



Human Rights in the U.S.

Lesson Plan The People Behind the Statistics

Grade Level: 8-12



Copyright © 2010
The Advocates for Human Rights
330 Second Avenue South, Suite 800
Minneapolis, MN 55401, USA

For further information, visit
www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Goal: To put a human face on the violation of human rights within the United States.

Objectives:

- Students will gain a general understanding of the concept of human rights.
- Students will examine how well the United States is doing in fulfilling certain fundamental human rights.

Essential Question: How is the U.S. doing in fulfilling the most basic human rights for its people?

Resources:

- One pen
- Handout: Universal Declaration of Human Rights - abbreviated version (see page 14)
- Role Play Instructions Handout
- The People Behind the Statistics Statements (see pages 18-25) - cut into separate strips
- Human Rights Toolkit - download at www.discoverhumanrights.org/General_Human_Rights.html.

Time Frame: 1-2 class periods

Age Level: 8-12

Appropriate Subject Areas: Social Studies

Procedure:

1. **Teach.** Ask the students if they have ever heard of human rights. Can they explain what they are? Explain that human rights are those rights which are essential for us to live as human beings. Solicit some examples from the group. Human rights are agreed upon by everyone, make sense and are fair. They are meant to protect people from unfair rules, and ensure not only access to basic needs such as food and shelter, but also the chance to grow and develop beyond what is required for survival.

Human Rights Overview: Explain that after WWII and the formation of the United Nations (UN), a group of 50 countries got together and agreed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which lists the rights that every person has. The UDHR is not a law; it is a statement about what countries should do.

There are also two international covenants (treaties) based on the Declaration that provide the principles of the UDHR with legal backing, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These two documents, along with the UDHR, make up the International Bill of Human Rights. Several other treaties on specific rights, such as the rights of women and children, have also been adopted by the UN. Give each student *Handout 1: Abbreviated UDHR*. Explain that human rights come in different categories but they are all equally important. Give examples of each category:

2. **Prepare.** From *Handout 3: The People Behind the Statistics Statements* choose an equal amount of statements from each category (eg: Work, Health, Education, etc..) to hand out. Students will break up into small groups based on these categories. It is important to have enough students (at least 3 to 4) in each category for good discussion. If necessary, you can eliminate one or more categories to accommodate the size of the class. Hang posters around the room for each of the categories you will be using in the activity.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

3. Introduce. Explain that in this lesson students are going to look at human rights issues within the United States. Give each student a different statement from *Handout 3: The People Behind the Statistics Statements*. Make sure to mix them up so they are reading them in random order. Explain to the students that too often when

- Political rights (right to vote)
- Civil rights (right to freedom of opinion)
- Equality rights (right to be free from racism)
- Economic rights (right to be paid fairly for work)
- Social rights (right to an education)
- Cultural rights (right to speak one's own language)

we are looking at statistics we forget that they represent real people with real stories. Based on concrete data, these statements put a human face on the very real challenges people are confronting in the U.S.

4. Read. Have the students read the statements out loud one by one. Remind them that they are representing not just one person, but symbolizing thousands of others facing similar situations. Encourage them to read loudly, clearly, and with expression and to listen respectfully to others reading their statements. Once a student has finished reading their statement, they should choose which of the rights hanging on the wall has been violated in their scenario and go stand next to that poster.

5. Small Group. Once all the statements have been read, there should be separate small groups representing each of the rights on the posters. Provide each student with *Handout 2: Role Play Instructions*. In their small groups have students take on the role of the person in their statement. Let the students know that they are taking part in a Summit on Human Rights in the United States. Each group will have a chance to discuss their issue and come up with a list of recommendations or solutions they believe would help them overcome some of the obstacles they are facing in getting their rights met. It is important for each group to have concrete goals for change and be able to discuss their reasons. To help them with their presentation, give each group *Handout 4: Human Rights Toolkit* or they can download fact sheets that correspond with the right they are representing at www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkit.html. Allow 20-25 minutes for students to read over the information and create their main talking points on: 1) the problems they are facing and 2) what should be done about it. Each group should have 5-7 minutes to present.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Key questions for each group to discuss are:

- What problem does the person I am role playing face and what change would he/she like to see?
- Who does this issue affect - only certain groups or does it cross race/class/gender/age lines?
- What are some specific changes your group can agree should be made to address your group's issues?
- Why do you think these types of changes would make a difference?
- Who are the different individuals/organizations/institutions that would need to be involved to create positive social change on your issue and what can they do?

Present. Have the room set up so that everyone can see and hear one another. Give each group 5-7 minutes to present on their conclusions. As the teacher, you are the moderator of the summit. If possible, have someone write down each group's main issues and solutions on the board.

