

Mennonite Central Committee
*'Peace is a Choice...
At Each Small Turn Choose Peace'*





'Peace is a Choice... At Each Small Turn Choose Peace'

A Peace Curriculum for Grades 6 to 9



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

Introduction:

The idea for creating a peace curriculum for middle school and junior high students is not new. There are many peace curricula available for schools to use, which focus on topics such as anti-bullying, conflict resolution, peer mediation, etc. However, few peace curricula relate specifically to themes and concepts taught in core subject areas. "At each small turn..." encourages teachers, students, and school communities to see peace not only as relevant and urgent in our world, but also tied intrinsically to what it is we are studying, how we relate to each other at home, at school and in our communities. The goal for this curriculum is to encourage and enable students to take responsibility for the profound impact, both negative and positive, their actions and decisions can have in all of those places. This curriculum hopes to challenge school communities to link learning, responsibility and action as one whole.

"At each small turn..." will acquaint students with the complexities involved in peace and peacemaking. Students will be challenged to explore issues of peace and conflict, and to expand their thinking about who they are in the midst of those issues, and how they can respond. Peace is not merely the absence of a conflict. Peace is connected to social and political issues that plague our world: hunger, poverty, disease, refugees, homelessness, the environment, the media, materialism, racism, sexism. This curriculum will introduce students to the tools that can be used to impact in positive ways the big and small conflict issues in their own worlds, and in the larger world. Tools such as: acceptance, listening, caring, forgiveness, tolerance, fairness, and gratefulness.

Some of the issues that will be discussed in the following units may invite some controversy due to various worldviews of students. The strategies used to study these issues should include teamwork, simulation exercises, guest speakers, presentations, talking circles, discussions, and storytelling. Whatever strategies you use, create an atmosphere of trust and respect, ensure that students respect and take all opinions seriously, and encourage students to listen to and understand the perspectives of their peers.

It may sound like a cliché to say that the future of our world, its health, our health, rests in the hands of our children, but it is a reality. The more tools that we can provide them with to create healthy relationships with each other and the earth, the better the chances are that the future is hopeful and full of promise. Our children and young people are important and vital participants in creating this future.

This is not an exhaustive curriculum, but rather a set of themes, ideas and activities designed to connect to existing core curriculum study, specifically: Social Studies, Health, Science and English Language Arts. This curriculum is also in its piloting phase. Any and all comments, suggestions, ideas, critiques will be welcome.

Thank you...

This curriculum would not have come into being without the work of many people who helped us brainstorm, refine and write the units. We are very grateful to each of the contributors: Abe Janzen, Esther Epp-Tiessen, Craig Schellenberg, Helen Siemens, Gail Daniels, and Debbie Nowakowski. Your ideas, thoughts and expertise have given the units depth, creative activities and new ideas in exploring the themes. Thank you.

Thank you to Byron Thiessen for his affirmation, his creative input and suggestions, and for telling us time and again, that this curriculum was a good idea.

We would also like to thank Roberta Fast (Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Communications) for her beautiful artwork on the images for this curriculum. The pictures are rich, inviting to look at, and thought provoking. Thank you for your work, Roberta!

Nina Kesel and Kim Thiessen
MCC Alberta, Peace Program
www.mcc.org/peace

1. see past yourself...
remember those around you
and far away



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

Unit 1:

see past yourself...remember those around
you and far away

Students Will:

- **understand the connection between themselves and others**
- **understand that they do have a responsibility to change what they can in their world**
- **understand that they have a critical role in making the world a better place**
- **understand the importance of their actions and the impact they can have on other people**

Key Content Questions:

- **What does it mean to "see past myself"?**
- **Why is it important for me to be aware of other people around me?**
- **How does the knowledge of others around me affect my life?**
- **What does it mean to care for others?**
- **Can I care about other people and do nothing to help them?**

Quotes:

“Two things stand like stone: kindness in another’s trouble, and courage in our own.” - Adam Lindsay Gordon

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” -Martin Luther King Jr.

“As long as there is poverty in the world, I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than 28 or 30 years, I can never be totally healthy...I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made.” –Martin Luther King Jr.

Introduction:

Each person on earth is important and valuable. There is no person or group of people that is less important than another. This includes people whom we dislike, people that are different from us and people who live on the other side of the world. It even includes our “enemies”. It is important to remember that no human life is worthless. If we are caring people, sincere, then we know and acknowledge that other people’s needs are as important as ours.

