

# WITH EYES TO SEE



## PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: CITIZENSHIP

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

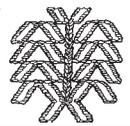
May  
2002

The word "citizenship" comes from an Old French word "cite," meaning city. To a large extent, the concept of citizenship in this country follows this meaning, referring to an individual's relationship with the government and her/his obligation to preserve it. At the same time, citizenship is used to convey the relationship individuals have with other citizens, as can be seen as early as elementary school where children are often graded on their "citizenship skills" (basically, how they get along and interact with the other students and teachers). Taken together, "citizenship" is open to many interpretations beyond those obligations and rights afforded to citizens laid out in our Constitution, Bill of Rights, and related laws.

Citizenship education is part of the curriculum in many schools and is found at various grade levels. What is being taught? What is the goal of such programs? What is a "good citizen?" In general, most citizenship education is probably aimed at providing children with the tools they need to live democratically and work towards the common good including voting, civic participation, volunteering, defending just laws and government (or opposing those that are unjust), self-esteem, among others. On the surface, very few people would argue that in order to protect democracy we must teach our children such skills. The debate as to the form this education should take is extremely controversial, however, as it forces us to analyze the state of our democracy today (both locally and nationally), the notion of global citizenship, dissent as an expression of patriotism (especially after the September tragedies), democratic schools, the First Amendment as it relates to the rights of children in schools, etc.

