

Lesson Three



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Human Rights Defined





“You are a human being. You have rights inherent in that reality. You have dignity and worth that exist prior to law.”

~Lyn Beth Neylon

Lesson 3: Human Rights Defined

- Goal:** To understand the definition of human rights
- Objectives:**
- Students will be introduced to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (activity 1)
 - Students will gain an understanding of the world events that led to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (activity 1)
 - Students will be able to define human rights in their own words (activity 2)
 - Students will connect the denial of human rights with structural violence (activity 3)
- Essential Question:** What are human rights?
- Materials:** Handout 1: What Are Human Rights?
Handout 2: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
Handout 3: Structural Violence Discussion Questions
Dictionaries
- Resources:**
- “Human Rights Here and Now” published by Human Rights USA, Amnesty International and the Stanley Foundation. Download for free at www.hrusa.org
 - Amnesty International’s 20-minute video “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” which explains all thirty articles in detail, is available at www.amnesty.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights-anniversary/udhr-film
- Time Frame:** 2-4 class periods
- Age Level:** High school - adult
- Vocabulary:** Human rights, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, structural violence
- Teacher Background:** The teacher should have a general understanding of human rights before teaching this lesson and subsequent lessons. As some students may have a more extensive background in human rights than others, this lesson may be optional or may be used as a brief review of human rights. The text *Human Rights Here and Now* is an excellent resource that provides background information on human rights education and is the main resource used for this lesson. It can be accessed through: www.hrusa.org.



Activity 1: What Are Human Rights?

(Approx. 1 class period)

Students may have varying degrees of knowledge about human rights. For the purposes of this curriculum, we will only briefly define human rights. For more in depth study on human rights, please see the supplementary resources at the end of this lesson and in the Appendix.

Procedure:

- 1. Write.** Instruct the students to copy the words “human” and “rights” in their journals. Ask students to write or draw their own definition of human rights. Have students work in pairs to discuss their definitions and use them to create a new, comprehensive definition. Have students copy in their journals the definitions of “human” and “rights” found in the dictionary.
- 2. Discuss.** Write the question “*What are human rights?*” on the board. Have students share and compare their answers with the class. The class should collectively decide on a definition to be used throughout this unit. Post the class’s definition in a visible location.

- 3. Brainstorm.** In groups no larger than four, ask the students to take turns reading aloud from Handout 1: What Are Human Rights? Have the students brainstorm the different types of human rights and how these rights connect to their daily lives and the world. They can brainstorm out loud or create a mind map (see box). Some suggestions for students to consider while brainstorming:

- Human rights that are violated daily in the world
- Human rights that are/are not upheld in their own lives
- Issues related to human rights
- People/institutions/documents related to human rights

Mind Mapping:

Place the word you are brainstorming about in the center of the paper. Circle the word. Extend lines that connect to more circles and fill with words related to the word of origin. This is a great brainstorming technique for visual and spatial learners. For an example, see page 119.

Combine answers on a wall, poster board, or paper and keep visible in the room for future reference. Have the students match the articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to those listed on their combined lists. Do this for both the rights that are violated as well as those that are upheld.

- 4. Journal.** For the last five minutes of class, ask students to write in their journals and document their personal thoughts on human rights and any questions they have related to this lesson. Lastly, ask the students to list examples of human rights abuses that occur, or have occurred, on a larger scale involving many people over time. Answers may include war, conflicts, genocide, etc.

Source: Adapted from the exercise “Human Rights, Human Beings,” in Human Rights Here and Now. A Publication of the Human Rights Educators Network of Amnesty International, The Human Rights Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, and the Stanley Foundation. (1998).





Activity 2: What Does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Mean to Me?