This unit will focus on what it means to care for each other, to support each other. Does caring mean that we simply hope that people around us and far away are okay, and that is all? Or does caring mean we also have to act? When we see someone suffering and we care about them, are we moved to ease their suffering? When we see someone hurting someone else, and we hope for the bullying to stop, are we not moved to make them stop? **Care and action are tied together.** If we are sincere about caring for others, then we open ourselves up to their needs, and opening ourselves up to the fact that we may be able to do something about those needs.

This unit applies directly to areas of study in **Social Studies** (local, national and international current events; contact between societies; differing world views), **Health** (well-informed choices to develop behaviours that contribute to the well-being of self and others; promoting home, school and community health), **English Language Arts** (explore thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences; respect, support and collaborate with others; respect diverse ideas, cultures, race, ages and abilities).

Activities:

1. Have students define the word "care". Have them talk about what it means to "see past themselves". Have students discuss ways in which they are all connected to each other. Have them discuss how they may be connected to people across the world.
2. View the videos "In the Midst of Plenty" – hunger (13 min.) and "Fit for Children: Child Poverty in Waterloo Region" (18 min. with study guide) – these videos portray the work of a local organization trying meet universal needs in their community. Although focused on Waterloo region, these videos can be used to illustrate issues in any Canadian community (available from Mennonite Brethren in Christ Resource Centre www.mbicresources.org). Discuss with the class how these issues are noticeable in their own community and which local organizations are working to address them.
3. Have students research the various local organizations in their area who are working with issues of poverty, homelessness, hunger, etc. Have the class compile an extensive list with contact information and volunteer opportunities available at each of these organizations. Organize a tour through your local food bank or homeless shelter. Or have the class volunteer over a lunch hour or for an afternoon at a drop-in centre or food for schools program.
4. Have students research and report on organizations that are working internationally with issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, hunger, conflict. Are the needs that are being addressed overseas also needs that we have here in North America?
5. Invite a guest speaker in to your class from a local organization to talk about their work, and perhaps to talk about how the students can get involved and help.
6. Have students read through the story "The Farmer and the Angel". What are their ideas of heaven and hell? How do they feel about the farmer's ideas of heaven and hell?
7. Have students respond to the stories of Ezekiel and Nzila. What would they do if they found themselves in their situation?
8. Have students discuss the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Why is/was there so much chaos among the people affected? What makes people respond violently to situations where everyone is desperate for help and assistance?

Student Response:

In their journals, have students reflect on the theme “see past yourself...remember those around you and far away”. Suggested questions:

- So what? Why should I care about others? What do they have to do with me and my life?
- How can I help to change situations that I am in, that others are in, for the better?
- Is it really important for me to care about people that I don't much like?
- How is my life connected to others around the world?
- What would happen if everyone cared a little bit more? What would happen if everyone cared less?
- Do we expect more from people who have more? Does having little make us less responsible?

All-Class Response:

As a class, respond to the theme, “see past yourself...remember those around you and far away”. The all-class response can be in the form of a poem, a song, a collage, a painting, a dramatic reading, etc. The all-class response can also be displayed or performed in front of the whole school, as well as at the annual MCC Alberta Fine Arts Festival.

Supporting Material:

Each person on earth is equally important and valuable. C.S. Lewis said in his book, *The Weight of Glory*, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal...but it is immortals whom we joke with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours...Next to the blessed sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses." We are all connected to each other, and when one person suffers it has a ripple effect on others. When one person celebrates it has a ripple effect on others. If everyone in the world treated others with the care and compassion and forgiveness that we hope will be to be treated with, the world would be a much different place.

What I truly need and wish for in life...food, water, a home, health, safety, education, freedom...is what everyone wishes for. We are connected by what we need, by what we hope for. Many people are driven by money, power, and things. And many people believe that the most important thing in life is to make sure that they themselves are taken care of, but do not give much thought to making sure that others around them, in their communities, at their work or schools, or halfway around the world, are taken care of. Who are the people or organizations in your community who work at caring for other people?

