

## Lesson 8: Friendship and Solidarity

### PURPOSE

To motivate students to practice solidarity by pursuing excellence together as a group.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand solidarity as the group pursuit of excellence and acting in a way that respects the dignity of each person.
2. Recognize the Liberian women as a historical example of solidarity.

### VOCABULARY

- Solidarity: a group of people unified in the pursuit of excellence for themselves and others

### MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Escape from a Deserted Island Game
- [Video](#): The Wisdom of Geese
- [Video](#): Advertisement on Solidarity
- Ordinary Women End Extraordinary Violence
- Supplementary Material video: [Trailer](#) for the Liberian Documentary *Pray the Devil back to Hell*

### PROCEDURE

**Step 1:** Review the previous lesson. Recall the definition of creativity and how it is used in peoples' lives. Reflect together with the students on how they used their power of creativity in their classroom skits.

**Step 2:** Play the game, *Escape from a Deserted Island*. Have each student write down on a piece of paper, one item that they would bring with them if they were stranded on a deserted island. Then, ask each student to think about and write down how they would escape the deserted island by only using this one item.

Divide the class into groups of four to five students. Give each group five minutes to think about and discuss how they would combine the items each one brought with them in order to escape from the island. Encourage students to be ready to explain their particular scenarios of escape.

After the groups finish, ask them to share their escape strategies with the class and respond to the following questions:

- » How did you collaborate to find the best possible escape strategy?
- » Was it easier to find a good strategy together with others rather than on your own?
- » Did having more items (i.e. four or five) increase the possibilities for devising a good strategy?

After hearing students' comments, highlight that in the second step of the exercise the students needed to use teamwork and collaboration to accomplish the task. Working together with others on a common mission to escape the deserted island certainly increased their chances of devising a successful escape strategy compared to when they had to do it alone. This is not just because having more items increased their possibilities of escape, but also because working together allowed them to jointly come up with new ideas and to help each other accomplish the task.

**Step 3:** Emphasize how the exercise shows us that the human person is a social being. All of our powers, and especially the uniquely human powers of thinking and choosing, are creatively enhanced when exercised in collaboration with others. A person cannot fully flourish in isolation from others. Pursuing excellence and a meaningful life is only possible in relation with others.

Recall that in grade 7, the class learned about friendships of excellence. Write the vocabulary definition on the board:

Friendship of excellence: friendship based on pursuing excellence for oneself and others

A friendship of excellence is a relationship where friends learn to respect one another's dignity and pursue excellence together. This experience of friendship between two people extends to other people through the principle of solidarity. Because the human person is a social being, it means that we ought to behave in a certain way. If a person only pursues selfish interests without thinking about how it will affect others, they will end up hurting both others and themselves. Since persons are connected in common humanity, what one person does affects others around them.

Show the [Video: The Wisdom of Geese](#). Explain that the video illustrates solidarity at work in the natural world and how each goose contributes to the uplifting of the whole. Another short video, playfully depicts the power of solidarity in standing up to an “enemy” as well as coming together to creatively overcome challenges. Show the short [Video Advertisement on Solidarity](#).

Likewise, alone, one can only achieve so much, but together, people, too, can achieve great things. The principle of solidarity enables people to promote and respect human dignity and strive for excellence not just on an individual but also on a group or societal level. Solidarity is the principle that makes the unified pursuit of excellence a reality. Write the definition of solidarity on the board:

Solidarity: a group of people unified in the pursuit of excellence for themselves and others

**Step 4:** In this lesson, the class will learn about an example of solidarity through a group of women who pursued and achieved excellence for their country, together. To learn about this example, divide the students into groups and provide them with the text, [Ordinary Women End Extraordinary Violence](#). This reading looks at the example of the women of the African nation of Liberia who, through their action and solidarity, managed to bring peace to their country, which was for many years torn apart by civil war.

After students have finished reading, discuss the associated questions with the text as a class, with the Teacher’s Answer Key provided.

