



Human Rights, Then and Now

Essential Question:

What basic human rights are people around the world struggling for today? What can ordinary people do to help?

Sub-Questions:

- What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? What are some of its articles?
- What global human rights issues did King speak out against during his time as a leader?
- What human rights issues are we facing today?
- What can we do as ordinary citizens to help the struggle for human rights?

Materials Needed:

- Class set of copies of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Printable versions available at: <http://www.un.org/events/humanrights/2007/udhr.shtml>
- *Optional:* Strips of paper with quote in # 4, poverty statistics in # 5, quote in # 8
- *Optional:* Internet access for # 10

Activities:

1. If students are unfamiliar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), give them an overview, using the following as reference: <http://www.udhr.org/index.htm>. Pass around copies of the UDHR articles and go over the articles together as a class.
2. Ask students to do a 2-3 minute freewrite on human rights issues that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. personally faced and/or addressed during his time as a leader. Ask students to share their responses in a class discussion. The answers will likely include references to racism, segregation, and voting rights for African-Americans.
3. Discuss with students how Dr. King also addressed global human rights issues. He spoke out against apartheid in South Africa as early as the 1950s. If students are unfamiliar with apartheid, this is a good moment to introduce this topic. Here is a good timeline for reference: http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/discrim/race_b_at_print.asp. Be sure to mention that apartheid ended in the early 90s, which makes the anti-apartheid advocacy of Dr. King and his colleagues in the 50s and 60s even more remarkable.
4. Inform students that on Human Rights Day 10th December in 1965, Dr. King was invited to speak at Hunter College at the South Africa Benefit of the American Committee on Africa. (*For more information on the American Committee on Africa, visit the online King*

Encyclopedia: <http://kinginstitute.info/>). Read the following short excerpt out loud from his speech. You can also pass out the quote on strips of paper or write it on the board.

“We are in an era in which the issue of human rights is the central question confronting all nations. In this complex struggle an obvious but little appreciated fact has gained attention – the large majority of the human race is non-white, yet it is that large majority which lives in hideous poverty.”

5. Pose this question to students: *“How does this 1965 quote from Dr. King’s speech apply to our world today?”* Students speak from personal observation and share out their responses in a class discussion. Address the last part of the above quote by sharing with students the following sobering statistics on current global poverty:
 - From 1981 – 2005, the poverty rate has fallen from 40 % to 29 % in the developing world (outside China) but the total number of poor people – 1.2 billion – remains unchanged.
 - The number of poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa has nearly doubled from 200 million in 1981 to 380 million in 2005.
 - 600 million people in South Asia live on less than \$1.25 a day (2005 estimate) – roughly double the entire population of the U.S. South Asia has the largest number of poor people in the world.

These statistics are sourced from the World Bank website; exact link:

<http://bit.ly/15RbIQ>. This site is a useful reference for additional context on measuring poverty that you may want to provide students. Be sure to point out the connection between poverty and race/color of sufferers. Feel free to connect to local examples of poverty within ethnic minority communities in the US, to make the material more relevant for students.

6. Explain to students that poverty is itself a human rights violation but also paves the way for other human rights violations. Ask students to discuss with an elbow partner and choose at least two human rights listed in their UDHR articles handout that are being violated for these masses of poor people around the world. Examples are lack of clean adequate healthcare, housing, education, etc. Each pair shares responses with the class.
7. Discuss with students some of the practical differences between the two major human rights situations we have studied so far – apartheid in South Africa in the 20th century and the current plight of global poverty. These practical differences (such as those listed below) can give us clues on how to most effectively address these situations:
 - Apartheid occurred within closed South African society; poverty is global and knows no boundaries

- The atrocities of apartheid often made headlines around the world. Poverty is so pervasive and has existed for so long that the news doesn't often cover it unless in the context of other issues

Brainstorm other differences and similarities between these situations with your class.

8. Tell students that they will now discuss what ordinary people can do to act against human rights violations. Read out loud (and/or pass around on strips of paper) the following excerpt from Dr. King's speech at Hunter College on Human Rights Day 10 December 1965. Do a close reading or explain vocabulary words, if necessary.

“Have we the power to be more than peevish with South Africa, but yet refrain from acts of war? To list the extensive economic relations of the great powers with South Africa is to suggest a potent non-violent path. The international potential of non-violence has never been employed. Non-violence has been practised within national borders in India, the U.S. and in regions of Africa with spectacular success. The time has come fully to utilize non-violence through a massive international boycott which would involve the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, France, the U.S. Germany and Japan. Millions of people can personally give expression to their abhorrence of the world's worst racism through such a far flung boycott. No nation professing a concern for man's dignity could avoid assuming its obligations if people of all states and races adopted a firm stand.”

9. Explain how Dr. King's call for an international movement against apartheid did indeed occur in subsequent decades. Briefly go over some of the major international anti-apartheid campaigns rooted in non-violent direct action: ex. divestment movements within US college campuses, boycott of South African goods, sports boycotts, etc. This website is a good reference for the international anti-apartheid movement: <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/aama/>.
10. Ask students to turn to their elbow partner. Using what they learned about the struggle to end apartheid, and the practical differences between the apartheid case study and the current plight of global poverty, students discuss two ways in which they can personally address the issue of global poverty and/or its related human rights violations. Students share responses with the class. Time and interest permitting, organize a service learning opportunity for students to take action against this issue in the ways they have defined.

Here are some resources (not exhaustive) that may be useful as students identify actions ordinary people can take against global poverty and human rights issues:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/take-action-online/page.do?id=1031043>

<http://www.change.org/>

<http://www.socialedge.org/>

<http://www.witness.org/>