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "**As long as there is poverty in the world, I can never be rich, even if I have a billion dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than 28 or 30 years, I can never be totally healthy...I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way our world is made.**" We become healthier and happier people when those around us are happier and healthier. We are connected.

The Farmer and the Angel

There once was a very kind and joyful old farmer. He was ninety years old and though his bones were a wee bit weary, his eyes still sparkled with love and laughter. He was the kind who seemed to know just what it took to make you smile, and when you needed to weep he'd sit by your side and hold you. He was the kind who noticed the dew sparkling on a spider's web and knew the taste of a juicy red strawberry. He was the kind who still at ninety worked very hard every day on the land, and when you needed a helping hand his sleeves were rolled up ready to go.

One day, because of his goodness, he was visited by an angel who granted his a wish. The angel said to the old man that anything he wanted would be his. The farmer said to the angel, "I am happy with the bounty of food upon my plate and the love that surrounds me daily, but before I die I should like just once to see heaven and hell."

The angel told him to take hold of her cloak and in an instant they arrived at the gates of hell. To the surprise of the old man, when he passed through the gates of hell he found himself on the edge of a beautiful open green surrounded by tall graceful pine trees. As he walked toward the middle of the green he saw many people seated around a great long table that was heaped high with the most magnificent and delicious foods the man had ever seen. Yet as he grew near he saw that the people looked sickly and thin, as if they were wasting from starvation. How could this be? Then he noticed that the people's arms were locked straight so that they could not bend them. It was impossible for these people to feed themselves. "Accch," the man sighed, "this is truly hell."

Hastily he returned to the angel and took hold of her cloak. In another instant they arrived at the gates of heaven. Here too the man found himself on the edge of a beautiful open green surrounded by tall majestic pine trees. He walked toward the middle of the green and saw many people seated around a great long table that was heaped high with the most wonderful and delicious foods. As he drew near, the man saw that the people's arms were locked straight so that they could not be bent. Yet these people were smiling and laughing. Their eyes danced with a merry delight and their stomachs seemed joyfully content. How was this possible? The good man looked closer and he saw: the people of heaven were feeding each other! "Ahh, yes," smiled the good man, "this is truly heaven."

Heaven for the farmer was making sure that everyone around the table was able to eat. What is heaven for us?

Ezekiel

In the city of Jos, Nigeria, a young man named Ezekiel has AIDS. He has had AIDS for some time already and lives, knowing that his life will not be very long. When he first contracted HIV, he lived in denial. But his refusal to acknowledge his condition brought his life to a crashing stop. He had, over a period of time, given his wife AIDS. His wife, in turn, not knowing, had given their new baby AIDS. The baby died as a result, and then his wife died. Ezekiel married again, still making decisions about his condition that were not healthy. He gave his second wife AIDS as well, who also gave AIDS to their baby. The baby died. This time, his wife did not die, but she left Ezekiel, and he finally came to some kind of terms with the reality and the terror that had been his life over the past couple of years.

Ezekiel went to live with his aunt Mary, 30 minutes drive from Jos, Nigeria. He tried to find a cure for AIDS for himself and he did find a herbalist, who took his money, but could not cure Ezekiel. In the end, Ezekiel almost died of AIDS, but for a doctor named Chris, who works in an AIDS clinic in Jos. Dr. Chris heard about Ezekiel, got into his little VW Van, and went in search of Ezekiel, whom he found, almost dead. Dr. Chris brought Ezekiel to the AIDS clinic in Jos where, over a period of time, he provided food, hygiene, and hope to Ezekiel. He could have withheld food; plenty others needed it too. He could have not bothered with hygiene, since Ezekiel really was hardly living anymore. He could have ignored the need for hope. Instead, Dr. Chris went out of his way for Ezekiel, providing the elements of hope, of a second chance, that most persons in the world deserve, and many never get. Peace making is about giving people a second chance, a first chance, a third chance... it is about making room for those without hope to have hope.

Ezekiel, nurtured back to health, now lives in Jos, and on his small motorcyle, he visits over 50 patients, about 5 or 6 each week. He does this as volunteer, helping the families to understand what they can do with the AIDS that has invaded their family, helping care for the sick, helping others understand how to prevent the further spread of the Virus. It is a difficult work, but Ezekiel does it daily, without remuneration of any kind. He does it because there is a need, because his own life has been affected, and because he has simply chosed to respond with what he can do. He is giving himself as a volunteer, in the interests of others.

