

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: EARTH CHARTER II

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

November
2002

In this season of Thanksgiving, let us be mindful of the blessings we have received over the past year, and ever mindful of that which must be done to make this a world of peace, worth passing on to our children. With the attacks of last September, the current war on terrorism, and a possible war in Iraq, the need for this peace work is immense. As the second in a series of four editions this school year of *With Eyes to See*, we return to the **Earth Charter** and its powerful call to "join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace."

This edition focuses on the Charter's third principle, **Social and Economic Justice**, and the activities in these pages attempt to push students to look at their lives and actions through a social and economic lens. Take the current focus on a war in Iraq. Why war? The Bush administration's reasons for attacking Iraq are primarily removing Saddam Hussein from office and eliminating all of his weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, there are many debates on what weapons exist in Iraq, the probability of another attack here, and if such a war would actually bring on more violence and instability as opposed to a real and lasting peace.

What are some of the socioeconomic issues surrounding Iraq? Over 500,000 Iraqi children have died due to the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq over the past decade; Iraq controls approximately 11% of the world's oil reserves; together with Saudi Arabia's 25%, they constitute more than 1/3 of the world's oil reserves; a war would cost billions of dollars, while the U.S. teeters on the edge of a recession and falling budgets for social services.

This potential war is complex and filled with layers of reasons and meanings. The same is true in another conflict taking place within this hemisphere: the expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to all of the Americas, called the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and its Mexico/Central America component, the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). According to the current administration and many business leaders, it would seem that NAFTA has been an overwhelming success. On the other hand, considering the number of jobs lost in the United States, low wages earned in Mexico, environmental concerns, the powers given to corporations through NAFTA's Chapter 11, and many other factors, it would appear that NAFTA has only benefited the "bottom line" of large corporations. The new FTAA and the PPP promise to have a significant impact on millions of people, many of whom have little voice in the decisions that could negatively impact their lives and livelihood.

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IDEAS

The four principles of the **Earth Charter's** section three, **Social and Economic Justice**, can be summarized as follows:

9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities/institutions promote equitable and sustainable human development.
11. Affirm gender equality, equity, and access to sustainable development.
12. Uphold the right of all to an environment supportive of human dignity, especially for indigenous peoples and minorities.

"Let us put our heads together and see what life we will make for our children."

-Tatanka
Lotanka
(Sitting
Bull,
Lakota)

"One of the virtues of being very young is that you don't let the facts get in the way of your imagination."

-Sam
Levenson

3-12

Bitter Chocolate? Sweet Chocolate!

Anyone who has watched television over the past year has probably seen the M&M commercials about choosing a new color for the candy. One letter to the M&M/Mars Inc. company concerning that campaign began as follows: "I am writing to register my vote for the new color of M&Ms in favor of "Fair Trade Certified," the color of dignity and freedom." The workers of cocoa farms, a large number of which can be found in West Africa, are too often children who are paid miserable wages or are forced to work as slaves. Such jobs do little to respect the lives of children, or to address the extreme poverty of many families and communities. Try the following "chocolate" activities:

- Pass out M&Ms to each student, and ask them to describe the taste after they have eaten them. Then ask the students where the chocolate of M&Ms comes from. They will need to do some research (on the web, searching with keywords like M&M and fair trade; a good site for information on fair trade chocolate is www.globalexchange.com, click on the *Global Economy* link). After compiling information on the origin of the cocoa, the farms where it is produced, and M&Ms, ask the students once again to describe the flavor (is it more bitter knowing children their age had to harvest it as near-slaves?). What can be done?

- Selling chocolate is often a big fundraiser for schools. As a powerful and proactive alternative to traditional candy sales, try selling Fair Trade Certified chocolate (certified as such based on the healthy working conditions and fair prices paid for the cocoa). In the process of raising money for school, students will learn more about the Fair Trade movement (which includes coffee and other products), organic agriculture, global trade, and more. Try the following contacts for more information, teaching tools, games, and Fair Trade chocolate fundraising opportunities: www.serrv.org, 800-422-5915; www.lasiembra.com, 613-235-6122; www.divinechocolate.com.

Youth as Agents of Social Change

Ask the students: "Who makes the decisions that affect your lives at school, at home, in the community, and at the state/national levels?" "Are you involved in shaping these realities?" "Should you be?" "How?" As a class, choose an issue and/or arena in which to get involved (adapt the questions for different age groups. Stories and examples of youth making a difference abound. (The February, 2001 edition of *With Eyes to See on Stewardship* explores activism in youth--copies are available upon request)

K-12

3-12

A Day in the Life of Girls and Boys

Gender economic inequality is not as pronounced in this country as it is in others, but we still have a long way to go before women are economically equal to men. (Consider the gender of political and business leaders. How many ads for household cleaning products feature men?) Have each student outline a typical day in her/his life. Once completed, divide the girls and boys into two separate groups to compare their outlines and collectively produce one for their sex. Then, as a class, compare the two lists hour by hour, from early morning until bedtime. What are the differences? Are they gender-based? Are boys and girls equal in their responsibility to family, to school, and/or to each other? What do these list tell us about our society and gender-equality?

