



A Bill of Human Rights: by Methow Valley Elementary School First and Second Grade Students

Facilitator: Jana Mohr Lone

Jana Mohr Lone is the director of the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing philosophy into the lives of young people, and an affiliate assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Washington.



During the school year 2001–2002, I facilitated weekly philosophy sessions with three first/second grade multi-age classes. During this time, we spent two weeks talking about human rights. In the first session we began by illustrating various rights (the right to live, the right to practice one's religion, etc.) and discussing their relative importance in small groups. In our second session I read to the students *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: An Adaptation for Children*, by Ruth Rocha and Otavio Roth, and together they created a list of the rights they believed every human being should have.

The students agreed that the first right on the list, the right to be treated equally, was the most important right to them. They disagreed about some of the other rights on the list, and we had spirited discussions about both the right to listen and not to talk (number 12) and the right to read (number 26). Some of the children felt strongly that these were not rights, but things you had to do, while others saw them as things they wanted and had the right to do. As part of this process, we spent some time trying to draw a distinction between rights and responsibilities.

Methow Valley Elementary School: First and Second Grade's Bill of Human Rights

1. The right to be treated equally.
2. The right to have clothes to wear.
3. The right to go to school.
4. The right to practice your religion.
5. The right to think for yourself.
6. The right to go to a doctor if you get sick.
7. The right to live.
8. The right to a home.
9. The right to enough food to eat.
10. The right to respect the flag.
11. The right to love each other.
12. The right to listen and not to talk.
13. The right to study what you want.
14. The right to have a family.
15. The right to have others listen to you.
16. The right to do the things you want to do.
17. The right not to be pushed around.
18. The right to enough money to take care of yourself.
19. The right to sit down.
20. The right to have a bed.
21. The right to be yourself.
22. The right to plan.
23. The right to rest.
24. The right to be free.
25. The right to have children.
26. The right to read.
27. The right to be safe from harm.
28. The right to have a pet.

Created by the students in Kay Lee's 1st/2nd grade class: Joseph Carey, Rozzie Christopherson, Brandon Cox, Cody Cupp, Chad Desjardins, Jessica Dominguez, Samantha Eiffert, Hunter Harrop, Joey Hausman, Mikey Michael, Saleya Miller, Riley Moe, Jacqueline O'Keefe, Buck Prib, Rhianon Toal, Briana White, Cricket Whittaker, Aaron Wiley, and Tommy Zbyszewski.

Declaration of Human Rights: by Whitman Middle School Sixth Grade Students

Facilitator: David A. Shapiro

David A. Shapiro is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the University of Washington, whose work explores questions in ethics and moral education. He is the education director of the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children.



In two sixth grade classes at Whitman Middle School in Seattle, Washington, we spent three class sessions philosophizing about rights. In the first session, we wondered about what rights are and who (or what) has them. This led us into a discussion of animal rights and—through a few thought experiments and the use of part of Mat Lipman's philosophical novel, *Lisa*—an exploration of the question, "Is it possible to respect the rights of animals and still eat them?"

In the second session, we wondered what rights look like and which rights are most fundamental. (To do that we used the "What Do Rights Look Like?" exercise described in the last issue of *Questions*.)

In the third session, we explored the idea of Universal Human Rights. Students read and discussed the Dr. Seuss classic, *Yertle the Turtle*, as a way to begin wondering about what rights all beings everywhere ought to have. We then read the first 10 or so articles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With those in mind, students worked in groups of three or four to develop their own lists of universal human rights.

Following is a combined list from both classes (about 56 students total) of the rights students identified as belonging in a declaration of human rights.

Whitman Middle School: Sixth Grade's Declaration of Human Rights



- The right to free speech.
- The right to have fun.
- The right not to do your homework.
- The right to read a book, even if it's banned, anytime you want.
- The right to a fair argument, with no excuses like "because I'm so-and-so."
- The right to bring pets to school.
- The right to shave our heads.
- The right to practice any kind of religion.
- The right to your own opinion.
- The right to sing and listen to music when you want to.
- The right to wear any appropriate clothes you want.
- The right to protest.
- The right to have friends of your choice.
- The right to be challenged in school.
- The right to demand that state lawmakers take their standardized tests before we do.
- The right to pass notes in class.
- The right to be heard without interruption.
- The right to be whoever you want when you grow up.
- The right to not know what you're doing.
- The right to believe in anything you want.
- The right to own property.
- The right to eat whatever you want.
- The right to an education even if you can't pay for it.
- The right to practice any kind of religion.
- The right to take your shoes off in class.