After s/he has explained what the responsibilities are, the second student can also sit down. Before doing so, s/he throws the soft ball to the third student, whose turn it is then to identify (name, explain if needed) another human right. The exercise continues until all the students are seated.

The teacher's role is to actively facilitate, encourage the students with (leading) questions and correct vague, or incorrect answers.

For example: if the first student (Jane) identifies 'freedom of speech', the teacher asks the second student John (who got the ball) 'What is your responsibility, obligation or duty, in relation to Jane's freedom of speech?'

→ Note that in many cases, the students will fall into the pitfall of using vague language, and respond something along the lines of, 'I am not allowed to interfere with her freedom of speech. I should respect her freedom to say what she wants or believes in.' → In this case, you continue prodding, and ask John, 'What are you not allowed to do?!' → The correct answer would be, 'Forbid her, or prevent her from expressing her opinion (publically).' → It is useful to continue prodding in this case, and ask, 'But what if Jane uses hate speech, and says bad things about a minority group in the society?' → John will likely offer a more nuanced response, identifying that freedom of speech, while important, may have some limitations.

Free2Choose Activity: 15 minutes

Free2Choose is an educational tool developed by the Anne Frank House. In various countries, students have created short films that highlight contemporary human rights dilemmas in their environment, and then interviewed people on the street to gather multiple different opinions about the topic. Discussing these human rights dilemmas is a useful tool for getting the students to understand that there are boundaries to human rights, and that it is not always easy to determine which right or freedom is more important than another.

The teacher should first check the Free2Choose YouTube channel, and select 1 or 2 short films that are the most suitable for their class, age, current events/issues in the school/city/country:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Free2chooseCreate>

After watching the selected short film with the class, the teacher should pause the film at the moment towards the end when the human rights dilemma or the discussion question is once again displayed on the screen.

Proceed to divide the class into smaller groups (with no more than 6 students in each group).

Each group should have a soft ball, or a crumpled piece of paper that can serve as an improvised soft ball for this **Agree/Disagree Ball Toss Exercise**.

Before the assignment can start, the teacher should choose 2 students (e.g. Jane & John), to demonstrate the assignment rules to the rest of the class. Starting with the posed question/dilemma, the teacher should offer an argument/elaborated opinion, and then toss the ball John, and say, 'You agree with me.' → John now needs to provide an argument that supports the teacher's originally stated argument/opinion/standpoint on the discussion question.

→ When John throws the ball to Jane, he instructs her what perspective to argue, by saying, 'You disagree with me.' (or, 'You agree with me.')

The point of the exercise is that the students are always alert as they never know when the ball will come their way. They also have to think quick on their feet because the standpoint from which they are expected to argue the discussion question is not necessarily one that they share or identify with.

The rules within the small groups (minimum 4, maximum 6 members) are:

- a) You stick with what you are instructed to argue (even if it contradicts or opposes your own, personal opinion);
- b) You are not allowed to repeat an argument that someone else used before;
- c) Everyone in the groups provides an argument twice (ideally, 3 times if there is time).

The teacher's role during this exercise is to walk around and listen in on different arguments offered in various groups.

Final discussion: 10 minutes

In the last part of the class, the teacher asks the students to reflect on their experience of the discussions: what did they like? What did they find challenging or difficult? Did anything surprise them during this class?

Sources:

Already listed within the lesson plan.

Additional Information

For implementing the 'Adaptation Alternative' option, see the Jigsaw Method of Cooperative Learning, explained: <https://www.schreyerstitute.psu.edu/pdf/alex/jigsaw.pdf> (in English)

Assessment & Evaluation Options

The class is designed to involve all the students, actively, in its implementation. Some students might be more enthusiastic than others, but all should take part in the discussions and exercises. You can test the learning outcomes in students by offering them another human rights dilemma or short film at the beginning of the next class, and ask them to list 3 arguments in favor of the question, and 3 arguments against the proposed question, in order to test their retention of knowledge and critical thinking ability.

Homework Ideas

The above noted assessment can also be offered as homework, so that students need to work on it prior to the next class.

You can also offer students to choose one question (or get one randomly assigned to them) on the basis of which they would need to write short essays (maximum 500 words), for e.g.:

- (1) Why are there tensions between human rights theory and practice?
- (2) Why is citizenship and statehood often the key prerequisite to getting one's human rights realized? (Alternatively, why do countries not accept all refugees when they, as all other human beings, should have the freedom of movement?)
- (3) What is the human right that you find most interesting/fascinating, and why?

Adaptation Alternatives

For a more advanced group, you can do a group **jigsaw exercise** where the class is divided into 3 groups, and each group needs to study one generation of human rights. The groups do brief online research, study the additional material provided by the teacher, and then explain/present the others in the group their findings. A class debate between three groups could then be facilitated, to see which generation of human rights is more important, or more relevant, for the world we live in today.



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