

Whole World in our Hands: Experiential Activities

Children's Rights

Theme:

Children's Rights in Local and Global Contexts

Prerequisite:

Students should be familiar with the concept of human rights. They should have a basic familiarity with the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights. With this introductory knowledge of human rights it will be easier to build on the idea of children's rights.

Curriculum Entry Points:

Grade 9 Social Studies, Grade 10 Personal Growth and Development, Grade 12 World Issues, Grade 12 Political Science, and Grade 12 Law.

Overview:

Minors (under the age of 18 years) are entitled to, and ideally are protected by, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**. Unfortunately, there are many occasions in which children's rights are not respected, both here in Canada and all over the world. Children are vulnerable beings, therefore more easily forced or persuaded into doing things that are not in their best interests.

This unit is designed to create awareness about different conditions children all around the world encounter, as well as to examine the reasons children are put in these situations. Agricultural work, sexual exploitation, child soldiers, child labour, and child abuse are all issues that will be examined. This is by no means an exhaustive list. Groups of students will each read and discuss amongst themselves a case study related to each of these issues. A class discussion will then follow. The topic of children's rights is so broad, thus after briefly reviewing these major issues, the focus will shift to the topic of child labour and what the students can do to improve the situation faced by many children around the world. The students will brainstorm ways they can stop contributing to these problems where possible (e.g. conscious consumerism). After completion of this activity, students will have a much better idea of what children's rights are, who is entitled to them, and different children's rights issues occurring both locally and globally.

Objective:

To have students gain a solid understanding of the rights that children are entitled to, and to create awareness about situations that other youth around the world face each and every day. Ideally, students will become advocates of fair treatment of all children and youth, and help create awareness in their larger social groups.

Main Concepts and Vocabulary:

CHILD: A young person, usually between infancy and adolescence.

CONVENTION: A contract or agreement decided upon by two or more parties, enforceable by law.

EXPLOITATION: Unfair extraction of labour or other services by a person or group reaping benefits for their own advantage.

MINOR: Anyone under the age of 18 years old.

RIGHTS: The freedom to access basic necessities in life that each human is entitled to (food, security, shelter, education, etc). This is not a privilege, rather something that is inherent. *It is worth noting that the interpretation and definition of rights may vary between cultures, but the Convention on the Rights of the Child is an internationally recognized agreement accepted by a majority of nation states.*



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Classroom Activity: Case Studies

Examination, Analysis and Discussion

Time Required:

Two 50-55 minute periods

Materials:

- One copy per student of simplified version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (provided at the end of unit, also available at <http://www.savethechildren.ca/resources/pdf/crc.pdf>).
- Case studies for each of the following situations: child labour, sexual exploitation, child soldiers, agricultural labour, and child abuse. (provided at the end of the unit)
- Blackboard or overhead projector

Background:

This activity is designed to create awareness about issues children and youth around the world are facing. Through examining the provided case studies, students will become more familiar with these issues, and will understand that the Convention on the Rights of the Child needs to be enforced. The class discussion at the end will bring in issues and ideas that surround the various case studies, and will strive to find common ground and possible solutions.

Opening Questions:

1. Ask the students what human rights are. Ask who these apply to. Are the situations of adults and children similar? *Children are more vulnerable and at times powerless, and as such their situation is a lot more fragile than that of adults. From this discussion bring in the idea of child rights as a way to protect the rights of children in particular.*
2. Ask students if they think child/human rights are universal. Why or why not? *Although the UN Declarations and Conventions are known as “universal” some groups have rejected this claim, saying that the values reflected are strictly Western. It is worth making the students aware of this, but don’t focus on it too much as it is not the major focus of this unit.*

Activity Instructions:

1. Divide students into five different groups. Each student in the group receives a copy of the group case study and a different role for the small discussion: team leader, time keeper, recorder, reporter, etc. Explain the responsibilities for each role in the group.
2. Students read the case studies as a group while considering and making notes on the following questions:
 - a. Is this fair? Why or why not?
 - b. What children’s rights are not being respected in this situation?
 - c. What effect will these child rights abuses likely have on the child’s future? (*e.g. if a child is working in a sweatshop without access to even a basic education, they will have few options for their adult life, and will continually be at a disadvantage.*)
 - d. What can be done to reduce or eliminate occurrences like these?
3. Students will participate in small group discussions and will assume their assigned roles. Small group discussions will focus on the above questions.
4. After small group discussions, reporters will share group ideas with the entire class.
5. Have the class note the similar themes in the children’s rights issues examined. Have these listed on the blackboard or overhead, so everyone can see the list. What children’s rights are not being respected in these situations? *Please refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.* What is the difference between a need and a want in terms of children’s rights?