Discuss. Once all the groups have presented discuss the following questions:

- What are your reactions to this information?
- How did it feel to play your role?
- Does personalizing factual information make it more relevant? Does it make the need for action more urgent?
- How important do you think these issues are?
- In your opinion, what responsibility should the United States have in fulfilling these rights? What improvements do you think should be made if any?
- How are these rights interrelated? Does the inability to have one right fulfilled affect other rights?
- How realistic do you think some of your solutions are? What are the barriers to implementing them effectively?

For further resources, download toolkits on human rights in the U.S. at www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkit/html. Developed by The Advocates for Human Rights, these toolkits include fact sheets, quizzes, take action ideas, and lists of local and national organizations working on such human rights issues as the right to health, education, food, housing, the rights of women, the rights of migrants, the rights of persons with disabilities, abolishing the death penalty, and more.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Role Play Instructions:

Take on the role of the person in the statement you just read out loud.

You are now part of a small group representing a specific human rights issue in the United States. As a group of concerned citizens, you have all been chosen to take part in a Summit on Human Rights in the United States. You have been given the opportunity to discuss your issue and come up with a list of recommendations or solutions that you believe would help people like you overcome similar obstacles.

Each group will have 20-30 minutes to prepare for their presentation and 5-7 minutes to present. To help with your presentation, download *Handout 4: Human Rights Toolkit* at www.discoverhumanrights.org/General_Human_Rights_Toolkit.html and any fact sheets that correspond with the right you are representing at www.discoverhumanrights.org/toolkit.html.

In your presentations, be sure to cover:

- 1) the main issues you are facing as a group
- 2) what your group thinks needs be done to address those issues

Key Questions to discuss in your small groups:

- What are your reactions to this information?
- How did it feel to play your role?
- Does personalizing factual information make it more relevant? Does it make the need for action more urgent?
- How important do you think these issues are?
- In your opinion, what responsibility does the United States have in fulfilling these rights? What improvements do you think should be made if any?
- How are these rights interrelated? Does the inability to have one right fulfilled affect other rights?
- How realistic do you think some of your solutions are? What are the barriers to implementing them effectively?



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Equal Protection & Due Process

My wife and I were driving home when we were pulled over by the police. The police said they had to search the vehicle and by the end of the search, our belongings were scattered on the ground alongside the road. When no drugs were found, the police left us there on the side of the road with no explanation. We were infuriated and humiliated by this treatment. I believe we were treated this way due to our race.

I am a public defense attorney. In the past three years, my caseload has doubled, while our state's budget for criminal defense has declined drastically. With so little money and so many clients, I cannot provide a thorough defense. For instance, I am forced to accept police reports without an independent investigation. This lack of adequate representation adds to the disproportionate numbers of poor individuals and minorities in prison.

I am a female inmate at a state prison. Like many other women convicted of drug trafficking, my partner kept and sold drugs in our home. I was too afraid to report him because he abused me. Although the judge sympathized with me, the law did not allow him to consider domestic violence as a defense in my case.

I was born in Thailand and have been an American citizen for ten years. Eleven months ago, immigration officials put me in jail because I didn't have my citizenship papers with me when I was pulled over for a minor traffic violation. It took 10 months and a skilled lawyer to get me out of jail. I was lucky because, unlike many detainees, I was able to afford legal representation. How can anyone be treated in this way?

I have been in an Alaskan prison for 13 years for a crime I did not commit. Thanks to current improvements in DNA testing, I believe my innocence can be proven. However, Alaska will not allow prisoners to access DNA testing post-conviction even if they are willing to pay for the testing themselves. The Supreme Court has upheld this decision. How is this justice?



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Housing

I should have known it was too good to be true, but my mortgage company assured me that I could afford to own my own home. After sixteen months however, the payments more than doubled and I had to foreclose. Like millions of Americans, I was the victim of predatory lending.

It seems like forever that I have been on a waiting list for public housing. I may never get one considering that only 1 in 3 eligible applicants actually receive assistance.

I want to leave my abusive boyfriend but I don't have anywhere else to go and my children need a roof over their heads. In fact, 1/3 of homeless women in my state left their last home due to abuse.

There wasn't room at the homeless shelter and I had to spend a night on the street – I was picked up and given a misdemeanor for loitering. Now I am employed and looking for an apartment but have been denied based on my misdemeanor. This is the effect of criminalizing the homeless.

I'm in 7th grade and failing. I have been at six different schools this year alone. Between shelters, staying with friends, and scraping by until my family gets evicted, I have had a hard time keeping up. At least I still go to school. In my state, 13% of homeless youth are not even enrolled.

