



Socially-based Curriculum Unit: The Human Rights Letter - Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Unit Title: The Human Rights Letter: Acting Through Writing to Make a Better World

Time Frame: 5 lessons

Unit Developer(s): Roger Langen

Developed for Course Name and Course Code: English Grade 10 Academic, ENG2D

Strand(s) and Curriculum Learning Expectations Addressed:

Reading and Literature Studies Strand

RLV.01D Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning

RLV.02D Understanding Form and Style: recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning

Writing Strand

WRV.01D Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience

WR1.03D Research: locate and select information to appropriately support ideas for writing, using a variety of strategies and print, electronic, and other resources as appropriate

WRV.02D Using Knowledge of Form and Style: draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience

WRV.03D Applying Knowledge of Conventions: use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively

Oral Communication Strand

OCV.01D Listening to Understand: listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes

OCV.02D Speaking to Communicate: use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes

Desired Results

Unit Description:

The unit may be taught as five consecutive lessons or “spread out” to allow reflection and home-based development of some of the tasks assigned.



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- LESSON 1 establishes the purpose of the unit, the concept of a human right, the link to personal self or “dignity,” with example(s); and provides accessible hand-outs on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) for discussion and overview. Students are asked to consider a particular right for individual focus.
- LESSON 2 (in computer lab) provides instruction for navigating websites such as Amnesty International (including a youth-friendly variant of the UDHR) to learn human rights research and methodology, with intent to choose a particular country and human rights story matched to a particular right.
- LESSON 3 (in computer lab) provides instruction for how to obtain a country’s profile (population, area, GDP, type of government, etc.), more information about the chosen human rights story/abuse, and target addresses for letter-writing.
- LESSON 4 reviews the format for writing a letter, with emphasis on the paragraphing and content strategy specific to a human rights letter, using examples. A first draft is assigned.
- LESSON 5 is designed as interactive reporting in a classroom discussion format of the students’ learning. Draft letters to be handed in will be corrected, and a good copy made and sent out to the relevant authorities. (Some students may want to opt out of actually mailing their letter.) A follow-up on results (including replies) can be scheduled for a later date.

NOTE: The unit developer is indebted to Amnesty International Canada for support in the development of materials for this unit and acknowledges the inspiration of Amnesty International’s annual, global letter-writing event on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2006.

Enduring Understandings / Learning:

Student will understand that:

1. Learning in the classroom can be action in the world.
2. Writing is action.
3. Ideals of justice, courage and heroism are well realized by an engagement with human rights.
4. Human rights are bound up with personal and moral dignity.
5. Persons who are “other” to “us” are also us, and not strangers.
6. First World success often contributes to global human rights distress.
7. Global action is not charity or guilt, but freedom and responsibility.
8. Letters to others on matters of human rights concern are a source of great pleasure, both because they work and because they are an outlet for students’ concerns.

Key skills include knowledge of how to obtain via Internet a “human rights” profile of another country and how to investigate a particular issue; how to navigate and use human rights NGO websites; and how to write an individual or collective letter of action. Perhaps the greatest learning is the discovery that the power of action lies within the thought and mind of one’s own hand.



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Assessment Tasks

Performance Tasks and Other Evidence That Will Demonstrate the Knowledge and Skills Acquired:

The teacher will continuously observe the in-class engagement of students with the unit concept and materials, as evidenced, for example, by animation of discussion and task assiduity.

Specific task achievements include:

1. Selection of a specific human right for understanding, and of a particular country and human rights story, by the end of Lesson Two
2. Establishment of a country's "profile" and identification of target addresses for the human rights letter by the end of Lesson Three
3. Writing of the first draft of the human rights letter
4. Writing of the finished copy of the human rights letter
5. The sending of the human rights letter
6. Oral or written follow-up, inclusive of testing.

Assessment Criteria:

- Evidence of engagement with tasks, including informal observation by teacher
- Timely completion of tasks
- Conformity of letter draft with instructions
- Quality of presentation of finished letter
- Quality of content of letter, inclusive of suggested improvements for draft
- Comparative evaluation based on rubrics for composition and writing
- Interactive posting of copies of finished letters on classroom bulletin board for peer review
- Evidence (optional) of extra research and/or real-world contact beyond the classroom, including replies to sent letters

Unit Planning Notes

Prior Learning Necessary:

It is advantageous if students have already had instruction and practice in writing a letter, preferably a business letter. This will allow them to concentrate on the different economy, but similar format, of a human rights letter. Previous contact with literature showing themes of courage, justice, war, poverty, and so on



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creates a motive platform for transition to this unit.