Nzilla

Kikwit is a smallish city of about 800,000, located about 500 km inland from the capital city of Kinshasa, Congo. A year ago, an MCC worker from Alberta visited the work of organizations in Nigeria and Congo, who are partnered with MCC in responding to AIDS in their communities, their countries. In Kikwit, a pastor named Nzilla hosted the visitors. As he was visiting people in hospitals in Kikwit, he began to realize that more and more of the patients had AIDS. It alarmed him and he decided that he needed to, and he could, and he would do something, at least, about this. And so he began to learn about AIDS... how it spreads, how to prevent it being spread, what to do if you have it or a family member has it. And so began a new aspect of work for Nzilla. He now works half time as a pastor, and half time as an AIDS educator in that city and the surrounding area. All this work, Nzilla does as a volunteer. He told the visitor from Alberta that he has 8 children himself, and his wife, and that he is paid nothing for the work he does as a pastor, or the work he does as an AIDS educator. He and his wife find ways to survive, to feed their family. They do not eat adequately. Almost no one does in Kikwit. But they are doing what they can and Nzilla has made a choice to respond to a need among the community. He does it willingly, and passionately, with inadequate support, with minimal resources. He encourages patients, and engages other volunteers whom he supports in their work.

What is amazing about Nzilla is that he is not unique. The visitors from Alberta saw many people, in different projects in Congo and Nigeria, working freely, working as volunteers in the interests and for the health of their communities and their countries and their families. They were bringing hope to others, and hope brings the possibility of peace.

No-one made Nzilla do this work. He does not have to do this. He does it because he has seen a need and has chosen to respond. That is the way of the peacemaker, of the hope maker. A person who does not wait for others to provide solutions, to provide initiative... rather, a person who moves into a need situation themselves and begins to work, with others, with institutions... understanding needs, finding resources, working with others... it is this willingness to give of oneself that the world is begging for... and that is so desperately needed from all of us, in the smallest or the largest of commitments, of initiatives... every day... as needs that are larger, smaller ... around us, among us become visible to us and we become part of the response to them. Responding brings hope, and hope brings peace, and peace brings the possibility of a healthy community out of which better, healthier lives can be lived, children can move forward... the future has a chance. **Our choices to care and to serve matter.** The world around us counts on us. Desperately.

7. build fairness...
support those who are not
heard



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

Unit 7:

build fairness...support those who are not
heard

Students Will:

- **Identify, explore and describe the attributes and behaviours of fairness in the context of peace**
- **Discover and articulate how fairness supports all**
- **Identify and discuss the consequences of not being fair or just (environmental consequences, social consequences, emotional consequences, cultural consequences, etc.)**
- **Discuss and articulate rights and responsibilities and how they relate to fairness**
- **Identify and articulate the hindrances to justice and fairness and their impact upon society and individuals**
- **Examine how fairness is woven into democracy and peaceful living**
- **Be empowered to make changes in their own lives; be an advocate for change and make a difference for others**

Key Content Questions:

- **Why is it important to know about issues of fairness or justice in our communities and around the world?**
- **What does “support those who are not heard” mean?**
- **What are the issues of injustice and unfairness in my community?**

- **What are the issues of injustice and unfairness around the world that I can do something about?**

Quotes:

“Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.”
-Sitting Bull

“Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the life of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends a tiny ripple of hope, and those ripples, crossing each other from a million different centers of energy, build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”
-Robert F. Kennedy

Introduction:

There has probably been a time in your life when you have yelled, “That’s not fair!” Most of us have experienced “injustice” at some point. The world is not a fair place – especially if you don’t have white skin, don’t come from a middle or upper class home, and don’t have a healthy or able body or mind. Power and privilege are not distributed evenly in our world. One of the ways to build fairness and justice is to be an advocate for those with less power to make things more just. Don’t just speak up for yourself. Speak up for those who are heard the least.

The following unit will focus on the issues of fairness and justice. A helpful activity to introduce this unit to your class may be Activity #1. The following questions may also be helpful in introducing the theme to your class:

- What are the attributes of fairness and justice?
- Is fairness tied to power in societies?
- Who are the powerful voices in our school community, our city, our nation, our world?
- Who were the powerful voices in Canadian history?
- Who are the unheard voices in our school community, our city, our nation, our world?
- What is the reality for those people who are suffering because of a system of power that does not recognize their rights, or their suffering?
- Are unrest, wars, poverty and hunger the result of an unfair and unjust society?

