

Why Should I Care?

Thinking about your Universe of Obligation

Objective:

Students will reflect on the concepts of individual and social responsibility, explore the impact of altruism on a societal level, and develop research-based projects focused on advocacy work in their community and throughout the world.

Overview:

Stephen Colbert was conducting an interview with New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof in 2007 when he asked the following – Why should we be concerned about issues happening in other countries? How does someone in another country affect me – in America, in my personal life – in any way? Kristof explained that we now live in global community and what happens in one area of the world impacts people in many other areas. Colbert mentioned that he had just read a story of a cat whose head was caught in a boot and quipped that this was something he could care about more than some issues far way.

In his comedic way, Colbert touched on a major issue in human rights work. How do those concerned about human rights get others concerned and willing to do something for others who are perhaps far away or in very different circumstances than themselves? In the words of Kristof, how do we “prick the conscience” of students so they take an interest in and become concerned for others?

TEKS: US History – 11(B); 15(A, B); 23(A, C); 24(A); 26(C)

World History – 1(F); 21(A); 22(C, D); 30(C)

Middle School – Grade 6 – 13 (A, B, C)

Duration: 2-3 class periods

Materials:

Student Journal Handout (see page 1 in appendix)

“Think, Pair, Share” Strategy Instructions (see page 2 in appendix)

World Map

Post-Its

“Stephen Colbert and Nicholas Kristof Interview” Video

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/0z68wk/the-colbert-report-nicholas-kristof>

“Save the Darfur Puppy” Reading (see pages 3-4 in appendix)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/10/opinion/10kristof.html>

Graphic Organizer Handout (see page 5 in appendix)

Universe of Obligation Handout (see page 6 in appendix)

Political Cartoon Handouts (see pages 7-12 in appendix)

Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet (see page 13 in appendix)

“Survival in Sarajevo: Friendship in a Time of War” Film

<https://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/survival-sarajevo-friendship-time-war>

“Stories of Rescue” Webpage

<https://jfr.org/rescuer-stories/>

Engage:

Begin a class discussion by asking students to reflect on the world around them.

Activity: Journaling & “Think, Pair, Share”

Ask students to respond to the following journal prompt questions: Is there an issue in the world that you care about or concerns you? Why is this issue important to you personally? How can you advocate, support, or educate others on this issue? (see page 1 in appendix for Student Journal Handout)

Once students have completed their journal entries, ask them find a partner and share their responses with one another using the “Think, Pair, Share” Strategy (see page 2 in appendix for “Think, Pair, Share” Strategy Instructions). As the students share out as a group, ask them to place post-its on a world map to identify countries, areas, and/or regions under discussion.

Explore:

1. As a class, view the Stephen Colbert and Nicholas Kristof interview.
<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/0z68wk/the-colbert-report-nicholas-kristof>

After viewing the video, ask students to read the article “Save the Darfur Puppy” (see pages 3-4 in appendix for Save the Darfur Puppy reading).

Activity: Graphic Organizer

Once students have completed the “Save the Darfur Puppy” reading, provide each student with a copy of the Graphic Organizer Handout (see page 5 in appendix for Graphic Organizer Handout). Students will use the graphic organizer to highlight main ideas, key concepts, and/or important themes from the Colbert/Kristof interview and the “Save the Darfur Puppy” reading (note: students can add illustrations to their responses to emphasize major take-aways from the video and reading).

After students have filled in the graphic organizer, bring the class back together for a large group discussion. Ask students to discuss similarities between the interview and the article as well as connecting themes that stood out to them.

2. What are the roles, responsibilities, and obligations of individuals in society today? Are we only responsible for ourselves or do our obligations extend outward into our community and world? To help students reflect on these questions, introduce the term “Universe of Obligation” to your class:

Universe of Obligation – a term coined by sociologist Helen Fein to describe the circle of people whom we feel responsible to protect and care for, i.e. individuals whom we should offer help and assistance to during a time of need or when they find themselves in danger.

Activity: Universe of Obligation

Ask students to consider who is in their “Universe of Obligation” (family, friends, neighbors, classmates, teammates, etc.) by having them complete the Universe of Obligation Handout (see page 6 in appendix for Universe of Obligation Handout). Once students have completed their handout, come back together as a class and ask students to report out on the activity – What stood out to them? What did they notice? What did they find interesting?

Continue exploring the concept of a Universe of Obligation on an individual and societal level by discussing the following questions as a class:

What factors influence the extent to which we feel an obligation to help others?
How does the way we view others influence our feelings of responsibility toward them?

In what ways might an individual show others who is part of their universe of obligation and who is not?

Under what conditions might your universe of responsibility shift?

What is the difference between an individual's universe of obligation and that of a school, community, or country?

What factors influence the way a society defines its universe of obligation? In what ways might a nation or community signal who is part of its universe of obligation and who is not?

What do you think might be some of the consequences for those who are not within a society's universe of obligation?

In the 1800s, sociologist William Graham Sumner wrote, "Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self." Do you agree with Sumner? Why or why not?

How would you describe your school's, community's, or nation's universe of obligation? © Facing History and Ourselves

3. How a community, society, or nation defines its Universe of Obligation greatly impacts how we view and respond to the needs of others. How can we, as individuals and as a society, expand our universe to include others? Introduce the term "Social Responsibility" to your class and consider the following questions: What would a society that embodies the principle of "social responsibility" look like? What changes would occur?

Social Responsibility – the concept that every individual has an obligation to protect and care for every member of society, i.e. everyone has a responsibility to act in a manner that is beneficial to society as a whole.