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6. Ask the students if they think a country signing and ratifying the convention is enough, or if more enforcement is needed. Do they think more should be done to enforce the convention internationally? *Remind students that most countries (except USA and Somalia) have signed and ratified this convention, yet these problems are still occurring. Have them brainstorm about what could or should be done to be sure the convention is enforced internationally.*

7. Close this activity by asking what students can do to prevent the exploitation of children in other countries. Although students may have no control over certain situations, draw the connection between their actions and the impacts of these actions by focusing the class discussion on child labour. Talk about the prevalence of sweatshop abuses (involving children) that occur in order to provide our society with every day commodities (e.g. clothing, sports gear, soccer balls, toys, etc). Ideally students will gain heightened awareness about these issues, and know that their consumer dollars and choices have an impact on the lives of youth around the world. Encourage the students to exercise awareness, as this is the first step towards bringing an end to such problems.

Preparation Notes:

Children's Rights Case Studies

Case Study scenario sheets to be photocopied and distributed to the groups to read and discuss are provided on the following page.

Community Activity

- Additional research on other types of situations children face around the world (e.g. camel jockeys, street children, garbage pickers, etc)
- Making posters/artwork to reflect the emotions felt when learning about the abuse of children worldwide. This could be paired with an information sheet about this particular issue, and put in a display area in the school.



Jessica Mankowski

Case Study: Sexual Exploitation

Mira, Age 13, Nepali working in India

Mira is from a poor village in Nepal. She was offered a job as a domestic worker in Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), India. However, instead of a domestic home, she arrived at a brothel on Mumbai's Falkland Road, where tens of thousands of young women are displayed in row after row of zoo-like animal cages. When she refused to have sex she was locked in a narrow, windowless room without food or water. On the fourth day, one of the madam's goondas (thugs) wrestled her to the floor and banged her head against the concrete until she passed out. Later she was sexually assaulted by the goonda. Beaten and bruised, she was forced to comply with their demands and join the other women on Falkland Road. The madam told Mira that she had been sold to the brothel for 50,000 rupees (about \$ 1,700), and that she would have to work until she paid off her debt. At only 2 rupees per visit, this "debt" would take a long time to pay off and would accumulate interest.

Mira is one of over a million children who are exploited in the sex trade annually. She is at high risk for physical health problems, most notably HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction, unwanted pregnancy and possibly even death. She also faces psychological trauma on a daily basis. If she is lucky enough to escape, she probably won't be able to live a normal life, due to the stigma associated with sex work in her society.³

Case Study: Child Soldiers

Ayeta, Age 15, Uganda

When Ayeta was 13, she was forcibly abducted at night from her home by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an armed opposition movement fighting the Ugandan Government. She was made to kill a boy who tried to escape, so the soldiers knew they could trust her. She saw another boy being hacked to death for not raising the alarm when a friend ran away. She could not cry when she saw these things, or she would be punished. Ayeta was beaten when she dropped a water container and ran for cover under gunfire. She received 35 days of military training and was sent to fight the government army.

Ayeta and many other child soldiers are forced to fight, often they don't even know what they're fighting against. They are put in dangerous situations, and are beaten if they refuse to follow orders from their captors. She sees other children being frequently killed or injured during combat or while carrying out other tasks. Ayeta and the others are forced to engage in hazardous activities such as laying mines or explosives, as well as using weapons. The living conditions are harsh and there is never enough food. Ayeta is haunted in her dreams by things she's been made to do, and knows her life will never be the same.⁴

Where to Find More Information:

Human Rights Watch is a great source for information about various human rights/child rights issues. On this site you can find the Convention on the Rights of the Child itself, as well as read about the various issues that exist under this theme. <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/crp/promises/index.html>

Save the Children is an organization for youth created and run by youth. There are regular updates as to events that are happening worldwide and how children are affected by these. <http://www.savethechildren.org/>

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, has created a site geared towards youth and how youth can get involved. It deals with various issues, including health, exploitation, and education. http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_rights.php

Case Study: Child Abuse

Adam, Age 14, Canada

Adam's mom had been dating Rob for several months before they married. Adam, along with his mom, older sister and two younger brothers moved in with Rob and his children. Rob was mean to his new stepchildren so Adam quickly trained himself not to react when he witnessed him beating his second and fourth grade brothers. Showing any signs of emotion or reaction only urged the abuse on. Rob would say 'I'll give you something to cry about.' One day Rob attacked his sister; Adam was shocked because he didn't think Rob would hit a girl. When he tried to protect his sister, Rob turned on him too. He threatened to hurt him even more if he called the police.

The constant stress of Adam's new household is causing his school work to suffer. He can't concentrate at school, and his teachers have noticed that he's becoming distant. At home he's in constant fear that something will trigger Rob's anger. It's even worse if Rob's been drinking. Adam can't wait until he's old enough to move out, but he's concerned about the safety of his little brothers once he and his sister are old enough to move out. Adam is scared to tell any teachers about his problem at home, he doesn't want to make things worse.⁵

Case Study: Agricultural Labour

Augustino, Age 14, Mexican migrant worker in the USA

Augustino has been working in the fields of California for the past two years. He was unable to begin school in September because he was still working in the fields with his family. He was not able to enroll in school until January so he missed three months of education. Augustino's job consists of moving up and down long rows of strawberry plants, bent over looking for strawberries. He picks only the good strawberries and places them in the packing boxes. He spends the whole day working in a stooped position. When there are a lot of ripe strawberries Augustino and his crew work from 6:30 in the morning to 8 at night, although they are not paid for by the hour. On a good day, Augustino can pick about 30 boxes. If he works hard, he can make about \$36.50 for a 13-hour day. The workers are not given breaks, and are given only 20 minutes for lunch. They are not encouraged to take bathroom breaks and are not often given drinking water.