**Step 5:** Summarize. Recall the definition of solidarity and the importance of pursuing excellence on a group level. Highlight the Liberian women as an example of a group who pursued and achieved excellence together.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Watch the trailer for a documentary about the Liberian Women. The trailer shows images of the war, and the young boys that were recruited into the army. The teacher should review the trailer in advance to decide if this content is appropriate for the class or not.

Trailer for the documentary: [Pray the Devil back to Hell](#).

## Ordinary Women End Extraordinary Violence

The west African nation of Liberia was founded by freed American slaves. The country's coat of arms declares, "The love of liberty brought me here."

However, in the last years of the 20th century and the early years of this one, Liberia was anything but a land of liberty. Drug-fueled militias maimed and killed civilians. Government and rebel forces alike raped with impunity. Hundreds of thousands fled. Others were trapped by the unending violence, unable to flee. As one Liberian woman later remembered, "My children had been hungry and afraid for their entire lives."

In spring 2003, a group of women decided to try to end the conflict once and for all. Dressed all in white, hundreds of them sat by the roadside, on the route taken daily by President Charles Taylor, rebel leader-turned-president. The president's motorcade swept past, slowing down only briefly. But the women returned, day after day. In pouring rain and blazing sunshine alike, they danced and prayed. In the words of Comfort Lamptey, author of a book on the Liberian peace movement of those years, the women were "fighting for the right to be seen, heard, and counted."

Taylor mocked the women for "embarrassing themselves." Still, though, the protests gained momentum. Religious leaders—imams and bishops alike—spoke out in support of the women's demands. Radio stations began reporting sympathetically on the roadside protests. Leymah Gbowee, one of the protest leaders, declared in front of the cameras, "We are taking this stand because we believe tomorrow our children will ask us: 'Mama, what was your role during the crisis?'"

Pressed on all sides, Taylor agreed to talk. He met with the women's leaders in the presidential palace. Peace talks with the warring factions began in Ghana a few weeks later.

It soon became clear, however, that the talks were going nowhere. Even as the warlords basked in the comfort of their luxury hotel, they worked the phones, directing renewed violence at home in the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

The women decided that enough was enough. Determined to focus on the human cost of the war, they barricaded delegates into the room where the talks were taking place. One of the negotiators, Nigerian General Abdulsalami Abubakar, remembered later: "They said that nobody will come out till that peace agreement was signed." As described in the 2008 documentary film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, one warlord tried unsuccessfully to kick his way out of the room. Others tried (and failed) to escape through the windows.

The men with guns agreed to talk seriously at last. A peace deal was struck. Charles Taylor went into exile. International peacekeepers arrived in Monrovia, greeted by cheering crowds. In 2006, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became Liberia's first peacefully elected president, Africa's first woman leader.

Johnson-Sirleaf said: "It was ordinary Liberians who reclaimed the country and demanded peace."

**QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:**

- How did the Liberian women practice solidarity in this example? What was an excellent aim that they were pursuing?
- Would it have been possible to achieve peace in Liberia if the women had not collaborated and worked together to achieve this aim?

**Ordinary Women End Extraordinary Violence – Teacher’s Answer Key:**

1. The Liberian women decided to try to end the conflict in their country once and for all. Dressed all in white, hundreds of them sat by the roadside, and decided to protest against violence. The excellent aim they were pursuing was stopping the violence and achieving peace in their country.
2. Achieving peace in Liberia was only possible because a critical group of people worked together in practice of solidarity to achieve an excellent aim, which was peace. One person can only do so much, but if everyone works together, then great things are possible on a larger scale. The Liberian women understood that and joined forces in peaceful protests to end violence in their country. Finally, through persistence and determination they achieved their goal – a peace deal between opposing sides.
3. This example shows that pursuing and achieving excellence on a group level is not just reserved for extraordinary individuals, but that ordinary people can achieve excellent things if they work together. Ordinary Liberian women, and not the country’s leaders and warlords, managed to achieve precisely this. As Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf who became Liberia’s president, noted: “It was ordinary Liberians who reclaimed the country and demanded peace.”