

Environmental Justice and Human Rights

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Introduction

According to the Environmental Program of the United Nations, the top three global crises are climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. How do these problems affect human rights? What can high school biology students do to address these topics? Studies suggest that teens are concerned about the government's actions to address climate change. In fact, many young people feel helpless, anxious, and sad about our planet's future. The Peacebuilder course provides engaging activities and information that spurs dialogue and action to improve human rights. During the Summer Research Experience for Teachers (SRET) we discovered the correlation between science and human rights. Energy.gov describes environmental justice as, "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Humanity's future depends on the activism and compassion of today's youth for environmental justice. I intend to create a safe collaborative space where students discuss human rights, the science behind emotions, and how the earth's concerns affect them. We will examine local efforts supporting environmental justice (such as TreesCharlotte and UNC Charlotte Urban Institute). The authors of One Green Thing: Discover Your Hidden Power to Help Save the Planet have created an assessment students will complete analyzing their role in climate action. Independently completing the NewGen's Peacebuilder Certification is an online opportunity for students throughout the school year. As we reflect on activities and feedback, a group peace project will be developed.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, the scholar will be able to:

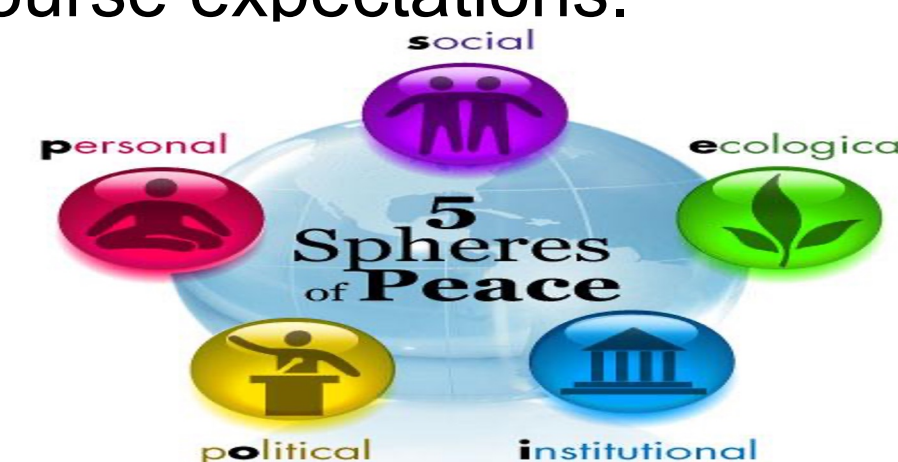
- ★ Correlate science and human rights
- ★ Become a certified Young Peacebuilder Guide
- ★ Explain and give examples of environmental justice
- ★ Identify their role in climate action
- ★ Create a Group Peace Project

Research

In 2017, Charlotte responded to the city's Climate Report with plans to establish ecological sustainability for all citizens. An example of these efforts include creating tree canopies for half of the city by 2050. Throughout the report, experts made connections to racial equity and environmental justice. Residents of low wealth neighborhoods suffer experience inequalities such as toxic air and food deserts. Businesses such as TreesCharlotte are dedicated to impact the community by providing education and trees to Charlotte residents. "The Environmental Leadership Action Plan is a guide for the activities of the County government so that the County can take results-oriented steps in decisions and operations to support current and future pollution reductions, resource conservation, and preparedness initiatives." As the first step of the action plan, a community survey was distributed in Spring 2022. Our city's conservation efforts are considered peacebuilding efforts. Providing human rights such as clean air is a necessary part of creating a safe community. Environmental justice was mentioned throughout the Action Plan. The area's leaders see the importance of providing sustainable living for all people. However, early participation of our children is necessary to improve racial, social, and economic equity.

The Youth and Peace in Action is an engaging curriculum that promotes peacebuilding through community and youth action. Engaging themes and infographics such as the 5 Spheres of Peace, encourage dialogue and collaboration. As a science educator, the ecological sphere is discussed throughout a scholar's high school career. Opportunities to discuss societal issues are limited in many classes. The timelines for high school courses are tight, especially those that require an end of course exam (biology, for example).

While completing the NewGen training and certification, I realized the importance of integrating the curriculum in our science classroom. Our learners are concerned about the earth's future, but do not believe they can make a difference. During the first week of school, biology students will begin discovering the importance of peace building along with class and course expectations.



Essential Questions

- What is the connection between science (biology) and human rights?
- What is environmental justice and how does it relate to biology?
- How can I become an advocate for peace and community action?

Classroom Implementation

Class Activities

(from the NGP Program)

- Fight-Flight-Freeze-Frenzy Body Posters
- Where do you Stand?
- Red Thread Index Cards
- Analyzing Peace Project Case Studies
- TedX Video: Teen Stress from a Teen Perspective
- Changing Climate, Changing Cities: Virtual Field Trip from Phoenix to Shenzhen
- Climate Anxiety Assessment (onegreenthing.org)
- Youth Peacebuilder Certification Program

Guest Speakers (In Person or Virtual)

- UNC Charlotte Urban Institute
- TreesCharlotte

Books

- The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks
- One Green Thing: Discover Your Hidden Power to Help Save the Planet

1. ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS 2. BRIDGE THE DIVIDES
3. BRING HUMANITY TO HOMELESSNESS
4. BOOST HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
CONNECT COMMUNITIES 6. ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD
7. FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT
8. SHAPE SCHOOL CULTURE
9. WELCOME NEW NEIGHBORS

Peace Project: Students use the 9 Categories above to begin a Peace Project



Evaluation and Results

- The collaboration and feedback will create a safe and engaging class culture.
- Students will learn how their emotions are connected to environmental sustainability.
- Through research of teen peace projects, scholars will realize how they can impact the community for peace today.
- The Peace Project will encourage activism, as students are compelled to see the needs in their community.
- Compassion to action is the goal. The activities and class discussions should create a sense of urgency to create a better world for all.

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