

5th Grade UDHR Garden Lesson

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Objective: Students deepen their understanding of local national and worldwide issues that led to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Students consider the positions of laborers, middle managers and the elite as they learn more specifically about labor disputes in the United States and their region. Students consider conditions of workers and social justice issues in the US and the world today.

Time/Location: This lesson occurs in the school garden on a day when outdoor work is possible, and in conjunction with the study of the UDHR.

Materials:

- enough tools for garden labor to keep all students busy for the entire lesson time
- a pitcher of water and some paper cups
- Materials for a fancy “station” for the elite—may include a tablecloth, yummy snacks, drink choices and real cups and plates, chairs or cushions...
- Teachers can consider preparing a short email or handout to be sent home explaining the activity to parents.

Estimated Duration: 45 minutes

The Lesson:

The exact discussion will always depend on crops planted in the garden, what students have been focusing on as they discuss the creation of the UDHR and what literature they are studying as part of the lesson. Ideally the school garden can be planted with crops such as cotton, hops, tobacco or other farm-produced products that have been instrumental to US labor history.

The description of the discussion below specifically refers to how we did this lesson at Haldane in the fall of 2015. It can be custom tailored to another garden or student group:

First, we gathered the students for a brief discussion. They were reading *Esperanza Rising*. We discussed the book and the fact that field workers often were, and still are, victims of human rights abuses. The average life expectancy for a field worker in California (in 2015) is 49 years old—30 years less than the average American life expectancy. This is due to overwork, pesticide exposure, and poor health care. Often undocumented--and even documented--workers are afraid to seek health care lest they lose their jobs or be deported.

We showed the students crops in the school garden that are especially significant to union history: cotton, hops, and tobacco. Of course, almost all edible crops require field laborers at some point, so the garden is full of examples. Bending over to pick a few beans to eat is fun. Bending over for 12-14 hours under the hot sun to pick beans for others is another story. We had students crouch down to look at the cotton plant. As they stood back up we said, “No. Stay down. Keep picking. For hours. Now imagine it is 95 degrees out. You can’t go get water. There is no bathroom...”

The main activity is a work program designed to help the students reflect on the plight of various groups of people. The students are randomly split into three unequal groups (we had them choose marbles from a sock. Most were clear, but there were two other colors.) Most students will be in one group, a few in another, and just a couple in the third group. The two students in the third group will get to sit at the picnic table and will be provided with lavish-seeming snacks and drinks, shade, magazines, whatever seems luxurious. The few (3-4) students in the second group will be able to

relax on the grass and have water. The first, and largest group, will be given hard, undesirable jobs such as picking trash out of the compost, moving rocks or wheelbarrowing heavy loads of stuff around. They will work for the bulk of the class time without a break or water, doing work that does need to happen in the garden.

It is not fair, and the students will be well aware of this. If students sit down or quit working, they need to be ordered back to work. (A bullhorn can be used for this purpose.) If they speak of striking, ask them how they will feed their families...they may say that they have no family. But most workers do. What would they do if they had hungry children at home, and this was the only work available?

When there are 10 minutes left, the teacher should have students quickly stack tools, and then the teacher can do a small amount of debriefing. However, most discussion will be done in the classroom and at home.

For de-briefing, quickly before the students return inside, and more in the classroom and at home:

How do students feel about the activity?

The UDHR was prepared in response to a need, and the events of World War II. The fact that human rights abuses still occur, routinely, is another point for discussion.

Has the UDHR been impactful? What else is needed?

Why do people choose to take jobs that are hard on their bodies and lifestyle? How can alternatives be provided?

NOTES FOR TEACHERS:

A book that is a great preface to this session is *Harvesting Hope*, by Kathleen Krull, about Cesar Chavez. It is a picture book that can be read to a class in 20 minutes.

When we did this lesson at Haldane, the students assumed that the roles would switch at some point—that all students would get a chance to be an elite, and all students would be workers or managers at one point. Ask the students why they think we did not switch this time. (Answer: because in life people do not get to choose whether they are born into a family of workers or an elite family. It is not fair. This is part of why the UDHR was created.)

Hops were an important NY crop throughout the 19th century and into the 20th. Info from Wikipedia about hops labor:

The need for massed labor at harvest time meant hop-growing had a big social impact. Around the world, the labor-intensive harvesting work involved large numbers of migrant workers who would travel for the annual hop harvest. Whole families would partake and live in hoppers' huts, with even the smallest children helping in the fields.[21][22] The final chapters of W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* and a large part of George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* contain a vivid description of London families participating in this annual hops harvest. In England, many of those picking hops in Kent were from eastern areas of London. This provided a break from urban conditions that was spent in the countryside. People also came from Birmingham and other Midlands cities to pick hops in the Malvern area of Worcestershire. Some photographs have been preserved.[23]

-from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hops>