This unit applies directly to areas of study in **Social Studies** (local and current affairs; contact between societies; differing world views), **Health** (well-informed choices to develop behaviours that contribute to the well-being of self and

others; promoting home, school and community health), **Science** (human use of forests; relationships between humans and the environment; human impact on climate and erosion), **English Language Arts** (explore thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences; respect, support and collaboration with others; respect diverse ideas, cultures, races, ages and abilities).

Activities:

1. Bring a "treat" bag for each student in your class. Include things like candy, fruit, new pencil, etc, in some of the bags. Vary the numbers of items in each treat bag. In other bags, put leaves, rocks, garbage, and other useless items. Number each bag, and copy the numbers onto small slips of paper. Mix up the bags and put them on a table. Don't let them look inside the bags. Explain to the class that each person will receive a bag and can keep what they find inside. Hand each student a slip of paper with a number on it. Invite students to trade numbers with someone else if they would like to. After they have finished trading, have students each take a bag and show the contents to the rest of the class. Have students get into two groups based on whether the contents of their treat bag were "good" or "bad".

Discussion questions:

- How did you feel when you saw what was in your bag?
- How is getting a bag of rocks like being treated unjustly in life?
- How did the students feel who got a "good" bag when they saw their neighbour get a "bad" bag?

Adapted from "Responding to Injustice", by Christine Yount, Group Publishing, Inc., 1991

2. Interview

- Research your family history or that of someone close to you who has come to Canada.
- Interview them and take notes so that you can share them with someone else. Did they come for safety reasons, religious freedom, because of injustices, inequities? Gather some personal stories and share them in class.

3. Simulation: Issues of Equality

"The Person's Case"

- Everyone needs a voice – this is talked about as being fair.
- Does building fairness in various situations help to build peace in Canada?
- How does building fairness help people to live in peace?
- How does building fairness help a country to promote peace?

- Do you wonder how fairness has become one of the attributes for Peace?

Did you know that in the early days of the 1900's (this is a long time before your grandparents would have been born) women were not considered 'persons' in the British Empire or in Canada?

Is this a shock? Why? Think – how could this be? Why would this have happened? What were women if they were not 'people'? Who determined that they were not 'persons'? And why did they determine that they were not persons?

In 1929, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Partby, and Nellie McClung, known now as the Famous 5, fought for the recognition of women as persons under the British North America Act. These women decided that it was not 'fair' that they could not vote; that they could not be active in government or civic affairs or have a say in government or politics. What did these five Alberta women do in order to change this? Read about it on the Famous Five Website, and hold a pink tea, just like the women did. Create an atmosphere and prepare the classroom for a pink tea (use tea cups, pink doilies, old music, posters of the women, etc); use the readers' theatre activity to re-en-act what happened at the pink teas, and what the women talked about. Old fashioned hats could be used for the main characters. Have fun with it. Debrief the class by discussing how the students felt about this activity, what they learned, what was fair or not fair about women not being able to vote, to be listened to or to have a 'voice'.

What are the results of fairness?

How might this still be true today? Where does fairness not happen?

- How did building fairness in the Person's Case help to build peace in Canada?
- How does building fairness help people to live in peace?
- How does building fairness help a country promote peace?

Issues of Equality

<http://www.edukits.ca/famous/sitemap.html>

Lesson Ideas and Activities

http://www.edukits.ca/famous/lesson_plans/senior_Isn2.html

Visit the Famous Five Foundation Website to gather information about this interesting story in the history of our

province and our country. Additional learning activities to meet this objective can be found here. <http://www.famous5.org/>

4. Debate & Discussion:

Select some topics for discussion and debate about fairness and justice. The topics may include issues such as: equality; law and governance; individual rights and responsibilities; rights and responsibilities of groups in a society; poverty; power; war; jealousy; greed, etc.

▪ Example topics for debate:

- Are both genders treated equally and fairly by people and the law?
- Have First Nations people been treated fairly in Canada?
- Is poverty a direct result of power struggles and lack of fairness, or something else?
- Is homelessness a result of injustices in our society?