Preparation Notes:

Scheduling use of the school's computer lab for Lessons 2 and 3 is a crucial preparation, unless the teaching classroom is already fully equipped. Prior practice by the teacher in the manipulation of websites intended for use is also strongly advised to ensure smooth guidance through these lessons. Handouts are as identified under Attachments below. The teacher is otherwise at liberty to prepare notes or substitute examples to suit the particular class, external events, or personal insights.

Learning Plan

Lesson 1

Sequence of teaching/learning:

1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE See Appendix A – Four Stories, etc.
2. HUMAN RIGHTS
3. PURPOSE OF UNIT
4. UDHR AND CRC See Appendices B and C.
5. SELECTION OF RIGHT

As the principal teaching for the lesson, Steps 1-3 should occupy the larger half of the period. They may be juggled to suit. Step 1 arouses interest for the unit. Step 2 is closely linked. Steps 4-5 are supportive and referential.

The stories and poem in Appendix A are meant to arouse interest for the unit. *Present them for reading.* You might ask students to identify human rights ideas in each of the selections, including the poem. Permit some discussion before defining human rights and establishing the purpose of the unit.

Amnesty International defines human rights as “those rights that are necessary in order for us to live as human beings.” That is, they are inherent to our being “human.” To experience humanity, everyone without exception must experience safety, justice, freedom, and equality. These are the conditions for human dignity, the full expression of one's person, safe from unnecessary harm. *Refer students* to the examples to see these ideas more clearly.

In clarifying the purpose of the unit, it is worth mentioning how effective human rights letters are. According to Amnesty, 29-47% of “urgent action” letters meet with a positive result, e.g., torture stops or a person is



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released or reappears safely. When letters are written on behalf of human rights defenders who have received death threats for asserting human rights, the success rate can be as high as 90%.

Note: Not all students will be comfortable with sending a real letter. Advise all students, therefore, that they retain the option to keep their letter within the classroom.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR) & CONVENTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC) – *Hand out Appendices B and C.*

The rights under the UDHR may be clustered for ease of comprehension: Articles 1–5 (Basic); Articles 6-11 (Legal); Articles 12-15 (Political); Articles 16-19 (Personal); Articles 20-21 (Democratic); Articles 22-27 (Social); Articles 28-30 (Collective). The CRC elaborates the rights particular to a child. Its 54 articles cover four broad categories of right specific to children: subsistence rights (food & shelter), development rights (education), protection rights (vs. exploitation, harm), and participation rights.

Wikipedia classifies various classes of human right as security, liberty, political, due process, equality, welfare, and group rights. A very broad division distinguishes between individual (civil and political) and collective (cultural, economic, and social) rights.

The UDHR and CRC proper are easily viewed through the Amnesty International website (see Lesson 2 below). Appendix B provides a simplified form of the UDHR, with keyword labels. Appendix C offers an introductory orientation to the CRC.

Students will have an opportunity to review the material more carefully at home. It is sufficient in class to overview and highlight points of interest. A good exercise is to *link various rights to the stories and poem* handed out at the beginning of class.

FOR NEXT TIME – *Ask students to explore* a particular right for next class. Besides those websites identified in Appendix A, they may use the following resources: www.amnesty.ca; www.hrw.org; www.freethechildren.org; www.warchild.ca; www.wikipedia.org; or follow the links to venture out and explore even more.

Lesson 2

Sequence of teaching/learning (computer lab):

1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE
2. INSTRUCTIONAL HAND-OUT See Appendix D.
3. ASSIST & SUPPORT
4. ANNOUNCE TRANSITION TIMELINES



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5. TASK COMPLETION

Students should be on Steps 3-5 for the bulk of the period.

This lesson takes place in the computer lab. *Warm up the class* by asking two students to identify the right they chose to explore further. Use five minutes.

Hand out Appendix D. Briefly review instructions. For the remainder of the period, *assist and support* students as they navigate the Amnesty Canada website. Announce transition timelines to help keep them on time.

The instructions are self-explanatory. The central task is for each student to determine the country and particular human rights story he or she intends to pursue. As with the examples from Appendix A, the chosen subject may involve several different rights. The student should aim to focus on one.

Prior to the end of class, *assign task completion* or further investigation at home.

