

Lesson 7: Habits of Excellence: Justice

PURPOSE

To help students live justly in their daily life and distinguish between justice and injustice in the world around them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand what the excellence of justice is and what are its characteristics.
2. Determine what is just and unjust in concrete examples of foreign aid.

VOCABULARY

- Habits of excellence: behaviors acquired through regular practice which help people achieve excellence *as persons*
- Justice: a habit of treating everyone as equal in humanity and giving everyone their due

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Seeds, Scarcity and Coercion
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Selected Articles
- Just or Unjust worksheet
- [Video](#): 80+ Indigenous women allege coerced sterilization in class-action lawsuit | CBC The Weekly

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall the definition of solidarity and the common good. Recall how Tamara Tan Azaña and Aliah Dimaporo exemplify solidarity in their work to promote human dignity.

Step 2: Recall the definition of habits of excellence from Grade 9. Write the definition on the board.

Habits of excellence: behaviors acquired through regular practice which help people achieve excellence as persons

Highlight that these are the excellences of a person *as person*, or of the person as whole. Some of the most important habits of excellence are: self-determination, courage, wisdom, justice, truthfulness, kindness, generosity, humility.

Recall some of the characteristics of the habits of excellence:

They lead to excellence of the person as a *person*: they do not have to do so much with being excellent in some particular field (e.g. sports, music etc.), but rather, with developing an excellent character. As excellences of one's whole person, they are reflected in all aspects of one's life.

They can be acquired through practice and learning: one is not born with habits of excellence, they are acquired through the course of a lifetime. As one practices them, more and more they become natural to us, achieving them with less effort.

They are all connected: developing one habit of excellence develops the others as well. As a result, wise people tend to be more humble, people with self-determination are more courageous.

Step 3: Explain that in this lesson, the class will learn about the excellence of justice. Justice is different from other habits of excellence (self-determination, courage, wisdom) since it is always a factor in our dealings with other people. For this reason, one can say that justice is a social habit of excellence.

To introduce the nature of justice, ask the students to recall the image of Lady Justice. Lady Justice is always wearing a blindfold. Why is that? Why do we say that justice is blind? With regard to what is justice blind?

After listening to students' comments, explain that the statement "justice is blind" means that everyone should be treated equally before the law, that is, that the law should be blind with regard to considerations such as one's wealth, race, sex, religion, etc.. Implicit in the idea that justice is blind is the argument that the law should treat everyone on the basis of the facts important for and relevant to the case (for example, that we are all equal in dignity and rights) and disregard all other factors which are not relevant.

The Institutes of Justinian is the sixth-century codification of Roman law ordered by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I. In his book, Justinian gives a definition of justice, stating, “Justice is the set and constant purpose which gives to every man his due.”

In the context of this curriculum, this means that fundamentally, everyone should be given their due on the basis of their humanity, that is, equal in value and human rights. This is noted in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR): “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, **justice** and peace in the world [...]”

Write the definition of justice on the board:

Justice: a habit of treating everyone as equal in humanity and giving everyone their due

Step 4: In this lesson, the class discussed that the definition of justice involves giving everyone their due and treating all human beings as equals. Aristotle argues that justice means treating equal things equally, and unequal things unequally. He implies that injustice (or discrimination) means treating equal things unequally, and unequal things equally. For example, if two students show very different levels of knowledge on an exam, they should not receive the same grade. Or, if a person works in a job that requires more specific knowledge and skills, a job that is more dangerous, or one that is in higher demand, it is not unjust that they receive greater pay than someone who works in a job that requires less specific knowledge and skills, is less dangerous, and is not in high demand.

We can conclude that different things should be treated equally if they are equal (or at least very similar) in some *relevant and important principle*. Justice should be blind to everything except this important principle. For example, in granting human rights to people, the only relevant principle is whether or not someone is a human being. In all other aspects (race, skin color, sex, religious or political orientation, size, weight, age, etc.) justice should be blind. But, for a teacher giving a grade on an exam, the relevant principle is someone’s knowledge, not whether they are human beings.

Divide students into groups and have each group read [Seeds, Scarcity and Coercion](#).

Once groups have finished reading, provide each student with a printout of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Selected Articles](#) to help them fill in the table in the [Just or Unjust](#) worksheet. For each example listed in the table, students should determine whether it is just or unjust and identify relevant Articles to support their claim. They can refer both to the Preamble or to certain Articles.

After students finish their work, ask them to share their conclusions with the rest of the class. Lead the class with the Answer Key provided in order to help students evaluate each example correctly.