5. Research and Report

- Research and report on an issue of justice/fairness in your own community (hunger, poverty, racism, homelessness, mental health issues, gender inequalities, disabilities, etc.). What is being done to address the issue?
- Research and report on a justice issue beyond our community (nationally or internationally; poverty; refugees; HIV/AIDS; gender inequality, etc.). What is being done to address the issue?
- Research and report on non-government organizations that are working with issues of injustice. What are they doing? Are they effective?

6. Participate in a talk show such as “Cross-Country Check-up” with Rex Murphy on Sunday afternoon on CBC Radio to highlight local, national and/or international justice issues.

7. Work with a volunteer organization and make a difference in your community.

8. Develop Metaphors:

Ask students to work in pairs and develop *metaphors* for citizenship, for governance that represent all of the attributes of peace. Then focus on those that represent fairness within a democratic governance model and process.

- An example of a metaphor is: citizenship or governance is like an orchestra or a band. An orchestra requires a conductor or leader who is able to guide and direct and keep the focus of the members; the members of the orchestra are attuned to what the other instruments are playing, and keep in timing and rhythm. The attributes of the players include: consideration of others, awareness of the rules that create an equal or fair

playing field for each individual and instrument, cooperation, values, knowledge, etc.

- Other examples might be citizenship or governance is like a hockey/football/soccer/rowing/swimming team, a family, a choir etc...

9. Write a:

- song
- poem
- television commercial
- one act play

which raises concerns or solutions to issues as they relate to fairness and justice.

10. Write an essay or a power point presentation about:

- If the world was a fair place then ...
- If life was fair...
- Barriers or hindrances to justice and peace are...

11. Imagine: Read the famous "I have a dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Junior (included at the end of unit 7). Write your own "I have a dream" speech about justice, fairness, and peace. Or write a song, a poem, an advertisement that expresses your emotions and passion for peace.

12. Plan a School Wide Peace Conference or Peace Summit
Work with students to:

- Identify concepts that students will be able to formulate a question around a topic about peace. Students may be interested in identifying 'hot issues/topics' that are being discussed in the news today.
- Establish goals that the conference will achieve.
- Promote the concept of student leadership and organization of the event.
- Develop a format for the conference. (It might be run like the Model United Nations established for and by students; or the legislature or parliament).
- Plan the conference by:
 - Setting an agenda for meetings
 - Identifying a topic
 - Determining the date, time and place of the conference etc.
 - Committee roles and responsibilities
 - Advertising the event by inviting students to participate
 - Invite special guests and a variety of leaders: school, church leaders, municipal leaders, trustees, and political leaders etc who also have peace as a focus; invite the media to attend.

- Holding the conference
- Planning a site and topic for the next annual or biannual conference
- Provide a write up in the local newspaper or TV station.

PEACE SUMMIT

Note:

When planning a peace summit include numerous schools and possibly find a non-government organization/s (such as the MCC, World Vision, etc) who have peace as a focus and who may be interested in sponsoring the event and possibly making it a yearly event. If held every third year, every junior high student would have an opportunity to be a member of the conference during his/her junior high school years if they wish to do so. Invite political leaders who also have peace as a focus.

Invite the media to tell the story of the summit and bring attention to the concerns and issues that youth are expressing surrounding peace.

13. Create a Democracy in your Classroom

Planning a simulation and real life experience of fairness.

As a classroom determine how your class will be run as a democracy.

- Explain to all students the objective of setting up a democracy in the classroom.
- Ask all students to select several leaders/facilitators/guides who will plan an agenda (with the teacher's assistance) for the class in structuring a democratic process that will be followed in the classroom for the entire school year (an election or vote may also be taken since they have learned about a democracy in grade 6). Explain the seriousness of the roles, responsibilities and purpose of the leadership position. The entire classroom of students who are now led by the student leaders/facilitators (with the teacher as a mentor), establish guidelines and principles of operation for all in the classroom so that everyone has a sense of voice (being listened to and heard).
- Once the leaders (2 or 3 who can work together and provide backup in their roles and responsibilities) have been chosen, students are lead through the processes of establishing "guidelines to live by" in the classroom and the characteristics and qualities of this democracy. Explore and discuss what the rights and responsibilities of each citizen in the class are, and how each member can be or become a contributing member. (use the learning experience for the students to learn about peace, fairness, and the other tenants of peace and

democracy). Practice the democratic process as you brainstorm, and make decisions about the “rules to live by”.

