Food Security as a Human Right

Lesson Overview: This lesson is inspired by Oxfam America’s GROW Campaign and explores issues surrounding food security as a human right. Students will examine the language within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights pertaining to food and will consider why this “right” to food sometimes goes unfulfilled. The lesson was developed based on information presented at the University of Chicago Center for International Studies 2012 Summer Teacher Institute, “Feeding the World: Challenges to Achieving Food Security.”

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Subject(s): Social Studies

Suggested Grade Level(s): 6-8 (can be adapted for upper grades)

Time Duration: Two to three 45 minute class periods

Common Core State Standards Addressed:
Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy and Speaking and Listening in History/Social Studies

Reading Informational Texts Key Ideas and Details, Standard 2
• Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions (Grades 6–8)

Reading Informational Texts Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Standard 8
• Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text and distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text (Grades 6–8)

Speaking and Listening Comprehension and Collaboration, Standard 1
• Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions; build on others’ ideas and express ideas clearly and persuasively (Grades 6-12)

Speaking and Listening Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Standard 4
• Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation (Grades 6-12)
Objectives:

- Students will examine the primary source language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and analyze the stated relationship between rights and food security.
- Students will consider the variety of factors that may contribute to hunger and the challenges that the global community faces in fulfilling food security as a human right.
- Students will understand that securing the right to food for all humans may require difficult political, economic, and social changes worldwide, but that everyone can take action toward change.

Materials:

- Two pieces of butcher paper—one with the question “What does it mean to be human?” written in the center, and the other with the question “What does it mean to have rights?” written in the center. Leave enough room for students to write on each piece of paper.
- A colored marker for each student
- A pen/pencil for each student
- UDHR Article 25.1 printed on a half sheet of paper (enough to have one for each group of 3-4): http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a25 (also printed below in procedure step 2.1)
- Dry erase board/chalkboard
- Copies of articles listed below for each student or Internet access and computers to read online
- Copies of Oxfam America’s “Enough For Everyone” GROW Campaign Pamphlet for each student or access to Internet link: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/Enough-for-everyone

Activities and Procedures:

Part One: Chalk Talk on the UDHR and the Concept of Human Rights

1. When students enter the room, have two sheets of butcher paper in the front of the room on the wall or on groups of desks (see materials) with the two questions mentioned in the materials section written in the center of each. Give each student a marker when he or she enters the room and tell him/her to take a seat until further directed.
2. Once the group is seated, ask them to raise their hands in response to the following question: “How many of you have ever heard of the UDHR?” (More than likely there will be very few students with their hands raised). If there are students raising their hands, ask one of them if they know what “UDHR” actually stands for. Either write the students’ response, or tell the class that it stands for an important document in world history called, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” Explain to students that they will be talking a lot about the UDHR in the coming lesson, but first we need to understand what human rights are in the first place.

3. Turn to the butcher paper and explain that the two questions written on them are meant to get students thinking about what it means to be a human and what it means to have rights (for younger students, you may want to clarify that it is different to have a right than to be right or wrong).

4. Direct students to approach the butcher paper (you may want to call up groups of 3-4 at a time to avoid crowding) for a “chalk talk” conversation where they will write their responses to the questions on the paper: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to have rights? They should think carefully about their responses but write their honest opinions—there is no wrong answer. Be sure to tell them the rules of a chalk talk:
   - Chalk talks are meant to be silent written conversations where all parties feel safe expressing their opinions
   - Students can write as much or as little as they like, but should be respectful of the fact that other students need to write on the page
   - Students may draw arrows and respond to each others’ comments and agree or disagree respectfully, but they may not erase or cross out someone else’s comment or show disrespect in any way

5. When students are finished writing their individual responses, allow 2-3 minutes for kids to simply walk by and read their classmates’ thoughts.

6. Once students are finished, ask the class: “Now that we have thought a little deeper about this topic, what do you think it means to have rights? What do you think it means to have human rights?”

7. Give students a chance to discuss as a group what they think the term “human rights” might mean. (Possible points raised by students: rights are things that are guaranteed to you; human rights are things that all people should have; rights are things that no one can take away from you, etc.)
8. Explain to students that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations, an organization of countries that was created with the intention of keeping peace worldwide, to guarantee that individuals everywhere would have certain basic rights as human beings (For more information, have students read the UDHR history here: http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml).

