

## Teaching Human Rights Through the Arts

I'd like to share this collection of resources, which I used to create a year-long 10th grade English curriculum based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During this experimental year I used what I learned in *The World As It Could Be* training and combined movement, visual arts, music, and theater with reading, writing, listening and speaking skills to address common core standards.

Our year followed the flow of WHAT (learning about the UDHR), SO WHAT (going in depth and discovering what mattered to us) and NOW WHAT (action research poster project to educate others). My overall goal was to create a balanced classroom environment that was uplifting and empowering while creating community exploring heavy, challenging, (and potentially depressing) issues.

During the WHAT phase, we dissected the language in the UDHR, watched and analyzed video clips illustrating the articles, and created our own visual representations of the articles. We learned about Universe of Obligation, and considered the ways we have been upstanders, bystanders, targets, and perpetrators. We studied elements of narrative writing, wrote our own narratives, acted them out, and re-envisioned/re-played them in preparation for Balboa's UDHR Assembly.

In the SO WHAT phase, we read narratives from marginalized voices, translated Chinese poetry written by a Chinese Human Rights activist, and learned how dramatic change could come from educating girls and educating everyone about their human rights. Students wrote opinion pieces on whether the UDHR still mattered. We explored a unit on the importance of gratitude in building resilience and happiness, kept gratitude journals, and kept the energy upbeat by focusing on progress and change makers in human rights.

Finally, in the NOW WHAT phase, students researched an issue that was important to them and an organization that was making progress on that issue. We focused on the skill of paraphrasing information from on-line sources and created action posters to educate the Balboa community.

## Teaching Resources

Student and Teacher Books:

**Voice of Witness (<http://voiceofwitness.org/>)**

VOW is a non-profit dedicated to "amplifying unheard voices." They've published an oral history book series to illuminate the narratives of people around the world who have experienced injustice in areas like human trafficking, unsafe working conditions, wrongful conviction, and immigration.

*We had a classroom set of the Voice of Witness Anthology collection and used selected chapters in literature circles. Students chose voices that interested them and read and discussed in groups in class. Groups were then jig-sawed to share their voices with the rest of the class.*

**Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-imagining the Language Arts Classroom**, Linda Christensen, Rethinking Schools, 2009. (Lesson on Writing for Justice, p 85-103) In Christensen's words, "I designed this lesson to help students uncover those moments in their lives when they participated in acts of injustice, and then to use those narratives to rehearse acting in solidarity with others to change the situation."

*I used the powerful lesson plan and sample student essays in the chapter to explore elements of narrative writing while uncovering our various roles as bystanders, perpetrators, upstanders, and targets. Students created and performed skits for one another as well as for the school-wide assembly on the UDHR.*

### Websites:

#### **Christian Science Monitor (csmonitor.com)**

Award-winning, insightful, progress-oriented international coverage of national and global issues, often with a human rights focus. Last year CSM ran a 10- part series on what's working in stopping human trafficking.

*I have subscribed to this magazine for years and have found it to be the absolute best resource for balanced and deep examination of global issues and the trends beneath them. Issues are always relevant to my teaching and provide understanding and inspiration. Students cut up the photos and words in the magazines for their poster projects.*

- **Points of Progress (Christian Science Monitor):** weekly feature in the magazine edition of CSM gives graphic display of world map and describes 7-10 positive events highlighting human progress toward a more just world.

*I collected these spreads and used them as speaking warm-ups. Students read in partners, chose a point that spoke to them, wrote briefly about it, then stood up and shared with 3 others... "I've got some great news!...." Then wrote another couple of sentences about what they learned from classmates.*

- **People Making a Difference (Christian Science Monitor):** (<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference>) weekly feature in both the online and magazine versions highlighting an individual change-maker who is working to effectively bring about social change.

*I printed out selected articles and used them to study genre writing, breaking down the parts of the article and identifying discourse moves by the author. We also pulled vocabulary and academic sentence frames to practice. I found this a positive way to introduce a human rights issue—through the lens of a change-maker.*

## **Greater Good Science Center ([greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu))**

The Greater Good Science Center studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.

*We used an article from this center's research on gratitude ([http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_gratitude\\_is\\_good](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good)) to launch an experiment in gratitude journal writing. Students kept gratitude journals for 8 weeks (reflecting and writing in class on Fridays about what they had been grateful for that week.) I hoped to show students how to build their own resilience and happiness in spite of challenging world and life events. We also conducted an experiment similar to the one done by Soul Pancake in this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHv6vTKD6lg>) in which we wrote in specific terms about someone in the class we were grateful for and then read/gave our notes to those people.*

## **Youth For Human Rights (<http://www.youthforhumanrights.org/>)**

The purpose of YHRI is to teach youth about human rights, specifically the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and inspire them to become advocates for tolerance and peace. YHRI has now grown into a global movement, including hundreds of groups, clubs and chapters around the world.