- A group of students could volunteer to post these guidelines for operation as a reference in the classroom.

The teacher and student leaders/facilitators select several topics from the curriculum that will apply the concepts of democracy (with a focus on fairness, justice) and ask the students to vote and decide which topic to begin with, timelines with deadlines and the sequence of the other topics. (This process will give the students a sense of choice and voice). Then determine with the class how they will accomplish the learning (what must be learned and how they will accomplish this). Some tasks may be small group activities with individual work and homework. Establish with students the understanding and importance for the need to do homework and come to class prepared. The teacher now becomes the facilitator of the processes for engaged learning and participation. It is exciting to see students take ownership, work diligently as they gain a sense of voice, become actively involved and see and experience that their contribution matters. Students will begin to own their learning, have fun, and be enthusiastic.

14. Have students choose one issue of unfairness or injustice, either in their home, neighbourhood, or in another country, and publicly (in class) make a decision and commitment to do something helpful about that situation.
15. Show the movie “Arms for the Poor” (available from MCC Alberta). Discuss the following questions:
 - Is it fair for a nation without basic health and educational services to spend resources on tanks and aircraft equipment? What limits would you place on security costs?
 - How do arms sales bring suffering to the people of the countries who purchase them? What responsibilities do the suppliers of weapons have before and after a sale?
16. World Council activity – have students form six groups (groups can be as small as one person), and assign each group a fictitious country listed on the World Council handout (included at end of unit 7). Each group will represent the country they have been assigned, and will be meeting with the World Council (all of the other country groups) to discuss the injustices faced by their country. Each group will want all the others to see that their need or injustice is the most important and must be addressed before all others. Only the country with the most serious injustices will be given support from the World Council to help solve the problems. Have each group design their own country flag and display it on their table for the other countries to see. Arrange chairs in a circle so that all groups can see each other. Have groups meet individually to plan how they will present their plea for

assistance. Each country will have five minutes to make its presentation. Have students also think about how they will respond to other countries' claims. After each country has made its presentation, allow countries to react to what other countries said. The teacher will act as moderator and allow only one representative to speak at a time. After each person or country has had a chance to respond, hold a secret ballot to see which countries problem(s) will be chosen as the one the World Council will deal with. After the vote, have students discuss how they felt defending their countries' issue(s). How did they feel trying to convince others about the seriousness of their problems? How did they feel trying to decide and vote on which country would receive help? How did they feel trying to decide on the worst injustice? Aren't all injustices equally bad?

Adapted from "Responding to Injustice", by Christine Yount, Group Publishing, Inc., 1991.

Student Response:

In their journals, have students reflect on the theme "build fairness...support those who are not heard". Suggested questions:

- So what? Why should I care about issues of injustice in the world? What do they have to do with me, and my life?
- What are the consequences of not being fair or just, in your home, your school, your community?
- What are the consequences when communities, nations, or governments are not fair and just with their citizens and/or with each other? Provide some examples.
- What can I personally do to create fairness and justice in my home, school or community?

All-Class Response:

As a class, respond to the theme, "build fairness...support those who are not heard". The response can be in the form of a poem, a song, a collage, a painting, a readers' theatre, etc. The all-class response can be displayed or performed for the whole school, as well as at the annual MCC Alberta Fine Arts Festival.

Supporting Material:

We live in a world where poverty, war, disease, homelessness and refugees are a stark reality. Too often when we turn on our televisions or radio we hear about violence, deaths, natural disasters, countries being invaded, people shot in the street, violence due to race or politics. In our own schools, homes and communities there are issues of violence and injustice: domestic abuse, sexual abuse, bullying, exclusion, racism, poverty, hunger, etc. Life is not fair. A teenager's sense of justice is strong. And young people want to know how they can make a difference in their world. But often young people don't know how to do it, or where to begin. And too often, the adults in their lives do not provide them with healthy and strong examples of how to create fairness and justice in their world.