(Approx. 1 class period)

Procedure:

- 1. Review.** Ask if anyone in the class can define or accurately describe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).
- 2. Read.** Give each student Handout 2: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This is an abbreviated version. Explain that this document was created by the United Nations as standards that all countries should strive to uphold to guarantee the human rights of all people. Ask students to read over the UDHR and pick one article to write about in their journals.
- 3. Write.** Next, students should be instructed to do the following:
 - Rewrite the abbreviated article as stated in the UDHR in their own words.
 - Add a visual. Draw a picture, or cut out an image from a magazine or newspaper.
 - Give three examples of how this right is upheld or violated in your own community.
 - State why you do or do not consider this right to be important, or relevant to your life.
- 4. Create.** Ask the students to transfer their ideas to a poster board and prepare a mini-presentation for the class. Students may choose to present their articles individually or you may want to group them according to the articles they have chosen. Keep and post for others to see.

Additional resources: The UDHR is a useful document for teachers and students to be familiar with when using *The Road to Peace* curriculum, as much transitional justice work is related to past human rights abuses. Many communities consider the failure to uphold human rights as an injustice that must be rectified by justice mechanisms.

- A complete version of the UDHR can be found at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>
- A passport style Universal Declaration of Human Rights booklet may be obtained for purchase at The Human Rights Resource Center at: <http://www.hrusa.org>



Activity 3: Structural Violence

(Approx. 1-2 class periods)

Times of conflict are not the only instances in which great suffering, pain, and anguish are inflicted upon humanity. Indeed, history has shown that injustices can, and do, occur during times of relative peace and calm. For much of the world's population, hunger, not war, is the most pressing concern. Hunger and poverty are two prime examples of what is described as “structural violence,” or violence that is inherent in the inequalities of societal structures. Harm is imposed due to a great imbalance in wealth and power which results in substantial differences in people's opportunities in life. Uneven distribution of resources and unequal access to medical supplies, health care, hygiene, education, employment, income, and political power are all forms of structural violence. This activity explores the ways in which the denial of human rights is, itself, a form of **structural violence** and how it can lead to physical violence, conflict, and war.

Procedure:

1. **Set-up.** This activity requires some preparation. Each student will be receiving a bag filled with candy which will represent currency. For directions on how to set up this activity, please see the [Structural Violence Activity: Directions for Teachers](#) on page 29. The candy wealth will be divided to represent how wealth is distributed in the United States. Before you begin the activity, write the following six items on the chalkboard or on poster board: **housing, health care, adequate food/nutrition, higher education, car, and TV/computer.**
2. **Define.** Write the term **structural violence** on the board and ask students what they think it means. After writing the students' responses on the board, give them the following definition by Robert Gilman to write in their journals: *“In-built violence that exists in the inequalities of societal structures ... uneven resource distribution, access to medical supplies, hygiene, education, income ...”* Let the students know that you are going to do a simulation that demonstrates how an unequal distribution of wealth and power in society affects a person's ability to meet even their most basic needs.
3. **Distribute Wealth.** Hand out one currency bag to each of the students. After you have handed out the bags, explain to the students that this candy is currency, and its distribution is representative of wealth in a real country. You may choose to ask them at this point which country they think this distribution of wealth represents—the answer is the United States—or you could reveal what country the distribution represents when you provide them with the actual statistics. Let students know that the amount they possess affects the capacity they have to satisfy their needs such as basic housing, adequate food and nutrition, good health care, education, and other luxury items such as a car, TV, or computer. Let the students know that one candy kiss can buy one “need” on the board. (For those that have currency other than kisses, there is a chart in their bag to help them calculate their wealth). Have students break into groups according to how much wealth they possess. Explain to the students that those in the room with six or more kisses will have most of their needs and wants met (have them form a group), those with two to three kisses will have only their “basic needs” met (have them form another group) and those with less than two will have difficulty surviving due to disease, lack of education, malnutrition, and inadequate shelter (have these folks form the last group).

