

## PURPOSE

To introduce human dignity as the unique value of human persons

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Explain that they are persons with human dignity.
2. Personally recognize their own dignity.

## MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- *Dear You* letters (see Materials [for Preparatory Work])
- lined paper for letter-writing
- Supplementary materials:
  - *Life without limb-its, Daily Mail* article  
(<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1196755/The-astonishing-story-man-born-arms- legs--world-famous-swimmer-surfer-footballer.html>)
  - *Motivational speaker Nick Vujicic on the power of staying positive, Channel NewsAsia* video  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=707VD48BuOs>)
  - *Mix & Match* worksheet (see Materials)

## VOCABULARY

- **human dignity:** the universal, intrinsic, and inalienable value of human persons
- **universal:** every one of us has dignity
- **intrinsic:** our dignity is part of who we are; it is with us our entire life
- **inalienable:** dignity cannot be given to us or taken away from us

## PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Introduce the course: This course will help us answer four questions.

Write on the board:

- (i) Who are we?
- (ii) What can we do?
- (iii) Who should we become?
- (iv) Why should we become that kind of person?

Everyone in this classroom is a human being. We all know this. But do we all know what a human being is? Understanding the human person is essential to knowing ourselves, to knowing others, and to knowing the best way to act. Over the course of these lessons, you will learn what it is to be a human person, how you can become an excellent human person, and why this will lead to a fulfilled life.

**Step 2:** Begin with a hook. Hand each student their own *Dear You* letter—a letter from their parent, another family member, a teacher, etc., that describes to them their own value and dignity. Give students some time to read and think about the letters that they have received.

Ask:

- How do you know the letter writer? What is your relationship with him/her?
- How does your letter make you feel?

Students could journal the answers to these questions in their notes.

**Step 3:** Introduce human dignity, the core concept of the course: What we experienced in this activity is our human dignity—our value as a human person. Every single person has this value, just because he or she is human!

Explain: We come to know we are valuable through the love we receive from other people. This is how we first come to recognize our own dignity. Similarly, it is through loving another that we are first made to recognize the dignity of others. When we love someone, we are not projecting our feelings onto them, rather we are responding to what is truly valuable and lovable about them. People are valuable in themselves. Our job is not to create their value but recognize and respect it.

Teach the three prongs to dignity and write them on the board:

- **universal:** every person has dignity, regardless of abilities, status, etc.
- **intrinsic:** our dignity is with us our entire life; it is part of who we are
- **inalienable:** dignity cannot be given to us or taken away from us

Explain: Human dignity helps us answer the question, “Who are we?” We are human persons who each have dignity.

We have this value always because we are human. All humans share it.

What is important also is that we can demonstrate our dignity in the ways we act and the choices we make. We can live more or less excellent lives—we can live lives of respect, or lives of disrespect, for the dignity of the person. We will learn about this in future lessons. For now, we can say that the most excellent person is the one who lives his or her life respecting human dignity in each of his or her actions.

One way that we can do this is return other's respect for us! Let's take the time to write those who wrote us a *Dear You* letter, answering for them the questions: Why do you love this person? Why is he or she valuable to you? What makes him or her special? This letter should be hand-written on lined paper.

**Step 4:** Review the concepts taught.

**Ask:**

- Do I have dignity? [yes]
- Does [student] have dignity? [yes]
- Do rocks have dignity? [no]
- Does an independent adult have dignity? [yes]
- Does a helpless, dependent baby have dignity? [yes]
- Do dogs have dignity? [no] \*
- Does a business have dignity? [no]
- Does a person with a disability have dignity? [yes]
- Does committing a crime remove one's dignity? [no]

What does it mean to say that dignity is inviolable? [dignity can't be taken away]

What group of people does not have dignity? [trick question! There isn't one]

\*While we love our pets, they are not human beings and so do not have human dignity. However, they do have value and ought to be loved, cared for, and respected. Harming animals in any way is a very bad way to use the freedom we possess as human beings.

**Step 5:** Summarize: Today we have begun to answer the question, “Who are we?” the first of the important questions posed to us in this class. We are human persons who each have dignity, the value that makes each of us special, just because we are human. We all share it, it cannot be given to us or taken from us, and it is with us for the entirety of our lives! Understanding that we have this dignity is important to understanding what we can do and who we can become.

## FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK

Ask students to mail or give the dignity letter they wrote in class. (If necessary, students should complete their dignity letters at home.)

## SUPPLEMENTS

**Supplement 1:** Summarize the newspaper story about Nick Vujicic, “the man without limbs,” and explain that he shows how human dignity is a value always with us, a value not limited by looks or ability; even in being physically incapable in certain ways, he is fundamentally human and his life therefore valuable. (An alternative would be to watch the *Motivational speaker Nick Vujicic on the power of staying positive*, Channel NewsAsia video.)

**Supplement 2:** Raise awareness of the dignity of the person on the level of the classroom. Hand each student a copy of the *Mix & Match* worksheet. Each student should roam about the classroom asking other students if they fit the clues given. So, for example, they should ask questions like “do you have more than two siblings?”, “is your favorite color red?”, etc. If the answer is yes, they should write down the name of the person in the blank. After someone’s name has been used for one of the blanks, it cannot be used again. Give the students 10 minutes for this and then reconvene the class.

Ask:

- How does this activity make you feel?
- Did anything about what you learned surprise you?
- What are some things that you all share? Some things that make you different?

Explain: Human beings are similar and different in many ways. However, because we are all humans, one thing we all share is human dignity.

**Supplement 3:** Bring the experience of the dignity of the person to the level of the student’s self-reflection. Ask them to imagine themselves looking in a mirror, then to write down a list of things that another person couldn’t know about them just by looking at them—qualities of their own individual uniqueness: two experiences from their past that have made them who they are today; two things they hope/dream for; two people they love; two things they find beautiful.

Model part of your own answer to students before they begin. Upon completion, ask:

- What are some examples of things that other people can’t know about us?
- Why do you think people can’t know these things about you unless you tell them?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Mix & Match

**Directions:** Find a **different** person for each clue in the list below.

**1. a person with whom you share your birthday month**

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. a person who's visited another country**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. a person with more than two siblings**

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. a person whose favorite color is the same as yours**

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. a person who's completed a puzzle**

\_\_\_\_\_

**6. a person who's taken dance classes**

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. a person who was born in another state (or country)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. a person who speaks a second language**

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. a person named after a relative**

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. a person who's lived in more than one house/apartment**

\_\_\_\_\_

**11. a person who loves reading**

\_\_\_\_\_

**12. a person who loves pizza**

\_\_\_\_\_

**13. a person who eats cereal for breakfast**

\_\_\_\_\_