Lesson 3

Sequence of teaching/learning (computer lab):

1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE
2. INSTRUCTIONAL HAND-OUT See Appendix E.
3. ASSIST & SUPPORT
4. ANNOUNCE TRANSITION TIMELINES
5. TASK COMPLETION

Students should be on Steps 3-5 for 50-60 minutes.

This class takes place in the computer lab. *Warm up the class* by asking two students to identify the country and human rights story they chose. Use five minutes.

Hand out Appendix E. Briefly review instructions. For the remainder of the period, *assist and support* students as they navigate the identified websites. Announce transition timelines to help keep them on time.

The instructions are self-explanatory. Once the students have obtained their country's "profile" (establishing political, economic and social context), they may *return to HR websites* to explore further their chosen story, particularly the Library on Amnesty's international website (as indicated). Task completion requires that students have established target addresses for their letter. This part should be completed in class.



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Prior to the end of class, *assign task completion* or further investigation at home.

Lesson 4

Sequence of teaching/learning:

1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE
2. HAND OUT SAMPLE LETTERS See Appendix F.
3. HIGHLIGHT SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES
4. TEACH PARTS OF HR LETTER See Appendix G.
5. ASSIGN "SHORT LETTER" IN CLASS
6. ASSIGN LONG LETTER DRAFT

Steps 1-3 are interactive in character and should not exceed 15 minutes. Step 4 is the mainstay of this lesson and should run 20-30 minutes.

Warm up the class by asking two students to share their country profile (some data) and/or their target address. Use 5 minutes.

Hand out Appendix F. Note similarities and differences between the two letters. The business letter (in this particular case) is parallel to the HR letter in that it makes an appeal. It shares with the HR letter courtesy, brevity, an orientation to facts, and the same basic structure. The HR letter is more personal, strategic, informal, and plain spoken. In short, it has a "personality," something a business letter tends to avoid. *Ask students for questions or observations.* Use 10 minutes.

Teach the human rights letter as per Appendix F. Use 20-25 minutes. Then *hand out Appendix G.* This will be their take-home guide for the letter.

Assign class time to write the four-sentence "short letter." Invite students to read their short letters aloud (if there is time). *Assign draft* of "long letter" for next class. Finally, remind students that, with the exception of those students who opt otherwise, their letters will be going out as real mail!

Lesson 5

Sequence of teaching/learning:

1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE Checklist letter draft.
2. GUIDED QUESTIONS
3. FACILITATED DISCUSSION (relying on unit experience and letters).



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4. HAND IN DRAFT LETTERS

Step 3 broadens Step 2 toward open-ended discovery and sharing. At strategic intervals, the teacher should insert learning reminders or theme organizers to consolidate or move discussion gently forward. Draft letters will be returned for corrections and improvements before mailing.

Warm up the class by asking two students to read their short letter aloud. Ask students to *checklist their letter* for compliance with some of the teaching points. You will direct this part. Use 10 minutes.

The warm-up should lead naturally into a broader discussion and sharing of the students' work. *Begin with some guiding questions* to get this started (e.g., Did anyone else do child labour? Did anyone pick an unusual country?). Then *let discussion develop* in a more student-directed way, facilitating rather than leading. At intervals, interpose a learning reminder or a thematic direction.

Collect their draft letters at the end. (You may also want to collect some of their process work, e.g., country profile data. You will need to have advised them of this expectation beforehand.)

FOLLOW-UP

Since some of the letters may be "urgent," you will want to return the corrected drafts within a relatively short time. Students will then hand in their finished letters at a specified date for your cursory review prior to mailing. They will provide an extra copy for your more considered review.

Assessment will be primarily of the draft and finished letter, but may also include credit for process work during the unit. Finished letter copies may be posted in the classroom for peer review. Replies should also be shared and posted. Replies to Amnesty-based letters should be copied and may be sent to Amnesty, although that is not required.

A follow-up class to reflect on collected results or other related learning is probably a good idea. This might include a suggestion to consider starting an Amnesty club at the school. The Amnesty Canada website provides full instruction. Just click the *Youth* button above the menu bar.

Attachments

Appendix A – Four Stories and a Poem

Appendix B – Universal Declaration of Human Rights / simplified

Appendix C – Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) / orientation

Appendix D – To the Student / Computer Lab Instructions (Lesson 2)



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Appendix E – To the Student / Computer Lab Instructions (Lesson 3)

Appendix F – Sample Business Letter and Human Rights Letter

Appendix G – Writing the Human Rights Letter

Other Possible Course Applications

ENG3C

Geography, Civics, and World Issues teachers may want to consider adapting this unit to their own subject and course objectives.