

Lesson on First Nations Communities and Human Rights Through Shannen's Dream

Minds On

Chart on board: Rights | Wants

Discussion on what is a right and what is a want?

Explain to students they will be divided into groups and each group will receive a handful of rights and needs. For example, nutritional food, housing, education, iPod, vacation, etc. Students will discuss each image and decide whether it should be classified as a right or a want. Students will then be asked to place their rights/wants on the board under their respective categories. Discuss these selections when everyone is complete.

Introducing Attawapiskat

Discuss: Where do you think children don't have these rights? Why? (This will give students an opportunity to use critical thinking to justify their thinking, to unveil bias', debunk myths, and understand the media's role in how we develop our understanding about other countries and cultures.)

Tell students you are going to describe a community and they have to guess what country you're talking about. (The community will be Attawapiskat in Canada.) Country will be written on a piece of paper and folded in an envelope. At the end of the lesson, one student will be selected to unveil the piece of paper.

When describing the community, talk about which rights the community of Attawapiskat has. For the rights the people of Attawapiskat do not have, physically take away the rights/wants from the board to demonstrate what is lacking. For example, right to housing, right to education.

Select one student to open the envelope and unveil the community is in Canada.

Circle Discussion with talking stick. Were the students surprised that the community was in Canada, their own country? Why or why not?

After discussion, have students write in their journal, or a sheet of paper, how they felt when they learned the community was in Canada, and why they felt that way.

Introduce the UN Declaration of Child Rights

Minds on Discussion: When you learned that the community we were talking about was in Canada, how did that make you feel? Are these rights protected? By who?

Introduce the UN: It was written in 1989 and came into force in 1990. All the countries in the world have agreed to it except the USA and Somalia. All the countries of the world try to make the law work. These rights for children are about what children are allowed to do, and what the people responsible for children have to do to make sure they are happy, healthy and safe.

UN Activity: Students are organized in groups. Each group will receive 3 Rights from the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Students will have time to discuss the rights, and come up with reasons why these rights are important. Students will create a chart to organize their thoughts. Students will then present their rights to the class.

Introduce Shannen’s Dream

Show students video on Shannen’s Dream. Hand out a Mind Map for students to complete while watching. Ensure the handout helps students organize their thoughts, questions, and the information they receive from the video.

Circle discussion with talking stick: What did you notice about this community? What were the Big Ideas? What questions do you have? Do you think other First Nations communities are similar?

Watch video again. Then take up video organizers. Introduce students to other First Nations reserves. Possible topics include sustainability, mining companies, drinking water, housing, health care, and education.

Compare Attawapiskat with Your School

Chart on board: Students of Attawapiskat vs. Students of your school.

Students will be put into groups and given a list of the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Students will create a chart like the one on the board, and indicate which rights each group of students have, and which they do not have. Students will then present their charts to the class.

Circle discussion on fairness, justice, and introduce idea of call to action. What have the children of Attawapiskat done to fight for their right to education? What have children from outside of Attawapiskat done to help advocate for this cause? Brainstorm ways in which we can help.

Persuasive Letter Writing

Using their first Journal entry, their Shannen’s Dream Video organizer, and the charts created by the class so far, have a minds on discussion about what students have learned regarding child rights, Attawapiskat, other First Nations communities, and a call to action. Brainstorm ideas on the board.

Introduce a model letter to the Prime Minister on overhead. Ask individual students to read each section of the letter out loud, so that students are participating in the process of understanding letter templates. Hand out papers for students to write their own letters. Students will record what they have learned, their feelings, and arguments for why children in First Nations reserves deserve all the rights on the UN Declaration of Child Rights. Papers will have a letter template included on them. Students will be divided into three groups.

Group 1: Writes to Prime Minister, Stephen Harper

Group 2: Writes to Health Minister, Leona Aglukkaq

Group 3: Writes to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Minister, John Duncan

Give students enough time to write a rough copy, peer edit, teacher edit, and write a good copy. Send Letters!!

Notes: In 2012 the children of Attawapiskat issued a report entitled “Our Dreams Matter Too” at the UN in Switzerland to challenge Canada's record on First Nation education. More than three decades after contamination of Attawapiskat’s first school, the federal government has announced that they will be moving ahead with plans to build a school.

This lesson has been approved by First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada .

Further Action: Have students organize an Our Dreams Matter Too walk on June 11th. See <http://www.fncaringsociety.com/shannensdream/> for further details.