My landlord seemed happy for me when I was getting married, but when my African-American wife moved in, we suddenly were asked to leave. He says it is because our lease doesn't allow two people, but that wasn't a problem until he met my wife.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Just & Favorable Working Conditions

I work full time at a nursing home in Arizona. Even with overtime, I can't seem to make ends meet for me and my family. Almost 3 million full-time, year-round workers live in poverty due to the low wages of their jobs.

I really enjoy my job, but as a deaf individual I have difficulty communicating with my co-workers. I am afraid that my resulting isolation will limit my advancement in the company and increase my chances of being laid off. Many workplaces still lack basic adaptations necessary for my career success such as interpreters, text phones, and pagers. I'm not surprised that 50% of the deaf community in the U.S. is currently unemployed.

I recently migrated to the U.S. to do agricultural work. I pick tomatoes for twelve hours a day with almost no breaks for rest, food, or going to the bathroom. This is very hard labor, especially on hot, humid days. Just last week, a young man fell ill from heat exhaustion while picking. This culture of exploitation must be one reason why farm workers are 3 times more likely than the general public to be injured while working.

Recently I started hearing anti-gay comments at work, some made by my boss. I am not "out" at work and worry that someone will learn of my sexual orientation and I will lose my job. Did you know that under federal law it is legal for an employer to fire someone because he/she is lesbian, gay, or transgender?

I work on an assembly line at a locomotive plant. I want to join the local union, but fear that doing so will cost me my job. I have seen employees get fired for their union activities. I have also heard that while firing employees because of unionizing is against U.S. labor law, our company views the small fines as routine costs that are nothing compared to the trouble they think is caused by union members.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Food

My family qualifies for food stamps but only for the minimum benefit. That means we receive \$10 worth of food stamps each month. I hate to complain but \$10 doesn't last very long. That minimum amount has not been raised since 1977.

I work in your school's cafeteria. Just because we serve it, doesn't mean it's healthy. Under federal guidelines, fruit snacks count as fruit and the nuts in a Snickers allow the candy bar to meet nutritional guidelines.

I am a small family farmer. I cannot compete against the large corporate farms in the U.S. and the multinational corporations that produce most of the food in the grocery stores. I want U.S. policies to be fair and respect the livelihood of small family farmers.

I got severely sick from the e-coli outbreak that affected spinach. I question whether our food production is sustainable and protects the health of animals, workers and consumers.

I am a senior citizen who counts on the food shelf, but still I have to choose between paying for food or medical care. Of the many senior food shelf users, 29% of us have had to make that difficult choice, and even more of us have to choose between food or paying utility bills.

I am a 3rd grader and I have been struggling in school. I feel hungry often and sometimes school is the only place where I get fed. I heard another adult tell my mom that children who experience severe hunger like me have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children who don't experience hunger.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Health

We have no health insurance because my paycheck barely covers rent and food. When my daughter had strep throat, I had no choice but to take her to the emergency room where they can't turn her away, even if I can't pay. It would be cheaper for taxpayers to support insuring all children than subsidizing emergency room visits.

I have a disability and some of my special needs are not covered by my insurance provider. I understand that my case is not unique at all. In fact the disabled are four times as likely as non-disabled individuals to have needs that are not covered by insurance.

I am an American Indian mother and my infant son died before we could even bring him home from the hospital. Did you know that infant mortality rates for African-American and American Indian babies are twice as high as those for Whites in some states?

As an uninsured child, I am more likely to develop a chronic condition like diabetes or asthma.

I am a sophomore in high school and have been diagnosed with depression, but my parents' insurance does not cover the number of visits that my counselor recommends. I guess I am lucky that I am getting any services since nationally 80% of teenagers who need mental health services are not receiving care.

Some say health care in the U.S. is the best in the world, but certainly not for all. As a racial minority in the U.S., I receive a lower quality of care than do my white counterparts, especially for more complicated procedures. This is true even when minorities have health insurance and are of the same social class as whites.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Political Participation

I have been out of jail for 10 years, yet my state will not allow me to vote in any elections. 12 states, including my own, bar convicted felons from voting for life. I have served my time and work hard to be a productive member of society. I am tired of feeling like an outcast because of a mistake I made years ago.

I am a government official in Des Moines, Iowa. I am concerned that immigrants in our state are struggling to join the election process. Because of a 2002 state law that requires all official governmental communication to be made in English, my department cannot provide registration forms or any other basic information about the election process in the first languages of our immigrant communities.