When learning about native peoples, economically impoverished groups, enslaved peoples, and natural disasters, we often "feel sorry" for others because of the suffering they endure. While this feeling is real and an important indicator of our capacity as humans to feel sympathy, it often promotes cynicism and hopelessness: "What can I do about hunger in Africa?!" **Solidarity**, on the other hand, encourages us to recognize our common needs and struggles and similar situations close to home, promoting a climate of action and hope. (The following activities are adapted from Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World)

• The next time a lesson leads students to "feel sorry" for another group, ask a student to look up the word solidarity in a dictionary. Discuss the definition, and then ask the students to "relook" at the situation in question in solidarity terms, finding the needs they have that are the same as the group in question. On a related note, it is often hard to feel solidarity when studying situations in other countries or other communities. Problems such as homelessness, poverty, violence, etc. can be found in most communities in this country. By focusing on related local issues first, students will be less likely later on to stereotype Latin America, Asia, or Africa simply as completely unlike the United States.

• When looking at various issues, it is helpful to guide students gradually through their examination of a problem to avoid cynicism. The following set of questions can be a useful tool for taking a discussion from identifying a problem to acting to change it. Present the issue using a picture, video, mime, poem, story, etc., and then follow these steps:

1. **DESCRIPTION:** This is the easiest thing one can ask any group to do: What do you see in the picture? What do you think each of the people is doing? What do you think each one is feeling?
2. **FIRST ANALYSIS:** Why was it happening? We start to ask why the people are doing what they are doing. The group is challenged to move from observing to thinking.
3. **REAL LIFE:** When the group is thoroughly involved and is focusing its attention on the main issue, one can move to the next level by asking, "Does this happen in real life?"
4. **RELATED PROBLEMS:** What problems does it lead to? From here one often moves out naturally to other problems related to the initial "symptom" portrayed in the picture. (However, sometimes, the problem is so central one should stay with it.)
5. **ROOT CAUSES:** What are the root causes of these problems? The group is challenged to analyze on a much deeper level. They are encouraged to look beyond the symptoms to explore the causes. This question is really the heart of conscientization.
6. **ACTION PLANNING:** What can we do about it?

(Adapted from Training for Transformation I, Hope, A., Timmel, S, Hodzi, C.)

• Another good way to encourage solidarity and decrease paralyzing feelings of helplessness is to focus attention on oppressed peoples who have come together and improved their situations, or stories portraying such people as three dimensional and full of strengths, weaknesses, dreams, and needs much like our own. Two such stories can be found in the following movies:

1. "Salt of the Earth" is based on the true story of Mexican-American miners in New Mexico who went on strike to protest their working conditions. It uses both professional actors and actual miners/community people to tell the story of racism, sexism, class struggles, and the power of collective action and solidarity to transform lives and working conditions. The movie, which came out in 1953 during the McCarthy era, was banned when it was released.

2. "Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh" explores the Ladakh people living in a remote area of India and the effects of globalization on their culture. The video portrays a people living cooperatively, in harmony with their harsh environment, and economically self-sufficient. At the same time, outside forces are changing the lives of the Ladakh, and the video encourages us to look at concepts like "economic growth," "individual freedoms," and "progress," and consider if they are always good.

(Both videos are available at www.teachingforchange.org, or 800-763-9131)

"While there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."
-Eugene Debs

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

IDEAS & RECOMMENDED

"Paying for a world-wide military presence is part of this nation's hidden cost...for relatively low-cost bananas, clothes, gasoline and aluminum foil."
-Russell Herman

"Hunger and poverty are no accidents. They are the fruits of social injustice."
-Clergy and Laity Concerned

RECOMMENDED

• The September edition of *With Eyes to See* contained a full listing of how to get copies of the Earth Charter. As a reminder, a quick way to see the text is to visit www.earthcharter.org.

• A good book for helping teachers and parents with activism with children is *That's Not Fair! A Teacher's Guide to Activism with Young Children* by Ann Pelo and Fran Davidson. (Readleaf Press, 2000). The guide explores the many issues surrounding children's activism, from choosing the issues to address and how to organize to an extensive reference list of books on the topic. All teachers, whether seasoned activists with their students or newcomers to social action, will find this book useful.

• An author who has done a lot of writing on sustainable economics and business is David Korten. Once a World Bank employee, Korten saw first hand the short-falls and harm of many of our current economic policies and business practices. His writings critique our current realities and offer hope of an economic system and corporations that foster sustainability and uphold the dignity of workers and consumers. His two most important works are *Where Corporations Rule the World* (Berrett-Koehler, 1996) and *The Post-Corporate World: Life After Capitalism* (2000). His books are wonderful resources for teachers.

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, Nicaragua, 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.

6-12

Europe's Foreign Debt. . .To Mexico

At the turn of the century, there was much talk about debt relief for economically impoverished countries. The interest many countries pay on the debt they owe is often much greater than what they spend on social services, with devastating consequences for the poorest members of those countries. Many of the original loans in question were made to military dictatorships who filled their pockets in the process, among other questionable circumstances. Mexican indigenous leader Cuaicaipuro Cuautémoc turns the tables on the rich nation/endefted nation paradigm in relation to the precious metals taken from his country during the 16th and 17th centuries: "I would rather consider those thousands of kilos of gold and silver as the first of several friendly loans granted by Native Americans for Europe's development." Using the "European invention of compound interest" over the past five centuries, as he points out, would be a lot of gold and silver owed to Mexico. His one-page article, entitled *The Marshalltezuma Plan*, is powerful reading for an economics class, units on colonialism, globalization, Mexico, and Europe. (The article can be found in *Rethinking Globalization*, see page three, or at www.newint.org/issue312/plan.htm)