(Activity continued on next page) →





Activity 3: Structural Violence (continued)

- 4. Share Wealth.** Tell the participants that they may give kisses to others; however, they are not required to do so. Tell them that those who do share will be honored as “DONORS” and their names will be placed on the board.

Allow a few minutes for students to redistribute the kisses if they wish. Instruct students to change groups if necessary, according to the number of kisses they now have. Ask for the names of those who gave away kisses or other candy bars and the amount they gave. Then ask if anyone changed groups as a result of giving or receiving candy. Explain that in the United States, as well as in every country around the globe, some people lack adequate necessities, such as food, education, health care, and shelter, and others, often in the same community, are able to acquire almost everything they need or want.

- 5. Re-Distribute Wealth.** Have the students get back into their original groups. Give each group 10 minutes to devise a plan to redistribute the world’s wealth. Remind the students that this is a simulation, so they should try to devise a plan that is representative of what they think their group of people (or the group they represent in society) would do, which may not necessarily be what they personally would do. Each group should: 1) Describe what their group plans to do and why, 2) Show why their plan is fair, and 3) Explain what needs to be done (if anything). Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to explain their plan to others and answer questions. After the plans have been presented and discussed, announce that a vote will now be held on which plan to adopt.

- 6. Vote and Implement.** When participants are ready to vote, announce the following to the class: 1) participants with six or more kisses have five votes each, 2) those with two or three kisses have two votes, and 3) those with one or zero have 1/2 vote. This strategy introduces the connection between wealth and power. Have participants vote and tabulate the results. Announce which plan is to be implemented and carry out this plan, redistributing the wealth if necessary.

- 7. Explain.** Explain to the students that there was exactly enough wealth in kiss units to ensure that everyone in the room could have six kisses and therefore fulfill all the needs and wants on the board. The following quote was used to determine the original breakdown of wealth:

“Although we are the wealthiest of the major nations, we also have the most unequal distribution of income and wealth. A Twentieth Century Fund study estimates that the top one percent of families owns about 40 percent of U.S. wealth. According to New York University economist Edward Wolff (cited by Robert Kuttner in the Washington Post), that same one percent, with average wealth of \$2.35 million each, holds 46.2 percent of all stocks and 54.2 percent of all bonds. And the next 9 percent own most of the rest; the bottom 90 percent hold just 10 percent of all this wealth. It is the forces behind this inequality that today present an unprecedented challenge to social peace in America.”

- 8. Discuss.** In the large group ask the students the following questions:

- How many people were able to meet their needs adequately?
- Were there any people left with nothing in the end?
- How did you feel about having one kiss or less?

In small groups of three to five, have students discuss for 10-20 minutes the questions in Handout 3: Structural Violence Discussion Questions.

- 9. Write.** Ask students to write in their journals a response to the question: “Can there be genuine peace in the world without an equitable distribution of wealth?”



Structural Violence Activity: Directions for Teachers

Materials Needed:

- 1 paper bag for each student
- 130 Hershey Kisses
- 2 king size candy bars
- 6 regular candy bars and
- 5 mini candy bars

Each student will receive a bag filled with candy that will represent currency. The candy should be divided into separate bags so that 1% of the people own 40% of the wealth, the next 9% get the next 40% of the wealth split evenly, and the bottom 90% of the people get the last 20% of the wealth split evenly. What the students do not know is that if all the wealth was distributed evenly each of them would have six candy kisses.

Candy Breakdown Calculations:

To do these calculations on your own, take the number of people you expect in the group and multiply that by six. (Six is the number of kisses that each person needs to have all of their needs and wants met - housing, health care, food, education, car, TV/computer - as one kiss can buy one of these needs/wants). To follow the statistics as given in the quote in the exercise, take 80% of the total number of kisses and give half of that 80% to one person and the other half split between two or three people. The rest of the kisses (the bottom 20%) can be split evenly between the people left. Examples of how it should be split up are given below. The breakdown is a little more spread out than the actual statistics, but it allows for there to be a few more students in each of the small groups. Once you read the statistics to the class, you can let them know that you were actually more “generous” in your distribution of wealth than what the statistics show.