Step 5: To highlight that unjust practices regarding sterilization and population control continue today, play the [video](#); 80+ Indigenous women allege coerced sterilization in class-action lawsuit | CBC The Weekly.

After watching the video, ask the students to explain in their own words why the practice of sterilizing Indigenous women is unjust, and which relevant principles or Articles from the UDHR this practice violates. Ask them to substantiate their answers with the examples from the video.

After hearing the comments from students, highlight that this practice violates the right to informed consent which requires States to ensure women and men have “access to specific educational information” including “the right to be fully informed, by properly trained personnel, of their options in agreeing to treatment or research, including likely benefits and potential adverse effects of proposed procedures and available alternatives.” The testimony of the woman in the video who explicitly refuses to have the tubal ligation, and yet is told she will not be allowed to leave the hospital until the procedure is performed, underscores the coercion, in violation of the right to informed consent. Other women were lied to that the sterilization process could be reversed. All this is unjust and against human dignity and the principle of informed consent.

Step 6: Note that the video highlights that the Criminal code of Canada did not criminalize forced sterilization. As a follow-up, ask the students what this tells us regarding justice and the law. Is justice the same as law? Is every law just?

After listening to the students’ comments, emphasize that not all laws are just. For example, slavery was legal, extermination camps in Nazi Germany were legal, and racial segregation was legal in many countries. Many of these coerced sterilizations occurred as recently as 2017. Justice is not the same as law, although law ought to be just.

Step 7: Summarize. Recall the definition of justice. Emphasize that justice means that different things should be treated equally if they are equal (or at least very similar) in some *relevant and important principle* and that justice should be blind to everything *except* this important principle. Recall different population control practices mentioned in the lesson and emphasize once more why they are just or unjust.

Seeds, Scarcity and Coercion

This essay looks at a period of agricultural ingenuity known as the ‘Green Revolution’ and at the same time, the totalitarian push to forcefully limit reproduction in India. The purpose of this article is not to endorse any agricultural methods of the Green Revolution nor its leaders per se, but to affirm that person-centered solutions can and do creatively meet the world’s needs.

In 1944, agronomist and plant pathologist Dr. Norman Borlaug joined the Rockefeller Foundation on a project in Mexico, focusing on soil development, plant pathology, maize and wheat production. The work was tedious and back-breaking, checking each individual plant for signs of rust: a plant disease caused by parasitic fungi. But after many trials and errors, Borlaug and his team successfully bred over 6,000 varieties of disease-resistant wheat. When the project began, the country was importing sixty percent of its wheat. By 1956, Mexico became self-sufficient. By 1963, Mexico was not only a self-sufficient wheat producer but an exporter.

In a move set in motion by renowned plant geneticist Dr. Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, Borlaug was invited to visit India in 1963. At the time, alarmist concerns about India’s growing population continued to gather momentum. US President Lyndon B. Johnson refused food aid to India until it agreed to incentivize sterilization.⁶⁸

In 1965 population control emissary, Paul Ehrlich and his family took their infamous cab ride in Delhi: “People eating, people washing... People, people, people, people.”⁶⁹ (It is of note that the population of Delhi was about 2.8 million, and the population of Paris was about 8 million⁷⁰ at the time and there are few published expressions of alarm how “alive with people” the streets of Paris were.) The experience only cemented Ehrlich’s belief that population control must be enforced: “by compulsion, if voluntary methods fail.”⁷¹ Ehrlich even brought up the idea of adding “temporary sterilants to the water supply or staple foods” and supported “government mandated sterilization”⁷².

Borlaug and Swaminathan continued their work with local farmers and by 1968, India’s yield had grown so much that schools had to be used as temporary granaries. By the time Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* saw its 1971 edition go to print, Norman Borlaug had already won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work revolutionizing agricultural productivity in the developing world.

68 Connelly, Matthew. Controlling Passions. *The Wilson Quarterly* 32, no. 3. 2008.

69 Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*. New York, *Ballantine Books*, 1968.

70 Mann, Charles: *The Book That Incited a World Wide Fear of Overpopulation*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, 2018, available at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/book-incited-worldwide-fear-overpopulation-180967499/> (last visited Nov 28, 2022).

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

India was self-sufficient in all grains by 1974.