Activity: Political Cartoon Analysis

What are our responsibilities and obligations, as individuals and as a society, during periods of injustice? How do nations respond to human rights abuses, especially during times of genocide? In the following activity, students will analyze the international community's attitude and response to the Holocaust and the Darfur genocide using political cartoons.

Divide the class into small groups – about four people per group – and give each group one political cartoon handout and one political cartoon analysis worksheet (see pages 7-12 in appendix for Political Cartoon Handouts and page 13 in appendix for Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet). Working in their groups, students will analyze and discuss important symbols, attitudes, statements, and opinions expressed through their cartoon. As students record their observations on the political cartoon analysis worksheet, encourage them to think about how these themes connect to the concept of a Universe of Obligation.

*Note: If students need background information on the Holocaust or the Darfur genocide, summaries can be found via the following links:

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>

<https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-in-darfur-guide/>

Once the groups have completed their worksheet, have each group share out their responses with the larger group.

4. How can individuals make a difference in their communities? How are communities transformed when individuals expanded their universes to include other or advocate on behalf of issues they are passionate about?

Activity: “Survival in Sarajevo: Friendship in a Time of War” Film

<https://www.centropa.org/centropa-cinema/survival-sarajevo-friendship-time-war>

The film *Survival in Sarajevo: Friendship in a Time of War* chronicles the courageous actions of every day people in a time of war. During the Bosnian war (1992-1995), the Jewish community of Sarajevo created a humanitarian aid agency known as “La Benevolencija” (the Ladino word for “Good Will”) inside the city's synagogue. Throughout the three year conflict, La Benevolencija provided the besieged people of Sarajevo with shelter, food, and medical care; created activities and programs for children; delivered messages through the radio and postal service; and coordinated rescue convoys out of the city. Many people heard about La Benevolencija's

community work and were inspired by their actions – very soon their Muslim, Croat, and Serbian friends and neighbors joined them in their efforts.

*Note: If students need background information on the Bosnian War, visit Centropa’s “Survival in Sarajevo” webpage (see the link above) and select the “Study Guide” tab, which can be found underneath the film. Each of the six tabs provides a brief overview of the conflict and how individuals were impacted throughout this time.

As students view the 12:23 minute film, ask them to consider the following questions: Who were the Upstanders – individuals who take action and help in a time of need – in this story? What motivated them to help? What were the different ways individuals offered assistance support, encouragement, and compassion in a time of need? What can this tell about what Upstander behavior looks like? How did their actions transform the lives of others and that of their community?

After students have viewed the film, provide each student with a blank piece of paper and ask them to respond to the following questions: What can we learn from this story (an important message or key take away)? How can I expand my universe and become an Upstander in my school, within my community, or in the world today?

Give students 1-2 minutes to write down their responses (ask students to write their responses anonymously) and report out as a class using the “Snowball Toss” Teaching Strategy: Ask students to form to a large circle with everyone facing inward/toward each other. Instruct students to crumple up their piece of paper into a snowball shape and toss the “snowball” in the air (note: you can repeat the toss several times and/or have students toss the “snowballs” around the classroom). To share out, ask everyone to grab a “snowball,” open up the paper, and read aloud – one by one – what their peers wrote.

EXPLAIN

Why do people care? What motivates individuals to help and take action? What character traits shape or influence their identity as Upstanders?

Activity: Identity Chart

In small groups, have each group research a Rescuer from the Holocaust and ask them to create an Identity Chart about their Upstander.

Direct students to the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous' "Stories of Rescue" webpage that features the stories of rescuers during the Holocaust:
<https://jfr.org/rescuer-stories/>

Students can create their identity chart on chart paper using the following format as a guide:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/image/sample-identity-chart?backlink=https%3A/www.facinghistory.org/resource-library%3Fsearch%3Didentity%20chart>

When creating their identity charts, ask students to include background information about their rescuer, character traits, and important quotes from their story. For additional information on the "Identity Chart" Teaching Strategy, please visit:
<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/identity-charts>

After students have completed their assign, have each group share their identity chart and the story of their rescuer with the larger group.

ELABORATION

To make a modern day connection to Upstanders in our communities and in the world, assign students an Upstander Research Project that explores the advocacy work of an individual or organization that is promoting human rights within a community/region or on a global scale today.

Activity: Upstander Research Project

Working in small groups or on their own, students will research an individual or an organization that is advocating for and/or supporting human rights on a local or global scale. Suggested topics include: the environment (climate change, habitat conservation, pollution, chemicals and human health, sustainability, water quality, etc.); efforts to reduce inequality (due to race, gender, orientation, age, religion, etc.); prevention or resolution of violence (war, conflict, genocide, etc.); migration (refugees, immigrants, borders, etc.).

Upstander Research Projects can take various forms such as: a PowerPoint presentation, an oral presentation, a poster board display, a fine arts project (artwork, poetry, play, video, or song that includes an artist statement to explain the concept behind the project and the message of the piece), etc.

Each project should include information on the individual/organization: background information on the person or group; the mission or goals of their advocacy work; how they are taking action on this issue; and the impact of their work either on a local or

world wide level – i.e. major accomplishments or milestones they have reached. It is also recommended that students include a list of three actions they can take in their school and/or community to support the advocacy work of their Upstander (encourage students to think creatively – what can we do besides donating and raising money to help support their efforts?).

EVALUATION

Students will present their Upstander Research Projects to the entire class.