*I used this organization's 30 one-minute video clips, created in the form of public service announcements, each one created to illustrate each of the articles of the UDHR. We analyzed the clips and examined which were most effective to us and why. Students reacted and responded in writing. **It should be noted that this site is affiliated with the Church of Scientology**, which has caused controversy, but in my research I didn't find the videos to have any kind of scientology references. On the contrary, they were accessible and universal in appeal without seeming to push any agenda.*

## **Rock Your World (<http://rock-your-world.org>)**

Rock Your World is a Program of Creative Visions, a non-profit organization that supports creative activists - individuals who use the power of media and arts to create positive change in the world. Curricular units complete with lesson plans and resources include: What Are Human Rights? Finding an Issue of Interest; Becoming Informed; Creating Campaigns; Writing Persuasively; and Making Films. Of special note is the recent addition of the Writing Songs unit, which includes the 5 lessons Learning How Songs Inspire; Listening to Music as a Songwriter, Starting to Compose Songs, Connecting a Song's Theme to Chorus, and Discovering Poetic Devices in Songs.

*I used the overall curriculum flow of this excellent site to frame my year—first we learned about human rights (what) , then we chose one that we really cared about and connected with, (so what) we researched it, and created an informative poster to educate others. (now what) Very useful and well-designed site!*

## **Ramiro Gomez, Artist**

This Los Angeles based artist is creating awareness and controversy with his projects that aim to make visible the often invisible immigrant workers in L.A.'s affluent communities.

Article in The Atlantic

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/04/documenting-californias-hidden-workforce/478989/>

Story on NPR: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/11/473384990/gardens-dont-tend-themselves-portraits-of-the-people-behind-las-luxury>

*Romiro's style of artwork is very accessible and could inspire students to do their own pieces. A fantastic example of how art can raise awareness! This could lead to a whole exploration of "Border Art" and using art to bring about social change. I discovered this artist at the end of the year and hope to bring his art into future classes.*

## **Poetry Inside Out (<http://www.catranslation.org/poetry-inside-out>)**

A program of the Center for the Art of Translation in which students study poems by world-class poets in the language in which they were written—Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, and many others—and learn the process of literary translation. They then use those translated poems as inspiration and resource for writing their own poems.

*Several of the poems in the Poetry Inside Out collection are connected to human rights issues. We translated a poem by the Chinese human rights activist, Huang Xiang, who was imprisoned for many years for his pro-democracy advocacy and now lives in exile in the US. Students then wrote their own poems as part of their final poster project.*

Film/Video:

## **Girl Rising (<http://girlrising.com/>) 1:41 minutes, available on Netflix**

According to their website: "Girl Rising is film as well as a global campaign for girls' education and empowerment. We use the power of storytelling to share the simple truth that educating girls can transform societies. Our mission is to change the way the world values the girl and ensure that girls' education is part of the mainstream conversation.

We raise awareness about the issue, inspire action and make change happen through film and other tools, such as educational and advocacy videos, screening guides and a free school curriculum. "

*This film packs a lasting emotional punch and greatly impacted my students' understanding of the importance of the education of girls in changing the world. Some teachers have viewed it in conjunction with reading "I Am Malala" and writing argument pieces on why we must educate girls. In our class*

*many students cited examples from the movie when writing opinion pieces on why the UDHR still matters today.*

**Path to Dignity** (<http://www.path-to-dignity.org/>) from Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (28 minutes) 2010. Streaming from website.

What happens to individuals and communities when people learn about their universal human rights? *A Path to Dignity: The Power of Human Rights Education* presents three stories illustrating the impact of human rights education respectively on school children (India), law enforcement agencies (Australia) and women victims of violence (Turkey).

A key message is that “one person can make a difference” in solving problems in society. Human rights education can transform people’s lives, empowering individuals on a path to dignity and bring about positive change in their respective communities and societies.

*We used this movie as a springboard into our action projects designed to educate people on their human rights. Students were captivated by the idea that only 7% of people in the US know about the UDHR and saw the importance of raising awareness.*

### **The Pigeon**

**([https://yula.haikulearning.com/clerer1/facinghistory/cms\\_page/view/10381165](https://yula.haikulearning.com/clerer1/facinghistory/cms_page/view/10381165))**

The video linked on this page, The Pigeon, is from Facing History And Ourselves. The video is set during World War II and based on a true story of a rare and startling act of charity. It describes an unexpected act of kindness and courage in a time of cruelty and fear in Remies, France, 1941, providing a poignant reminder of the human capacity for good.

*I used this powerful clip to introduce the concept of Universe of Obligation and practice identifying the roles of upstander, bystander, target, and perpetrator before we wrote our own narratives.*