Lesson Plan: Observing Human Rights Day

Introduction
Since 1950, Human Rights Day has been celebrated globally on December 10 of each year. The occasion commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. As an annual clarion call, Human Rights Day serves to remind all global citizens of the ongoing work and vigilance that is needed to ensure the realization of human rights codified in the UDHR. Notwithstanding that the UDHR is more than half a century old, the world still has not been liberated from ongoing human rights abuses and violations.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States created a powerful generation of civil rights and human rights leaders. These leaders generated additional sociopolitical movements for global peace (e.g., ending the war in Vietnam) and universal social justice (e.g., anti-apartheid). The following lesson aims to familiarize students with the human rights principles codified in each article of the UDHR. The lesson aspires to help students realize that the UDHR is a “living” document -- rather than an archival document. To this end, students will participate in an activity that focuses upon the concerted actions that Americans took to end apartheid in South Africa. They will then engage in a final activity, focusing upon Human Rights Day, to facilitate their identification of current human rights issues that need attention and rectification.

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Subject: U.S. History, World History
Grades: 6-8, 9-12
Teaching Standard: 10.1, 10.9, 10.10, 11.8, 11.9, 11.10, 12.3, 12.4
Essential Question
What responsibility do we hold for violations of human rights in other countries? When we fail to take action, do we make human rights violations possible? Are we somehow responsible for these violations by our inaction?

Sub Questions
• What was apartheid in South Africa? Which human rights were violated according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
• Why were civil rights leaders in the United States concerned with the human rights violations of apartheid in South Africa?
• What actions did citizens of the United States take to end apartheid?
• What are examples of current international human rights violations for which United States organizations and citizens are protesting? Do they use similar methods of protest as the American Committee on Africa used in the 1950’s and 1960’s? What new methods are being used today?
• Is your community commemorating Human Rights Day, 10 December? If not, what type of celebration or commemoration would you suggest and why?

Lesson Activities
Part One: Apartheid and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Part Two: Action Against Apartheid
Part Three: 10 December, Human Rights Day

Part One: Apartheid and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Instructions
Classroom Activity:
Pass out a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). If students are not familiar with the UDHR, provide background information and review the articles. (Information on the UDHR and copies of the document are available through the United Nations.) Ask students to read and discuss the UDHR.

Now ask students to analyze “Appeal for Action Against Apartheid” flyer distributed by the sponsors King and Chief Albert Lutuli. Ask students to focus on two specific
sections of the document. The first begins with “Apartheid means” and the second begins with “In 1957, an unprecedented Declaration of Conscience…” Ask students to create a list of the UDHR articles which were violated under South African Apartheid.

**Extension Activity:**
Ask students to read the following King Encyclopedia entries, which can be found at the King Institute’s website: American Committee on Africa (ACOA), Albert Lutuli, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Materials**
- “Appeal for Action Against Apartheid” flyer distributed by the sponsors King and Chief Albert Lutuli
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

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**Part Two: Action Against Apartheid**

![Image of the "Appeal for Action Against Apartheid" flyer]

*The "Appeal for Action Against Apartheid" flyer was created by the American Committee on Africa as part of an international anti-apartheid movement*

Instructions
Using the “Appeal for Action Against Apartheid” flyer, ask students to focus on the two sections that begin with “We Can Act” and “We therefore ask all men of good will to take Action Against Apartheid.” Ask students to answer the following questions:

• What actions did the American Committee on Africa (ACOA) want individuals to take?

• Do you think these actions were effective? Why or why not?

• Why were boycotts and economic sanctions a chief strategy of the American Committee on Africa?

Place students in pairs and give each pair the American Committee on Africa letter. Ask students to answer the following questions:

• What type of document is this?

• Who is the author of the document?

• When was the document created?

• Who is the intended audience?

• What is the purpose of the document?

Ask students to read the document carefully and choose one quote from the document that helps to answer each of the following questions:

• Why were civil rights leaders in the United States concerned with the human rights violations of apartheid in South Africa?

• King stated in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail: “A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” How is this idea represented in the document?

Optional Activity:
The documentary film, Have you Heard from Johannesburg? Apartheid and the Club of the West, captures the grassroots movement in the United States against apartheid during the 1980’s. The national campaign of civil disobedience, campus protest, and legislative action grew from the civil rights activism of the 1950’s and 1960’s. Ask
students to examine what ways the strategies have changed from the 1950’s and what ways they have remained consistently the same.

**Extension Assignment:**
Ask students to examine the following quote from the “Appeal for Action Against Apartheid” flyer: “Let us recognize that each of us, of whatever race, from whatever nation, makes apartheid possible as long as we fail to take action against it.” Ask students to replace “apartheid” with “human rights violations.” Do students agree or disagree with the statement and why? They may use the lesson’s documents, the quotes listed below and the film, *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?* to support their answer.

Quotes:

- “The only solution to South Africa’s crisis is for whites to accept blacks as human beings.”
  The Right Reverend Desmond Tutu, Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, 14 August 1985

- “Racism is no mere American phenomenon… The classic example of organized and institutionalized racism is the Union of South Africa. Its national policy and practice are the incarnation of the doctrine of white supremacy in the midst of a population which is overwhelmingly black.”
  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (“Where Do We Go From Here?” 1967)

- “If I lived in South Africa today in the midst of the white supremacy law in South Africa, I would join Chief Luthuli and others in saying break these unjust laws. And even let us come up to America. Our nation in a sense came into being through a massive act of civil disobedience for the Boston Tea Party [and] was nothing but a massive act of civil disobedience.”
  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (“Where Do We Go From Here?,” 1967)

- “For it is we, through our investments, through our governments’ failure to act decisively, who are guilty of bolstering South African tyranny.”
  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (“On South African Independence,” given on 7 December 1964 in London, England while en route to Oslo, Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize)

- “We can join in the one form of nonviolent action that could bring freedom and justice to South Africa, the action which African leaders have appealed for, in a massive movement for economic sanctions.”
  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (“On South African Independence,” given on 7
December 1964 in London, England while en route to Oslo, Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize

• “Let it never be said by future generations that indifference, cynicism or selfishness made us fail to live up to the ideals of humanism which the Nobel Peace Prize encapsulates. Let the strivings of us all, prove Martin Luther King, Jr., to have been correct, when he said that humanity can no longer be tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war.”
  From Nelson Mandela’s Nobel Peace Prize Address in Oslo, Norway on 10 December 1993

Materials

• Appeal for Action Against Apartheid
• American Committee on Africa letter
• Have you Heard from Johannesburg? Apartheid and the Club of the West

Part Three: 10 December, Human Rights Day

Instructions

Opening Activity:
Ask students to research local, national, or international events held on Human Rights Day and report back to the class. What types of events are held? Which human rights issues are being addressed? Are the events in the form of protests, celebrations, or commemorations?

Classroom Activity:
In groups of three to four, ask students to identify a human rights issue that they feel requires attention. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch provide a summary of national and international issues. Using the document in the "Appeal for Action Against Apartheid" flyer, ask students to create a flyer for a “Call for Action.” The flyer must include a description of the issue, relevant articles from the UDHR which are in violation, and at least three actions for individuals to take to help remedy the issue. Remind students that the flyer must be both informative and visually interesting in order to be effective.
Optional Activity:
Ask students to create a “Human Rights Day Event” at your school. Choose from one of the issues that were identified by students. Ask students to create activities at school to inform the public about the issue and that also involve some form of pragmatic action.

Materials
• Appeal for Action Against Apartheid