

Human Rights Education

by Dennis Banks

According to the Preamble of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights education is both a social responsibility and a fundamental human right. There is a growing consensus around the world that education about human rights contributes to the building of free, just, and peaceful societies and serves as a strong preventative to future human rights abuses.

The United Nations defines human rights education as "training, dissemination, and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the molding of attitudes which are directed to: The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; The promotion of understanding, respect, gender equality, and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society; The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the Maintenance of Peace."

When American students say, "We've got rights," they usually think of the civil and political rights defined in the United States Bill of Rights, which include freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, and the right to a fair trial. Few students realize that broader social, economic, and cultural rights such as quality health care, housing, and education and a living wage, are also considered human rights. Although media reports regularly refer to human rights violations, "human rights literacy" is not widespread in the United States. This is a matter for concern because people who do not know their rights are more vulnerable to having them abused or ignored.

The Human Rights Committee of the New York State Council for the Social Studies includes elementary, middle, and high school teachers, administrators and curriculum developers and university-based social studies educators. For more information about the committee contact Dennis Banks at banksdn@snyoneva.cc.oneonta.edu.

Human Rights on the World Wide Web

The internet has turned into a primary source of information for teachers on all aspects of human rights education. From primary sources, to census data, to first person accounts of atrocities, the web allows every classroom to become a repository of limitless information. It is up to individual teachers to convert information into powerful lessons for their student. We hope the following sites will inspire teachers to take a chance and make a difference.

Recommending websites is always tricky. Many sites are maintained by advocacy groups. Even service organizations have political philosophies. We encourage students to use a critical eye when they visit sites. They should always ask: Who is sponsoring this site? What is their point of view? What other points of view exist on this subject? What evidence do they provide to support their position? For example, some groups that oppose the death penalty cite the United States for human rights violations.

- Charles Cronin, Robin Edwards, David Levy and Mariam Wahabzada

<http://www.hrw.org> Human Rights Watch is an excellent web site for obtaining links to primary source articles on human rights issues. Articles are current.

<http://shr.aaas.org/program/index.htm> The AAAS Science and Human Rights Project contains links to valuable primary sources for human rights issues. Pages are updated regularly. There is a link form this page to Human Rights Alerts. Recommended for high school students.

<http://www.hrea.org> The Human Rights Education Association contains tools for educators. This site provides links to information about books, resources, and curricula pertaining to human

rights education. It also provides links to other human rights organizations on the web. Links are reorganized by geographic region.

<http://www.usip.org/library.html> The United States Institute of Peace Library provides global links to major and minor human rights organizations. Not all links are associated with human rights.

<http://www.usip.org/library.html> The Genocide Research web site of the Armenian National Institute is an electronic gold mine for those doing research on, or planning to teach about, the Armenian Genocide. The site includes photographs, stories, and documents.

<http://remember.org/genocide.html> The Genocide Research Project contains information, photographs, and links to sites devoted to genocide. The Cybrary feature has a great deal of on-line material regarding the holocaust.

<http://humanrights.about.com/newsissues/humanrights/> About Human Rights contains an impressive number of links to human rights sites. The GENOCIDE link connects to sites on the Holocaust, Armenia, and Cambodia.

<http://www.dfn.org/> The Digital Freedom Network contains links to reports, news articles, and editorials related to human rights. Includes links to political cartoons.

<http://www.dfn.org/> Resources on Human Rights has links to many other sources of information on human rights.

<http://www.unicef.org/graca/index.html> Impact of Armed Conflict on Children is a UNICEF sponsored web site. This site is for the educator or student who is willing to read lengthy documents and reports. The good news is that these are UN documents and reports. They provide startling statistics on what is happening all over the world to people who are vulnerable and least able to defend themselves.

http://www.library.upenn.edu/resources/subject/social/political/working/human_rights.html The University of Pennsylvania Library Political Science - Human Rights web site contains links to other major human rights web sites. It also has annotated bibliographies of documents and books relating to human rights. This site is for the serious researcher.

http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/drl_hrp.html The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Web Site is an excellent resource for those seeking current reports on human rights around the world. It contains United States responses to U.N. reports. The teacher or student visiting this site can compare U.S. views on human rights issues with those of other countries.

<http://www.lostandfoundworldwide.com/refugees.htm> This site gives students a concrete example of how organizations are using the Internet to help reunite families. Students may even find ways to get involved in this process.

<http://www.kids.maine.org/quiz.htm> The Kids Hunger Quiz. This web site provides a short quiz on facts about world hunger. The responses to the questions contradict myths about hunger in the world. The quiz is followed by answers to the questions.

<http://www.kids.maine.org/hunfa.htm> The Kids Can Make a Difference web site has some surprising facts about world hunger. Once again many of these facts contradict myths about hunger. It also has startling revelations about the resources available to deal with the problem. It is rather lengthy. Teachers can use the information to prepare lessons on hunger.

<http://www.amnesty-usa.org> Amnesty International USA provides students and teachers with current information about human rights issues in the USA and around the world. It also provides a mechanism for getting involved.

<http://www.amnesty-usa.org/education> The Amnesty International Human Rights Education web site contains links to other useful web sites on human rights and education.

<http://www.amnesty-usa.org/aikids/udhr.html> Contains the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Plain Language. Useful for students with lower reading levels.

<http://www.birzeit.edu/hrarc/> Birzeit University is located near Jerusalem. The human rights section of this web site has stories of Israeli raids on the university and surrounding villages.

This site gives access to a Palestinian point of view not often presented in American newspapers.

<http://www.igc.org/globalvision> Globalvision's film and video work provides hard-hitting, analytical coverage of global human rights issues. Features a unique Human Rights Map. Click on any geographic section to access human rights reports about countries in that region.

<http://www.healthandhumanrights.org> The Consortium for Health and Human Rights is comprised of three nongovernmental health and human rights organizations--the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights, Global Lawyers and Physicians, and Physicians for Human Rights. These groups promote the link between health and human rights internationally by providing education, research, and advocacy for professionals working in health and human rights, students, educators, and the general public.

<http://www.facinghistory.org> Facing History engages teachers and students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of collective violence, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.