

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: CONSCIENTIZATION CENTRAL AMERICA

ideas for
teachers
who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts
into what
and how
they teach

September
2004

Welcome back to another school year and *With Eyes to See*! Last year we explored the building of community from the classroom to the world. This year we will continue with an international focus to the newsletters by "thinking globally and acting locally" but with a dual purpose: to highlight the people with whom Concern America is honored to work around the world, and to suggest peace and justice activities for the classroom to create connections between the global and the local. Our travels this school year will take us through four regions where Concern America works: Central America, Colombia and South America, Mozambique and Africa, and Mexico.

Underlying each edition of *With Eyes to See* this year is the concept of **consientization** (developing consciousness). The great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's use of this term went beyond simply raising one's awareness on an issue to including an essential social action component. Working mainly with oppressed peoples, Freire saw conscientization as a way of actively reflecting on one's life and surroundings and then acting to make things better. This type of developing consciousness is understood to have the power to transform reality and not simply to talk about it.

In our classrooms in this country, the concept of conscientization can be applied in the same way. In the book *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far From Home: A Bold Inquiry Into the Values and Goals of America's Schools* by educator Jonathan Kozol, he describes a teacher who had but one rule in her classroom: "Any idea a student genuinely believes, and feels to be his own, must be enacted, executed or applied within the realm of the real world." (New York: Simon & Schuster. 1990. 210). The role of the teacher in such a classroom is to facilitate discussions, explorations, and exercises which help students expand their understanding and awareness of their world, and then to act upon this new awareness. Freire called this process **praxis**, where **reflection** and **action** are inextricably linked much like the Chinese yin and yang symbol. Conscientization therefore is a process which includes: a repeating cycle of reflecting-acting; input (information), to learn from the experience of others; the growing awareness of a need for change (both within oneself and in one's surroundings); measured/appropriate actions to make changes; and regular evaluations of what has been accomplished and where consciousness has grown. The cycle then repeats.

It is hoped that this edition of *With Eyes to See* will help students develop a greater consciousness of the people and their realities throughout Central America, as well as of themselves, and encourage all of us to act, reflect, act, reflect..... Conscientization.

CONCERN AMERICA

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"We suffer with those who have disappeared, those who have had to flee their homes, and those who have been tortured."
-Archbishop Oscar Romero

"What hurts Indians most is that our costumes are considered beautiful, but it's as if the person wearing it didn't exist."
-Rigoberta Menchú

Concern America in Central America

Concern America (C/A) is a small nonprofit, nonsectarian, nongovernmental development and refugee aid organization that partners with materially poor communities in "developing" countries in projects to assist them to move their communities out of poverty. In the U.S., C/A offers social justice education to groups of youth and adults. To accomplish its mission abroad, C/A operates the following projects in Central America:

GUATEMALA: Health promoter and midwife training and environmental health projects in three regions of the Department of Petén, reaching 70 communities and 50,000 people. Another project supports a coalition of indigenous women's artisan cooperatives.

EL SALVADOR: Work with health promoters and midwives since 1984. Programs currently include the recognition of health promoters and midwives by the Ministry of Health, and income-generating projects to support local health programs.

HONDURAS: Concern America's women's health and community development project is now run by the local Hondurans; Concern America continues to support a community library.

6-12

What Does the News Say?

When doing a report on a country, most students turn quickly to an encyclopedia and begin taking notes. From these resources one can learn a lot of important background information, but rarely do they give a good sense of the current realities faced by a people. What indigenous leader in Guatemala, the subject of ongoing death threats by the Guatemalan government and military during that country's civil war, is now a member of the current government? Who is striking to protest the privatization of health services in El Salvador? Which group of children in Nicaragua has developed its own language and is currently the interest of linguists from around the world?

These and many other stories have recently made the mainstream press in this country. What types of stories do we hear about? Which stories do not appear in our press? Where can alternative stories be found? Try the following:

- collect various editions of local newspapers, including larger ones like the New York Times or the Los Angeles Times, and comb them for stories on Central American countries (the same can be done on the websites of many such papers). Make a chart of the types of stories, and see what emerges.
- Search for additional stories from the World Press Review (www.worldpress.org), the Independent Media Center (www.indymedia.org), and www.zmag.org; each site has a Latin American section. Another good site is AMERICAS.ORG, which has links to articles and commentaries of late on all countries of Latin America. How do stories on these sites compare to the mainstream press?

WHAT DO WE DO NOW WITH THIS INFORMATION WE HAVE GATHERED?

What Color is my Skin?

Skin color paints can be purchased and have names like peach, cinnamon, and mahogany. Gather the class in a circle, and invite each student to the front to try out various colors and combinations with her/his skin; each child will be a different color: Maria might be chocolate-cinnamon while Henry is peach. Then have each child paint a self portrait using their color, AND write a story about who they are on the inside. Do the same with pictures of various children living in Central America by comparing skin colors and creating stories for each child (based on research the class will do). DOES KNOWING YOUR "NEW" COLOR, AND THE MANY STORIES, AFFECT THE WAY YOU SEE YOURSELF? OTHERS? WHAT TO DO?