While most of us enjoy the freedoms of going to school, going to church, voting, eating at a fast food place, and police protection, many others in the world have never heard of or experienced these freedoms. There are choices that people can make in life in which the consequences can be that some of these freedoms, rights or privileges are taken away from them. But often the absence of freedoms, rights and privileges are not the result of choices or bad decisions, but merely where a person happens to be born, what the colour of their skin is, their culture, their religion, their health, etc.

In as many as 50 countries across the globe, children are caught up in armed conflicts, as bystanders and as targets. In Uganda, for example, children are forced to kill or to witness the killing of friends, family members, neighbours. Their neighbourhoods are destroyed, their families have been killed or have fled, and by the time the child has either escaped from the army, or the war is over, these children find themselves on their own with no support and no place to live. In the ten years between 1986 and 1996, armed conflicts killed over 2 million children; seriously injured or permanently disabled over 6 million children; orphaned more than 1 million children; and psychologically traumatized more than 10 million children. Countless numbers of children, particularly girls, have been raped or have experienced other forms of sexual abuse as a weapon of war; 20 million children are homeless due to wars; 300,000 children are child soldiers; and in one month approximately 800 are killed or seriously injured by landmines.

None of this is fair. In fact, it is horrible. That North Americans and Europeans have cars, drivable roads, televisions, newspapers, MSN, the internet and many other forms of communication suggests that we have responsibilities in promoting fairness and giving a voice to those who are not heard. Privilege brings with it responsibility.

Supporting Material written by Helen Siemens

World Council

Calamerica

Problem: There are approximately 50,000 refugees in this small country that has been ravaged by war for more than a decade. Hundreds of people who had found refuge in a church and who thought they were safe from the rebels, were shot and killed.

Mytholania

Problem: Muslims are being persecuted and imprisoned for their beliefs. It is believed that certain high-level government officials are in charge of the anti-Muslim actions.

Tongla

Problem: Homelessness, hunger and poverty are the reality for the majority of people in Tongla, and each day approximately 100 people lose their homes and are forced out into the streets. The minority, meanwhile, throw away millions of dollars a day on clothes, food, entertainment, cars, etc.

North Bangla

Problem: Physically and mentally handicapped children are institutionalized, neglected and the care they are given is very inadequate. Most of the children in the institutions suffer from malnutrition, among many other conditions.

Durbinskia

Problem: Racial discrimination and prejudice are a big problem in this country. Every day there are violent outbursts in which people are injured or killed. The violence is caused by segregation and unfair practices.

Adapted from "Responding to Injustice", by Christine Yount, Group Publishing, Inc., 1991.

Websites:

1. www.mcc.org
2. www.cultivatingpeace.ca
3. www.davidsuzuki.org
4. www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/
5. www.mcc.org/makepovertyhistory
6. www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza
7. www.ecocycle.org
8. www.compassionatelistening.org
9. www.who.int/en
10. www.youthactionnet.org
11. www.behindthelabel.org
12. www.mbicresources.org

Additional Resources:

Websites:

1. Mennonite Central Committee: www.mcc.org - information on poverty, hunger, peace, and education work that MCC is involved in. Also, excellent resources such as the AIDS Toolkit, Waterworks Toolkit, Global Family Toolkit, and much more.
2. MCC Resource Catalog – books, DVDs, videos, resource kits, activity boxes, teachers guides, brochures and posters available.
3. Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Resource Centre: www.mbicresources.org - videos, books, DVDs covering a wide variety of issues.
4. Cultivating Peace: www.cultivatingpeace.ca - classroom ready resources for schools across Canada to encourage youth to respect diversity, think globally, value human rights, recognize injustice and respond to conflict without the use of violence. Excellent resource.
5. Behind the Label: www.behindthelabel.org - features extensive information on labour conditions in the garment industry. Site includes in-depth profiles of international sweatshop struggles, mini-documentaries, photos and facts.

6. Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org - works to defend human rights worldwide. The site includes sections on women's and children's rights.
7. Oxfam Canada: www.oxfam.ca - features topics such as fair trade, sweatshops, education and hunger. Download resource kits, workshop guides and campaigns.
8. United Nations Association in Canada: www.unac.org - click on "Youth for Diversity" to learn about national youth forums against racism, and download a manual by youth to combat racism through education.
9. Artists Against Racism: www.vrx.net/aar - join leading musicians, actors, authors and artists from around the world in a public education campaign to combat racism. Check out how youth can get involved through school concerts, videos and other action.