

TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL

From *Teaching Human Rights*.

© Center for Teaching International Relations.

Overview: Participants evaluate their school's human rights climate using criteria from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The subsequent discussion helps students in identifying areas of particular concern and in developing an action plan to begin addressing them.

Objective: To assess human rights conditions within the school community
To critically assess forces at work within the school that affect the human rights climate
To develop an action plan to improve the human rights situation within the school

Grade Level: 7th and up. Administrators, parent and teachers may also benefit.

Materials: Handout #35, "Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School"
Handout #3, #4, or #5, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"

Procedures:

1. Have participants evaluate their school's human rights climate by completing the survey questionnaire below. It might be appropriate to have participants conduct research using the survey items below prior to developing an action plan.
2. Prepare for class discussion by creating a 1-4 rating scale on the chalkboard. Have participants respond to each item.
Note: Participants might not wish to make their own responses public. Consider collecting the questionnaires and redistributing them so that participant anonymity can be assured.
3. Discuss the survey findings, drawing on the following questions to move from analysis and evaluation to the development of an action plan.
 - a. In which areas does your school appear to be adhering to or promoting human rights principles?
 - b. In which areas do there seem to be human rights problems? Which of these are of particular concern to you? Elaborate on the areas of concern, providing examples, and identifying patterns in human rights violations.
 - c. How do you explain the existence of such problematic conditions?
 - Do they have race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, age, or sexual orientation dimensions?
 - Are the issues related to participation in decision-making (who is included and who isn't)?

- Who benefits and who loses/suffers as a result of the existing human rights violations?
 - Are there other explanations to be considered?
- d. Have you or any members of your community contributed in any way to the construction or perpetuation of the existing climate (perhaps by action or not acting in certain ways, ignoring abuses, or not reporting incidents)?
 - e. Were those completing the questionnaire representative of the population of the school? Would you expect different results from a different group of people? In what ways might another group's response differ and why? Should these differences be of any concern to you and to the school community? When determining which human rights concerns need to be addressed and how to address them, how can you be certain to take into account the perspectives and experiences of different people?
 - f. What should be done to improve the human rights climate of your school? What action(s) can you and your group take to create a more just environment where human rights values are promoted and human rights behaviors practiced?
4. Reviewing questionnaire item #25, stressing the importance of assuming responsibility and acting. As a group, brainstorm possible actions of the group might take to improve the human rights situation. Generate a short list of options for action. Thoroughly debate and discuss the short list before making a decision regarding actions to be taken.
 5. Based on the group discussion, choose items for action, and develop an action plan, identifying goals, strategies, and responsibilities.