Once you divide the candy as described above, put the candy in paper bags so that each student receives one bag containing their “wealth” of candy. This is so students can choose to reveal their wealth or not. When putting the bags together, be sure to include a “conversion chart” (shown below) for those students who have more wealth. So, for example, let’s say you have figured out that for your group you need to give the top person 72 units of kiss currency. You could give them:

- 2 king size candy bars = 40
- 2 regular candy bars = 20
- 1 mini candy bar = 5
- 7 kisses

CURRENCY CONVERSION CHART

King size candy bar = 20 candy kisses
 Regular candy bar = 10 candy kisses
 Miniature candy bar = 5 candy kisses

Sample Breakdowns:

For 45 people:

- 1 person: 108 units of currency
- 4 people: 27 units of currency
- 6 people: 3 kisses each
- 4 people: 2 kisses each
- 27 people: 1 kiss each
- 3 people: 0 kisses each

For 30 people:

- 1 person: 72 units of kiss currency
- 2 people: 36 units of kiss currency
- 4 people: 3 kisses each
- 2 people: 2 kisses each
- 20 people: 1 kiss each
- 1 person: 0 kisses each

For 25 people:

- 1 person: 60 units of currency
- 3 people: 20 units of currency
- 3 people: 3 kisses each
- 3 people: 2 kisses each
- 15 people: 1 kiss each

For 23 people:

- 1 person: 55 units of currency
- 2 people: 27 units of currency
- 3 people: 3 kisses each
- 4 people: 2 kisses each
- 11 people: 1 kiss each
- 2 people: 0 kisses each

Source: Adapted from the exercise “Economic Justice: The Scramble for Wealth and Power” by Sherry Kempf and David Shiman in *Economic and Social Justice: A Human Rights Perspective* by David Shiman. A publication of The Human Rights Resource Center at the University of Minnesota and the Stanley Foundation (1999).



WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

What Are Human Rights?

Human rights are **universal**: they belong to all people regardless of their sex, race, color, language, national origin, age, class, religion, or political beliefs.

Human rights are **inalienable**: you cannot lose these rights any more than you can cease to be a human being.

Human rights are **indivisible**: you cannot be denied a right because it is "less important" or "non-essential."

Human rights are **interdependent**: all human rights are part of a mutually reinforcing complementary framework such that the ability to exercise one right is often dependent on having other rights. For example, your ability to participate in your government is directly affected by your right to express yourself, to get an education, and even to obtain the necessities of life.

Human rights can also be defined as the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. To violate someone's human rights is to treat that person as though she or he is not a human being. To advocate for human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected.

In claiming these human rights, everyone also accepts the responsibility not to infringe on the rights of others and to support those whose rights are abused or denied.

Human Rights as Inspiration and Empowerment

Human rights are both inspirational and practical. Human rights principles hold up the vision of a free, just, and peaceful world and set minimum standards for how individuals and institutions everywhere should treat people. Human rights also empower people with a framework for action when those minimum standards are not met, because people still have human rights even if the laws or those in power do not recognize or protect them.

We experience our human rights every day in the United States when we worship according to our beliefs, or choose not to worship at all; when we debate and criticize government policies; when we join a trade union; or when we travel to other parts of the country or overseas. Although we usually take these actions for granted, people both here and in other countries do not enjoy all these liberties equally. Human rights violations also occur everyday in this country when a parent abuses

a child, when a family is homeless, when a school provides inadequate education, when women are paid less than men, and/or when one person steals from another.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Rights for all members of the human family were first articulated in 1948 in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Following the horrific experiences of the Holocaust and World War II, and amid the grinding poverty experienced by much of the world's population, many people sought to create a document that would capture the hopes, aspirations, and protections to which every person in the world was entitled. The UDHR was drafted to ensure respect for basic human dignity and to prevent similar atrocities from ever happening again.