Augustino says one of the worst things about working in the strawberry fields is that every eight days, the rangers apply sulfur to the fields as a pesticide. When the workers bend over to pick the strawberries sulfur stings their eyes and burns their throats. Along with this, he and the other workers often experience racism as they're visible minorities in the United States. Graduating from high school is Augustino's dream, though he knows that if his family needs money he will have to work to help support his family so their basic needs can be covered.⁶

Case Study: Child Labour

Nirmala, Age 10, Nepal

When Nirmala was 8 years old her father took her to work as a weaver in a carpet factory near Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The family needed money, she said. She starts work at 6:00 in the morning and works late into the night. A typical factory holds 18 huge weaving looms. Five children work at each loom tying knots in carpets. The lighting is poor and with no windows, ventilation is bad. There are no bathrooms. Nirmala and most of the other children only eat twice a day and are almost always hungry. Many of them sleep in the factory, crowded into small rooms. This "room and board" is all the "payment" that Nirmala and the other child workers get.

The work is painful: Nirmala's hands often get numb after hours of moving her fingers between the stiff threads. The cramped spaces, long hours, poor nutrition, lack of air, and wool dust cause her to have a sore back and to become ill often. In these work conditions in her factory, diseases like tuberculosis can spread quickly from worker to worker. Nirmala does not know what her future holds, but since she has no access to even a basic education, it does not look hopeful.⁷

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 1

Everyone under 18 has all these rights.

Article 2

You have the right to protection against discrimination. This means that nobody can treat you badly because of your colour, sex or religion, if you speak another language, have a disability or are rich or poor.

Article 3

All adults should always do what is best for you.

Article 4

You have the right to have your rights made a reality by the government.

Article 5

You have the right to be given guidance by your parents and family.

Article 6

You have the right to life.

Article 7

You have the right to have a name and a nationality.

Article 8

You have the right to an identity.

Article 9

You have the right to live with your parents, unless it is bad for you.

Article 10

If you and your parents are living in separate countries, you have the right to get back together and live in the same place.

Article 11

You should not be kidnapped.

Article 12

You have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.

Article 13

You have the right to find out things and say what you think, through making art, speaking and writing, unless it breaks the rights of others.

Article 14

You have the right to think what you like and be whatever religion you want to be, with your parents guidance.

Article 15

You have the right to be with friends and join or set up clubs, unless this breaks the rights of others.

Article 16

You have the right to a private life. For instance, you can keep a diary that other people are not allowed to see.

Article 17

You have the right to collect information from the media - radios, newspapers, television, etc - from all around the world. You should also be protected from information that could harm you.

Article 18

You have the right to be brought up by your parents, if possible.

Article 19

You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated.

Article 20

You have the right to special protection and help if you can't live with your parents.

Article 21

You have the right to have the best care for you if you are adopted or fostered or living in care.

Article 22

You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee. A refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because it is not safe for them to live there.

Article 23

If you are disabled, either mentally or physically, you have the right to special care and education to help you develop and lead a full life.

Article 24

You have the right to the best health possible and to medical care and to information that will help you to stay well.

Article 25

You have the right to have your living arrangements checked regularly if you have to be looked after away from home.

Article 26

You have the right to help from the government, if you are poor or in need.

Article 27

You have the right to a good enough standard of living. This means you should have food, clothes and a place to live.

Article 28

You have the right to education.

Article 29

You have the right to education which tries to develop your personality and abilities as much as possible and encourages you to respect the environment.

Article 30

If you come from a minority group, because of your race, religion or language, you have the right to enjoy your own culture, practice your own religion, and use your own language.

Article 31

You have the right to play and relax by doing things like sports, music and drama.

Article 32

You have the right to protection from work that is bad for your health or education.

Article 33

You have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs.

Article 34

You have the right to be protected from sexual abuse.

Article 35

No-one is allowed to kidnap you or sell you.

Article 36

You have the right to protection from any other kind of exploitation.

Article 37

You have the right not to be punished in a cruel or hurtful way.

Article 38

You have the right to protection in times of war. If you are under 15, you should never have to be in an army or take part in a battle.

Article 39

You have the right to help if you have been hurt, neglected, or badly treated.

Article 40

You have the right to help in defending yourself if you are accused of breaking the law.

Article 41

You have the right to any rights in laws in your country or internationally that give you better rights than these.

Article 42

All adults and children should know about this convention. You have a right to learn about your rights and adults should learn about them too.

This is a simplified version of the UNCR. It has been signed by 193 countries. The convention has 54 articles in total. Article 43 - 54 are about how governments and international organisations will work to give children their rights.