Yesterday I went to my local polling station to vote and I couldn't get into the building because it didn't have wheelchair accessible entrances. This is not unusual. 84% of U.S. polling stations pose difficulties to persons with disabilities such as lack of handicapped-accessible entrances and voting booths. I feel discriminated against - all Americans, regardless of ability, should be able to vote at a polling station if they want!

As a resident of the District of Columbia, I am not allowed to vote in Congressional elections. This is particularly upsetting because D.C., and thus its 600,000 residents, is under the direct authority of Congress.

I recently went to a polling station and was told I did not fulfill the residency requirement for voting in my state. As a homeless individual, I often have to move among city districts for food, shelter, and employment. This should not prevent me from being a part of the election process.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Education

I am the parent of a four year old who qualifies for Head Start, but there are no spaces available. They say there is only enough funding to serve half of all eligible children. No wonder only half of the kindergartners in my state are ready to start school. It's not fair that my child should be left behind.

I am a 17-year-old Latino student. My test scores are at approximately the same level as the average white eighth grader. I assure you it has little to do with my IQ. I question these tests and our methods of teaching Latinos and African-Americans if the average gap is that large.

I am a high school guidance counselor. I've heard my state has the worst counselor to student ratio in the country. My school is a typical example. My caseload includes nearly 800 students. It is impossible for me to meet the needs of all of my students.

I came to this country from Mexico when I was four. I'm an A student in high school right now and dream of going to college, but unfortunately because my parents and I don't have legal status in the U.S., I am ineligible for in-state tuition, most scholarships and loans, and I can't afford to pay triple what my classmates pay to go to college.

I am a learning disabled student. Although the statistics show a rise in graduation rates overall for students like me, 22% of Americans with disabilities fail to complete high school, compared to 9% of those without disabilities. The federal government promised more funding to students with disabilities but they have only delivered half of it.



Lesson Plan: The People Behind the Statistics

Right to Safety & Security

I am a 16-year old resident of a primarily black neighborhood in Cincinnati, OH. Last week, a young girl in my community was shot and killed in the crossfire of a dispute. I am scared for the safety of my family. Urban violence in the U.S. disproportionately affects people under the age of 35 and youth of color.

My child committed suicide while in a youth prison. He is not alone. Due to inhumane practices such as weeks-long isolation and verbal and physical abuse, numerous children have responded to juvenile prison by hurting themselves.

Six months ago, my husband and I emigrated from Mexico. Since then, my husband has hit and sexually assaulted me. Last week I went to a local domestic abuse shelter for help, but they did not speak Spanish fluently and did not provide interpreters. I don't know where to go for help and I feel completely alone.

I am the father of a gay teenager. I recently read in an FBI report that approximately 16.6% of hate crimes in the U.S. are aimed at LGBT individuals. Furthermore, this rate has steadily increased since the first study in 1991. I support the sexual identity of my son, but I also worry about his safety now and in the future.

Last week, I gave birth to my first child while in a state prison. It was a very scary and painful experience. Though I was a first-time mother, I had been given very little information about birthing before I went into labor. During labor, my feet were shackled to the bed, limiting my ability to move and achieve a comfortable birthing position. No woman should have to give birth the way I did, regardless of her criminal record!



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1

Right to Equality

Article 2

Freedom from Discrimination

Article 3

Right to Life, Liberty, Personal Security

Article 4

Freedom from Slavery

Article 5

Freedom from Torture and Degrading Treatment

Article 6

Right to Recognition as a Person before the Law

Article 7

Right to Equality before the Law

Article 8

Right to Remedy by Competent Tribunal

Article 9

Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Exile

Article 10

Right to Fair Public Hearing

Article 11

Right to be Considered Innocent until Proven Guilty

Article 12

Freedom from Interference with Privacy, Family, Home and Correspondence

Article 13

Right to Free Movement in and out of the Country

Article 14

Right to Asylum in other Countries from Persecution

Article 15

Right to a Nationality and the Freedom to Change It

Article 16

Right to Marriage and Family

Article 17

Right to Own Property

Article 18

Freedom of Belief and Religion

Article 19

Freedom of Opinion and Information

Article 20

Right of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Article 21

Right to Participate in Government and in Free Elections

Article 22

Right to Social Security

Article 23

Right to Desirable Work and to Join Trade Unions

Article 24

Right to Rest and Leisure

Article 25

Right to Adequate Living Standard

Article 26

Right to Education

Article 27

Right to Participate in the Cultural Life of the Community

Article 28

Right to a Social Order that Articulates This Document

Article 29

Community Duties Essential to Free and Full Development

Article 30

Freedom from State or Personal Interference in the Above Rights