The 30 articles of the Declaration together form a comprehensive statement covering economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights. The document is both universal and indivisible. A **declaration**, however, is not a treaty and lacks any enforcement provisions. Rather it is a statement of intent, a set of principles to which United Nations **member states** commit themselves.

Over the past 50 years the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has acquired the status of **customary international law** because most states treat it as though it were law. Governments, however, have not applied this customary law equally. Socialist and communist countries of Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia have emphasized social welfare rights, such as education, jobs, and health care, but often have limited the political rights of their citizens. The United States has focused on political and civil rights and has advocated strongly against regimes that torture, deny religious freedom, or persecute minorities. On the other hand, the United States government rarely recognizes health care, homelessness, environmental pollution, and other social and economic concerns as human rights issues, especially within its own borders.

Across the U.S., a movement is rising to challenge this narrow definition of human rights to include social, economic, and cultural rights in the human rights agenda. The right to eat is as fundamental as the right not to be tortured or jailed without charges.

Source: Adapted from "What Are Human Rights?" in *Human Rights Here and Now*. A Publication of the Human Rights Educators Network of Amnesty International, The Human Rights Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, and the Stanley Foundation. (1998).



THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

Article 1
Right to Equality

Article 2
Freedom from Discrimination

Article 3
Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

Article 4
Freedom from Slavery

Article 5
Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

Article 6
Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law

Article 7
Right to Equality before the Law

Article 8
Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal

Article 9
Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile

Article 10
Right to Fair Public Hearing

Article 11
Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty

Article 12
Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence

Article 13
Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country

Article 14
Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution

Article 15
Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It

Article 16
Right to Marriage and Family

Article 17
Right to Own Property

Article 18
Freedom of Belief and Religion

Article 19
Freedom of Opinion and Information

Article 20
Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Article 21
Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

Article 22
Right to Social Security

Article 23
Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

Article 24
Right to Rest and Leisure

Article 25
Right to Adequate Living Standard

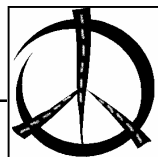
Article 26
Right to Education

Article 27
Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of the Community

Article 28
Right to a Social Order that Articulates This Document

Article 29
Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development

Article 30
Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the Above Rights



Source: "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Abbreviated)."
A Publication of The Human Rights Resource Center at the University
of Minnesota (1998).

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STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **What aspects of this game represented how the world's wealth and power are distributed?**
- **For those of you who gave away kisses - what motivated you to do so? In general, what do you think motivates people to give?**
- **Describe how you felt about the relative position you achieved in the activity.**
- **After playing this game, do you have a better understanding of the situation or perspectives of poor people or poor nations? Of the situation or perspectives of wealthy people and wealthy nations?**
- **Why were some people given more votes than others? Was this an accurate representation of those with more or less power in the world?**
- **Who are the "haves" and the "have nots" in the world today? Who are the "haves" and "have nots" in our country? In your state? In your community? Why?**
- **Can these inequalities in our country and in the world be considered structural violence? Why or why not?**
- **How significant is structural violence?**
- **How do wealth and power affect one's ability to enjoy human rights and human dignity?**
- **Can poor people really achieve human rights?**
- **Are there responsibilities associated with having wealth and power? Should the "haves" be concerned about the situation of the "have nots?" For what reasons? Economic? Moral/Religious? Political? Why might the "haves" share money, power, or resources with the "have nots?"**
- **What might the "have nots" do to improve their situation? What are some actions that "have nots" have taken around the globe and at home to address the inequalities of wealth and power?**
- **How might structural violence contribute to direct violence, internal conflict, and war?**
- **Do you think there should be a redistribution of wealth and power in this country or the world? Why or why not?**
- **Do you think there can be genuine peace in a world with an inequitable distribution of wealth? Why or why not?**