9. Explain, “Today, we are going to examine one human right in particular—the concept of food security, or one’s ability to access proper nourishment.”

**Part Two: Article 25.1 and Food Security as a Human Right**

1. Next, students will examine a specific article within the UDHR pertaining to health. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and provide each group with the following article from the UDHR printed on a slip of paper:

   **Article 25.1**
   Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. In their groups, direct the students to read the article out loud. Then have them underline terms that are unfamiliar or formal and have them discuss what those terms mean in their own simpler words. Then, have them try to restate the main idea of the article in their own words in no more than 2 sentences on the backside of the paper. Have each group share their interpretation of Article 25 out loud to the class.

3. Ask, “Now that we have all shared, what are the things that Article 25 suggests all humans should have?” Write responses on the board (ex: food, clothing, a home, medical care, social services, unemployment/disability benefits, care for the elderly and sick, etc.)

4. Ask, “Even though these things are recognized as ‘rights’ for all human beings by the United Nations, do you think that most people in the world are actually getting all of these things?” Most students will probably say ‘no.’ Ask students to elaborate on why they responded the way they did. What makes them say that?

5. Circle the word “food” on the list and explain that the class will be further exploring food as a human right and that the goal is to understand more clearly why this human right is not always fulfilled for everyone in the world.
Part Three: Exploring the Barriers to Food Security as a Human Right

1. Inform the small groups used previously that they will read an article about the global food crisis. Assign each group one of the articles below and either give them a paper copy or provide Internet access to read online. Each article will cover a different barrier to food security as a human right (Note: Other barriers certainly exist, but these are a few key examples).

Foreign Aid Distribution: "$500m of US food aid lost to waste and company profit, says Oxfam" from The Guardian: http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/mar/30/us-food-aid-lost-waste-profit


Land Grabs: "Giving their lives to stop a gold mine in El Salvador" from Oxfam America: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/articles/giving-their-lives-to-stop-a-gold-mine-in-el-salvador

Bio-fuels and Corporate Interest: "The Cost of Biofuel" by Oxfam America: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/articles/the-costs-of-biofuel/?searchterm=ethanol

2. Direct the groups to spend some time reading the articles aloud and underline what they see as the main barrier or obstacle to securing food as a human right explained in the article. When they are finished reading, have the students write a short summary or draw a simple chart or drawing representing the barriers detailed in their article and prepare to explain to the class.

3. Have each group present to the class what they discovered about the barriers to food as a human right. Consider charting on the board what each group describes and asking students to take notes on each others’ presentations.

4. Now, assign one spot in the room for each of the barriers listed and ask students to go stand in the spot designated for the barrier that they believe is the biggest challenge to food security as a human right. Once students have picked their spot, choose a couple of students from each location to share why they chose the barrier that they did. (Note: If students just choose the barriers that they studied, require them to choose something other than the one they read about!)

5. To wrap-up, explain that these barriers rarely act alone and often work together to prevent humanity from achieving food security. This does not mean that we cannot ever achieve a world without hunger, but that many things may have to change to get there.
6. Explain to students that there are always things we can do to help fight these barriers and that there are already organizations out there trying to make a difference. One example is Oxfam America’s GROW Campaign, which gives five recommendations for achieving world food security: investing in small-scale food producers, ending excessive speculation in agricultural commodities, modernizing food aid, stopping giveaways to the corn-ethanol industry, and regulating land and water grabs.

7. Pass out a copy of the Oxfam “Enough for Everyone” pamphlet (or provide students with the link: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/publications/enough-for-everyone) and ask students to read over the recommendations provided by Oxfam.

Optional Extensions or Assessments:

• For homework, assign students one of the five points from Oxfam’s GROW campaign. Ask them to research online whether the recommendations made by Oxfam have made any progress. You could have them bring in a news article pertaining to that recommendation and present to the class.

• Have students develop their own “Action Plan” for how they think that the global community should tackle the barriers to food security.

• Encourage students to host their own “Hunger Banquet” through Oxfam America to raise awareness of the global food crisis: http://actfast.oxfamamerica.org/index.php/events/banquet/?utm_source=ACTFASTBFeaturedEventPromo&utm_medium=web

• Encourage students to take advantage of the opportunities for action provided by Oxfam America here: http://actfast.oxfamamerica.org/index.php/?utm_source=OAACTFASTBox&utm_campaign=ACTFAST