(from *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and Early Grades*. Teaching Tolerance: www.tolerance.org, 334-956-8362) (exercise adapted from *With Eyes to See*, Dec. 2000, *Interdependence*)

K-6

6-12

Create an Immigrant Story

The Storyline Method was developed by teachers in Scotland to "help children see the world as a connected whole." Its premise is that social justice education must connect with students' emotions and "bring the whole of him-herself to the table of learning." Choose a topic about which students talk but lack understanding (e.g. homelessness, immigration, gangs, teachers/adults, people with disabilities, etc.).

Most people in the United States were once immigrants, though for many students their own family's immigrant story is many generations removed. As a way for these students to reconnect with the realities of immigrants, and for students who are recent immigrants to explore their own experiences, a "story" about immigrants from Central America could be moving, and might look like the following:

- 1) Start with questions like, "What words come to mind when I say Immigrant?" and "Why do you think people Immigrate?" Do some basic research on Central American immigrants.
- 2) Each student becomes a "character" (immigrant) in the story, creating their person physically (art) and through a biography (writing). Each shares her/his character, and they all begin to interact--a community is created.
- 3) To stimulate discussion, situations are posed like 'Today you must leave your homeland.' What will you take with you (that will fit into one bag)? Students share answers and discuss each others' choices. Use various situations and questions over several days.
- 4) Eventually, students may want more information about immigrants and could invite someone to speak with them (a recent immigrant, social worker, etc.).
- 5) In the end, students have been able "to explore their own worries and fears about social issues that impact their own lives," and in the process have begun to see "immigrants" as real people with many of their same fears, joys, families, and hearts. WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP? There is much more information about Storyline easily found on the internet (search using the key words "storyline method").
(Hutchinson, Jaylyne N. and Romano, Rosalie M. *Teaching for Social Justice*. Ed. W. Ayers, J. A. Hunt, and T. Quinn. New York: Teacher College Press, 1998. 254-269) (exercise adapted from *With Eyes to See*, Dec. 2000, *Interdependence*)

"And that's when my consciousness was born."
-Rigoberta Menchú (when, at age 8, she worked on a coffee plantation)

Books, Videos, and Activities around Central America

- Rigoberta Menchú Tum is an important indigenous leader in Guatemala, both for bringing the plight of the indigenous and Guatemalan *campesinos* (peasants) to the world's conscience during her country's devastating civil war, and for her continued actions today. Her widely read autobiography, **I, Rigoberta Menchú** (the title in Spanish, translated, is *My Name is Rigoberta Menchú, and My Conscience Was Born this Way*), does a great job of introducing the reader to the realities of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, while telling her own story. Individual chapters can be pulled out and used as each describes a different aspect of indigenous life. Best for grades 9-12 due to some violent content.
- Many books exist that are filled with wonderful pictures of the indigenous Mayan people (most living in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize). One striking new book is by photographer Jonathon Moller, a long-time solidarity worker with Guatemala, entitled **Our Culture is Our Resistance: Repression, Refuge, and Healing in Guatemala**, with a forward by Rigoberta Menchú. The text and photos follow recent exhumations of clandestine graves where the Guatemalan military buried many indigenous people (men, women, and children) murdered during the 36 years of civil war. Mr. Moller also chronicles the lives of the Guatemalans who formed peaceful, internal refugee communities which called themselves "Popular Communities in Resistance." Despite the heavy content, the incredible photos and text show the hope of Guatemalans to heal and build new lives for their children.

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"The things that make us alike are stronger than the things that make us different."
-Jane Addams

RECOMMENDED

"Don't wait for strangers to remind you of your duty, you have a conscience and a spirit for that. All the good you do must come from your own initiative."
-Popul Vuh (the creation story of the Mayan people)

"Although the world is very full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."
-Helen Keller

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- Try the documentary **If the Mango Tree Could Speak**, based on a powerful, collectively written poem by children who are Central American refugees living in this country. The documentary focuses on 10 boys and girls, ages 12-15, who grew up in Guatemala and El Salvador during war. (a study guide is available at www.newday.com)

- A powerful movie is **Romero**, available at most video rental stores, which gives a biographical account of the last three years of the incredible life of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador. The entire movie is moving (and heavy at times), but a good study guide which uses only selected clips from the movie is available at the "Popcorn Peacemaking" section of Salsa.net (see below).

- When Linda Shelly returned to Honduras to the village where she lived, the community members were no longer eating red beans, the staple of their diet. What happened? To answer the question, Ms. Shelly made a wonderful, detective style documentary entitled **Where are the Beans?** that ends up looking policies of the IMF and the Honduran government for clues.

Many of the above mentioned materials can be found at www.teachingforchange.org. As well, many great resources and teaching ideas can be found at the PEACE Center at www.salsa.net.

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- * The St. Nicholas Project
- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

Mark Your Calenders Now for Concern America's Next WALK OUT OF POVERTY, March 19, 2005. JOIN US! Call Janine or Denis at Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa. The 2004 Walk raised over \$38,000, making it the most successful walk to date.

WWW.CONCERNAMERICA.ORG: Take a moment to visit Concern America's web site! In addition to information on our projects around the world and in this country, previous copies of *With Eyes to See* can be downloaded, the catalogue of fair-trade crafts that support local artisans from around the world can be viewed, and you can learn about upcoming events through our home office such as our Training for Transformation/Palo Freire workshops.