This edition of *With Eyes to See* does not attempt to put forth a formula for citizenship education, but rather the intent is to challenge teachers and their students to explore many of the dimensions of citizenship and democracy. The activities on the following pages are filled with questions. We invite you to use these questions, expand on them, develop others, and, together with your students, jump into the chaotic and unknown waters you create by "practicing" democracy. There is a good chance that what you discover will surprise both you and your students.

~~~~~  
*Education always implies program, content, method, objectives and so on. . . For me it has always been a political question, not exclusively an educational question, at what levels students take part in the process of organizing the curriculum. I know that this question has to have different answers according to different places and times. The more people participate in the process of their own education, the more the people participate in the process of defining what kind of production to produce, and for what and why, the more the people participate in the development of their selves. The more the people become themselves, the better the democracy. The less people are asked about what they want, about their expectations, the less democracy we have.* -Paulo Freire (from *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Myles Horton and Paulo Freire. Ed.: Bell, B, Gaventa, J and Peters, J. Temple University Press: Philadelphia. 1990. 145-146. Emphasis added.)



*How are we to bring children to the spirit of citizenship and humanity which is postulated by democratic societies? By the actual practice of democracy at school. It is unbelievable that at a time when democratic ideas enter into every phase of life, they should have been so little utilized as instruments of education. -Jean Piaget*

"Solidarity does not mean that everyone thinks the same way, it begins when people have the confidence to disagree over issues because they 'care' about constructing a common ground."  
-Peter McLaren

"What is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood."  
-Audre Lourde

### Democratic Schools or Benevolent Dictatorships?

It is generally agreed that in order to learn to do something, one must have hands-on practice: would it be possible to learn to ride a bicycle from a textbook without ever practicing on a real bike? Is the same true about citizenship and democracy? If so, should schools provide students with "democracy practice?" What would this look like?

Democratic schools do exist and take on many different forms. Some schools have councils made up of students and teachers who make many of the school's policies in collaboration with administration. Many classrooms collectively make decisions about their rules, disciplinary actions, activities, etc. through classroom meetings. Other schools hold town hall meetings with students, teachers, administrators, and parents to discuss problems, set school policy, and do vision planning for the school. All of the schools in various ways are practicing democracy. What about your classroom/school?

### Is This a Democratic School? (6-12)

Have students diagram the administrative structure of the school, identifying the powers of each level of administration (from the students on up to the school board and beyond). They will probably need to refer to their student handbooks and interview school administrators to complete the task. What do the students think? Is their school a democratic system? Should it be? What changes would they like to make? How could they make them (and what will they do about it)?

### Democracy Working (K-12)

As a first step in making the classroom a more democratic place, try holding "classroom meetings" or "circle times." After creating a safe space in which everyone listens and is welcomed to share, classroom meetings can be used for many things: to create classroom rules, discuss consequences when rules are broken, talk about issues of the school and beyond, develop proposals for activities/actions in the class, school, and community. A proactive goal can be to get to the point where the students themselves are running the meetings. Also, if the students do a good job, push them to take their democratic skills to the school at large.

5-12

### The First Amendment

What are the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment of our Constitution? In a recent survey, one in five teachers could not recall any of the freedoms (they are religion, press, speech, assembly, and petition), while the general population was worse. Do students know that they have these freedoms? An important issue for students is the extent to which they can exercise their First Amendment rights at school. For example, should students be able to report on controversial issues in student newspapers? Should internet access in schools be censored? What books should be available in the library? Who decides?

Start by asking students what they know about the First Amendment. After defining the five freedoms, discuss their relevance to school. Challenge the students with situations that might test their opinions (allowing racist literature in the library; students want to start a religion group in a public school; students protesting an increase in school lunch fees boycott classes; there may be recent examples in your own school). Contact the First Amendment School's project for more ideas ([www.firstamendmentschools.org](http://www.firstamendmentschools.org), or write Mike Wildasin, ASCD, 1703 N. Beauregard St., Alexandria, VA 22311-1714)

## What is a Citizen?

6-12

As a class, have the students brainstorm a list of responsibilities of citizenship. Then, in small groups, have students place each responsibility in one of three categories: **Enforced** (by law), **Encouraged** (by government programs), or **Important** (as a democratic principle). For example, jury duty is *enforced*, donating to charities is *encouraged* (by tax breaks, but not mandated), and helping others is *important*. Students might need to consult the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and/or history and civics texts. When completed, ask the students to draw conclusions from their list. Any surprises? Any changes they would like to make? Any additions? A possible topic of discussion is voting which is not an obligation (*enforced*) but *encouraged*; in some countries, like Australia and Belgium, every citizen must vote or pay a fine. Should voting be an obligation in this country? Why or why not? (from the Congressional Quarterly online bookstore at [www.cqpressbookstore.com/livdemlespla.html](http://www.cqpressbookstore.com/livdemlespla.html). Look there for more resources for this activity and other lesson ideas.)

"The job of a citizen is to keep his [or her] mouth open."  
-Günter Grass

## Global Citizenship

Take a minute and look at the tag on your shirt. Chances are, hands from another country were involved in the process of clothing you; our lives are increasingly connected to people around the world. Consequently, the choices we make in terms of what we buy and the prices we pay affect the health and well being of people we will never meet. This is just one example of our "global citizenship."

1. (3-12) A simple activity is to pose the following question to students: Are we global citizens? Use an activity like the one mentioned above with the clothing tags to challenge the students and see where they take the discussion.

2. (6-12) Use the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and/or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the classroom. Compare them to our Constitution, or to the lives of the students themselves. Both documents are recognized throughout the world (even if they are not always followed) and connect us to billions of people. They are great documents to have permanently displayed in the classroom, and can be used as references or the centerpiece of many activities. To get copies of each document or for more information, use the following web sites: [www.un.org/Overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html) (U.N. Declaration of Human Rights); [www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm](http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm) (U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child). For lesson plans surrounding these documents, and other ideas, visit the U.N.'s education site at [www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/declaration/index.asp](http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/declaration/index.asp).

"The love of one's country is a splendid thing. But why should love stop at the border?"  
-Pablo Casals

## Citizenship for Young Citizens

3-12

Words like "democracy" and "citizenship" don't make sense to most young children, but the basic concepts that underlie them do: helping others, understanding those different than ourselves, the importance of everyone's voice, etc. Use children's books to draw out discussions on these topics. Some examples:

- Whoever You Are by Mem Fox and Leslie Staub-- With striking illustrations and simple text, it reminds us that despite differences among people around the world, we have many similarities that connect us.
- The Big Orange Splot by Daniel M. Pinkwater-- A funny story celebrating each person's uniqueness, freedom of expression, and the importance of creating community.
- The Lorax by Dr. Seuss-- "I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees," states the Lorax, reminding us of the importance of giving voice to the voiceless in our world.
- The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka-- Helps us look at another side of a story in a funny way as we get the wolf's version of events.
- One of Each by Mary Ann Hoberman and Marjorie Priceman-- A dog learns that when he shares with others, even though he has less, he gains more in his interactions and friendships.

# RECOMMENDED

"The irony of the matter is that future generations do not have a vote. In effect, we hold their proxies."  
-Charles Hitch

"Teach this triple truth to all: a generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity."  
-Buddha

## RESOURCES

1. For an interesting look at citizenship education in various schools, try the book *Preparing for Citizenship: Teaching Youth to Live Democratically*, by Mosher, R., Kenny Jr., R.A., and Garrod, A. Praeger: Westport, CT. 1994. Each chapter is a case study of a school.

2. Interested in the emotion and motivation involved in being an active citizen? Full of stories of ordinary people engaged in social justice, Paul Rogat Loeb's book *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time* is moving reading. St. Martin's Griffin: New York. 1999.

3. A great resource full of the nuts and bolts of civic participation is *Civics for Democracy: A Journey for Teachers and Students* (Presented by Ralph Nader) by Katherine Isaac. Essential Books: Washington D.C. 1992. The book is divided into four parts: I. Profiles of Students in Action; II. A History of Citizen Movements; III. Techniques for Participation; and IV. Student Activities.

4. Two helpful web sites for finding lesson plans for citizenship activities, or most other topics, are [www.askeric.org](http://www.askeric.org) and [www.edhelper.com](http://www.edhelper.com). Both are search engines for educational resources, and are easy to use.



## 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, Bolivia, Brazil, 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

Information on any of these projects can be obtained by contacting:

Education Coordinator  
Concern America  
P.O. Box 1790  
Santa Ana, CA 92702  
(714) 953-8575

**STAY TUNED!** For the 2002-2003 school year, all four issues of *With Eyes to See* will be dedicated to using the **United Nations Earth Charter** in our classrooms. The Earth Charter is "a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century." The charter can be used as a powerful educational tool "for developing understanding of the critical choices facing humanity and the urgent need for commitment to a sustainable way of life." For more information and to view the Charter, visit [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org).

The work of the **Cesar E. Chavez Foundation** is to promote the life and work of Cesar Chavez and to encourage us to get involved in our communities. The Foundation is involved in many activities including a partnership with the Governor's office for service learning activities, celebrations/activities around Cesar Chavez Day (April 1), grants for service projects, school curriculum, speakers, and more. Visit the Foundation's web site for more information: [www.cesarchavezfoundation.org](http://www.cesarchavezfoundation.org).