



## Global Voices Information Sheet

### Human Rights: Universal or Culturally Relative?



#### Background Info

- Over 50 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that everyone is born free and has equal access to political freedom, regardless of race or gender or faith. It states these rights should be protected by law.
- Equitas' International Human Rights Training Program begins June 6. Participants from over 50 countries come to the Canadian-funded program to bring human rights education back to their home countries.
- There is often tension between universal human rights and cultural relativism, more recently concerning Canada's intervention in the pro-democracy uprisings in foreign countries.
- In Libya, Canada is helping to fight the corrupt dictatorship of leader Moammar Gadhafi by sending fighter jets to attack his troops. Military involvement means that Canada supports the pro-democracy movement in that country.
- A Western-style democracy might not be suitable with the cultural values and traditions of another country, and the Canadian government is currently struggling to decide what its role will be once the conflict in Libya is over.
- Ian Hamilton, executive director of Equitas, says that "Human rights education is not a case of one size fits all."

#### Key terms

- **Human rights**—Basic freedoms, often held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, religious belief and equality under the law.
- **Universal**—relating to the entire world.
- **Cultural relativism**—the idea that human values are not equal, but vary according to one's cultural perspective.
- **Arab spring**—refers to the current sweep of pro-democracy uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. The "spring" is in contrast to the "winter" of oppression that many of these countries have faced. For example, protests have started in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Bahrain.

## Global Voices Elementary Educator Resources

### Note to Educators:

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. Activities are structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Extension and conclusion activities are included to challenge students and finally, encourage them to reflect on the issues at hand.

Since these activities are designed as discussions rather than formal lessons, assessment strategies are not included.

### Themes and Course Connections

- Themes: human rights, westernization, consideration, values, actions and equality.
- Course Connections: The Arts, Language, and Social Studies.

### Materials

- Chart paper or blackboard
- Global Voices column
- Materials to create a class mural

### Specific Expectations and Learning Goals

Students will:

- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in written and spoken language or other forms of expression.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express, and defend a position on an issue and explain how to put the ideas into action.

### Knowledge and Understanding

1. Human Rights (estimated time: 15 minutes)
  - a. Ask students: what are human rights? Encourage discussion and debate around this topic by introducing key words such as universal, equal, dignity, etc. Be sure to make clear connections between human rights and the key words you are introducing.
  - b. Following this discussion, ask students to list off different rights they have as humans and as children. Make a list of these rights on the board.
  - c. Before this list is complete, ensure to fill in any important human and children's rights that students may have missed.
  - d. Divide the class into pairs.

- e. Have each pair look at the list and identify any instances they have encountered or heard of where an individual was not being granted their rights. Pairs must discuss these scenarios together, identify the right(s) the person was denied, and what impact this had on them. Ask pairs to be prepared to share at least one scenario and its impact by the conclusion of the discussion.
- f. Ask pairs to share their scenarios and allow reactions from the class.
- g. Hold a discussion around why these scenarios took place and what needs to take place in society to ensure that people are granted their basic human rights.
- h. Explain to students that today they are going to explore an organization called Equitas that fights for human rights. Tell students that Equitas works for the advancement of equality, social justice and respect for human dignity in Canada and around the world through transformative human rights education programs.

## Thinking

1. Guided Reading: The Global Voices Column (estimated time: 20 minutes)
  - a. Have students sit in a circle and distribute one copy of the Global Voices column to each student.
  - b. Pre-reading steps:
    - i. Make predictions: ask students to read the title of the column and view the pictures. After doing so, ask them to make predictions as to what the column is going to be about.
    - ii. Introduce vocabulary from the column.
    - iii. Assess prior knowledge: ask students to discuss what they already know about these topics.
  - c. Reading steps:
    - i. Go around the circle and have each student read a section of the column to the class, so that everyone gets a turn to read.
    - ii. As students are reading, offer guidance and coaching by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at reading strategy application.
  - d. Post reading steps:
    - i. Encourage students to provide a summary of the column in order to ensure they have understood the series of events.
    - ii. Ask questions about the text to judge comprehension.
2. Media Literacy (estimated time: 15 minutes)
  - a. Divide the class into small groups and distribute chart paper to each group.
  - b. On the chart paper, ask each group to write the heading of the column in the center of the page.
  - c. Next, have groups write all the words that come to mind after reading the column around the center title, creating a word web.
  - d. When students have completed their word webs, ask them to answer the following questions in their groups:
    - i. What is the message of this column?
    - ii. Who created this message?
    - iii. What creative techniques are used to attract the readers attention?
    - iv. How might other people understand this message differently than me?
    - v. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in this column? Which ones are left out?
    - vi. What statistics of facts are listed in the column?
    - vii. Why has this message been created?
    - viii. Do you agree with this message?
    - ix. What do you know? What are you unsure of? What would you like to know?
  - e. As a class, discuss the students' word webs as well as their answers to the above questions. Discuss why it is important to understand the source and potential bias of a resource offering news information.

## Communication

1. Values (estimated time: 10 minutes)
  - a. Explain to students that in addition to the inspiration Equitas takes from the principles of human rights, they are guided by the following values:
    - i. Integrity
    - ii. Focus and determination
    - iii. Trust and mutual respect
    - iv. Openness
    - v. Partnership
    - vi. Innovation
  - b. As a class, go through this list and discuss the meaning of each value and what this value looks like in students' lives.
  - c. Following this discussion, ask students to work independently to create a personal list of values that they want to live by in their life. These values should support the advancement of human rights.
  - d. When students have completed their lists, ask them to share some of their values with the class.

## Application

1. Human Rights Mural (estimated time: continuous project)
  - a. Discuss how they as individuals can honour human rights. List suggestions on the board.
  - b. Explain to the class that they are going to work together on a human rights mural for the school. On this mural they must include images, words and symbols that represent items on the list. The goal of this mural is to remind the rest of the school about those people who do not have access to some human rights, and making this consideration a part of their everyday life.
  - c. Create the mural as a class and display the final product in the front hall of the school.

## Additional Resources

In addition to the above lesson plans, you may want to share some additional resources with your students. Listed below are some links to useful online resources:

Free The Children –

<http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/educator/programs.php?type=curriculum>

Equitas - <http://equitas.org/en/>