And yet, in 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi* invoked a National Emergency. One reason stated was a need for rapid economic development and upliftment of those in poverty. Once the Emergency was imposed, the Prime Minister had the right to amend the Constitution – and this gave the central government the right to execute family planning programs. The central government mobilized the state political leadership and took decisive actions, setting up camps and sterilization targets. In the capital city of Delhi access to basic amenities became dependent on proof of a sterilization certificate. For many of the city's poorest inhabitants, the choice was sterilization or homelessness. Western countries continued to back the sterilization program; during the Emergency, World Bank head Robert McNamara remarked, "At long last, India is moving to effectively address its population problem."⁷³

In 1994, the United Nations Environment Program made a joint award of its prestigious Sasakawa Prize to Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan and Paul Ehrlich. Had it escaped the judges' notice that Ehrlich had made numerous false predictions and undermined the very work of Swaminathan? When asked about sharing the award with Ehrlich, Swaminathan only laughed and said, "it puzzled me"⁷⁴.

Today, despite population increase from 1975, global hunger is still on the decline. According to the UN, the global percentage of undernourished people has fallen to 8.9 percent. There is no lack of food, only a surplus of corrupt interests getting in the way of just distribution.

* No relation to Mahatma Gandhi.

73 Matthew Connelly, *Population and Development Review*. Vol. 32, No. 4. December 2006.

74 Gardner, *Future Babble: Why Expert Predictions Fail – And Why We Believe Them Anyway*, Random House, 2010.

Just or Unjust?

For each example from the text, written in the table below:

- Identify whether it is just or unjust.
- Provide one or more relevant principles from the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Selected Articles](#) to support your reasoning.
- Explain in your own words why you identified the example as just or unjust.

EXAMPLE	JUST OR UNJUST?	RELEVANT PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION
US President Lyndon B. Johnson refusing food aid to India until it agreed to incentivize sterilization.			
Enforcing population control by compulsion promoted by Paul Ehrlich.			
Adding temporary sterilants to the water supply or staple foods promoted by Paul Ehrlich.			
Borlaug and Swaminathan working with local farmers in India to increase India's food production.			
India's government conditioning basic amenities on having a proof of a sterilization certificate.			

Just or Unjust? – Answer Key for the teacher

Note that for each example there can be multiple relevant principles listed from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Selected Articles.

EXAMPLE	JUST OR UNJUST?	RELEVANT PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION
US President Lyndon B. Johnson refusing food aid to India until it agreed to incentivize sterilization.	Unjust	<p>Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.</p> <p>Article 12: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family...</p> <p>Article 16, 1: Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family....</p> <p>Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security...</p>	<p>This action is unjust because it is coercion (economic).</p> <p>Coercion is a denial of the subjecthood of the person and instead treats persons as objects that can be manipulated. This is a violation of multiple Articles and freedoms. Through this action, the US subjected Indian citizens to inhuman treatment and punishment, interfering in the sovereignty of another nation by violating human dignity and basic rights of conscience.</p>
Enforcing population control by compulsion promoted by Paul Ehrlich.	Unjust	<p>Article 16 (see above)</p> <p>Article 25, 2: Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.</p>	<p>This proposal is unjust as it is coercion (by force). It violates the right to found a family. By proposing to enforce the number of children a woman or family is allowed to have, this proposal also violates Article 25, regarding the protection afforded to motherhood and the family.</p>

<p>Adding temporary sterilants to the water supply or staple foods promoted by Paul Ehrlich.</p>	<p>Unjust</p>	<p>Art. 25, 1: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...</p>	<p>This action is unjust because it is coercion (by force). This proposal violates numerous rights, including the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of each person and their family. The outcome of adding “temporary” sterilants to the water is potentially hazardous to health, violating Article 5, “subjecting persons to inhuman and degrading treatment...” in the name of meeting population control targets.</p>
<p>Borlaug and Swaminathan working with local farmers in India to increase India’s food production.</p>	<p>Just</p>	<p>Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Article 22 (see above) Article 25, 1. (see above)</p>	<p>This action is just because it is an expression of solidarity and friendship. Using reason and conscience, their efforts increased food security. Thanks to the vision of Swaminathan, assistance from Borlaug and the dedication of local farmers, India gained self-sufficiency in grains.</p>
<p>India’s government conditioning basic amenities on having a proof of a sterilization certificate.</p>	<p>Unjust</p>	<p>Articles 19-23 Article 25, 1 (see above)</p>	<p>This action is unjust as the basic amenities of each country should be available to all citizens. Regardless of status (sterilized or not), access to basic amenities is a fundamental right. Also, refusing access to cultural institutions violates the right of citizens to freely participate in the life of the community.</p>

Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Selected Articles

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

[...]

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

[...]

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. [...]

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence. [...]

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security [...].
2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. [...]

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.