

Instruction and Assessment Units





UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Overview

The concept of “social justice” is multi-faceted. This unit seeks to give students the foundational skills needed to understand the breadth and depth of social justice. The introduction to this unit guides students through one definition of social justice that is action- and process-oriented, and develops in learners the key role of empathy in addressing issues. Prior to exploring specific examples of injustice, students should first develop their understanding of key terms and concepts of social justice. Students will explore the meaning of terms such as equity, human rights, and marginalization.

A discourse on ethics and how to use ethics as a measurement tool for human behaviour is central to this unit. Students will be asked to conduct a self assessment of their own attitudes and behaviours as they relate to

selected social justice issues. Finally, students will be required to demonstrate attributes and behaviours that promote social justice, such as fair-mindedness, respecting diversity, and developing an action plan.

Specific activities that are undertaken in this unit include

- setting ground rules for productive and respectful discussions of the emotionally charged topics that will likely arise in this class
- building empathy through role playing
- defining selected terms and concepts related to social justice
- examining the field of ethics and applying ethical reasoning skills to selected social justice issues
- creating and maintaining an Empathy Journal, and making the first entries to the journal.





Prescribed Learning Outcomes

This unit can be used to help students achieve the following prescribed learning outcomes in whole or in part:

Defining Social Justice

A1 demonstrate understanding of concepts and terminology of social justice, including

- anthropocentrism
- equity and equality
- ethics
- diversity
- dignity and worth
- hegemony
- human rights
- oppression
- peace

A3 apply critical thinking skills to a range of social justice issues, situations, and topics

A4 analyse selected social justice issues from an ethical perspective

A6 conduct a self-assessment of their own attitudes and behaviours related to social justice

A7 demonstrate attributes and behaviours that promote social justice, including

- recognizing injustice
- fair-mindedness
- embracing diversity
- empathy
- taking action





Setting the Stage—Creating Ground Rules and a Safe Space for Students

The intent of the following activities is to have students participate in creating, and agreeing to follow, ground rules for the class to ensure that the course and classroom is a safe learning environment for all students.

Students' Personal Experiences of Negative Attitudes

Ask students to work in groups of three or four. Have them answer the following questions, and be prepared to discuss their answers with the class.

- What negative attitudes or stereotypes do many adults have toward youth?
- Which of these are not valid?
- How do you feel when you experience these negative attitudes and stereotypes?
- What would you like to be different in adults' attitudes toward youth?

Facilitate a class discussion concerning these questions, and note commonalities.

Have students return to their small groups, and write out what are the basic values and principles with which they wish to be treated (e.g., fairness, respect, trust, honesty).

Explain that, as with the attitudes of some adults toward youth, people in many groups within society experience social injustice in the form of stereotypes and negative attitudes. These are as unfair and hurtful as those that students experience. Provide examples: Aboriginal peoples, people living in poverty, racial minorities, religious minorities, people who are homosexual or bisexual, women, people with mental or physical disabilities, etc. Ask students if they can think of any others. Explain that these forms of social injustice will be explored throughout the course.

Class Ground Rules for Creating a Safe Space

Ask students to brainstorm ground rules that should govern student behaviour and participation in the class. Have students form small groups to discuss what they wrote.

Facilitate a class discussion concerning the concept of a safe space, including:

- why ground rules are important (e.g., to model a socially just atmosphere, to enable all to feel safe to share their views)
- what the ground rules will be
- how students can act to create a classroom environment that is a safe space for all students
- how they will act or intervene if hurtful or offensive comments are made.

From this discussion, identify the class ground rules that will govern behaviour and participation in the class. Point out that this is not necessarily a democratic process. The concern is often the wellbeing of a minority, and these rules protect them from attitudes and actions of the majority.

Discuss what prevents us from intervening even when we feel we should (e.g., peer pressure, wanting to fit in, not wanting to be identified or included in the marginalized group). Explain the difference between freedom of thought and freedom of expression. Students are entitled to hold whatever views they wish concerning the topics in the course, but our freedom of expression is limited by the rule that, in voicing our opinions and in our actions, we must not harm or hurt others.

Emphasize to students that creating a safe space and the ground rules are an individual and collective responsibility of all students in the class. Have students formalize the ground rules in a written document; this can be either posted in the classroom, or created as a pledge for students to sign.





Responding to Prejudices in Schools and Society

In small groups, ask students to brainstorm, discuss, and record

- negative attitudes or prejudices they see in school or society
- how these attitudes and prejudices are expressed
- the consequences of these attitudes
- how others should respond when these attitudes are expressed.

Ask students to share these examples with the class. Facilitate a class discussion of their responses to the questions. Focus on how these attitudes are hurtful and harmful to others, and contribute to social injustices.

Point out to students how these attitudes and prejudices offend the basic values and principles that they have identified earlier. Explain to the class that, when we are raised in a society with negative attitudes and prejudices, we tend to unconsciously internalize some of these, usually from a very young age. Part of the work of social justice is to change these entrenched negative attitudes and prejudices. Therefore, if any such attitudes are expressed in class in this course, it is important that these be challenged. The purpose is not to condemn the person who has expressed the negative attitudes, but rather to

- ensure that the class is a safe place for all students, and free from harmful and hurtful comments
- be aware of the harmful attitudes that exist among us
- work to change these harmful attitudes within ourselves and others.

Discuss how the class should respond if harmful or hurtful attitudes are expressed.

Self-Reflection

Have students reflect individually on any negative attitudes or stereotypes that they hold toward particular groups or individuals in society. Emphasize the importance of being honest with themselves, to help them move beyond prejudices. Have them consider:

- How have these views been acquired?
- What are the basic values underlying such views?
- What are the effects of such views when held by a large number of people?

Have students write a short reflection piece (1,000 words, 3 pages), or make a small group presentation (groups of three or four, 15 minutes) that addresses questions such as the following:

- Why is creating a safe space and having ground rules for the course and class important?
- Is Social Justice 12 different from other courses in this regard? If so, how?
- What are my basic values that guide my behaviour and participation in the course?
- How will I respond if a classmate expresses prejudice or hurtful attitudes towards a person or group of people during a class?

An assessment rubric with sample criteria (**Student Reflection**) is included at the end of this unit.

Social Justice Dictionary

Explain to students the nature and purpose of the Social Justice Dictionary, and that each student will be creating a dictionary of social justice terminology and definitions. As terms arise in class readings, class discussion, student research, or work on their class project, students should add terms with definitions to their dictionaries. Students can choose to keep their dictionary in paper or electronic form, and may choose to use any layout that facilitates their understanding of the terms





(e.g., annotated word web, hyperlinks, graphic support, real-life examples).

Note: Definitions of selected social justice terms are included in the glossary of the Social Justice 12 IRP.

Use students' dictionaries as a means of assessment. Have students share their dictionaries periodically during the course, and work with them to identify and resolve gaps or errors in understanding. See the assessment instrument provided at the end of this unit (**Social Justice Dictionary**) for sample criteria.

Building Empathy—Animal Ambassadors Project

Assign students each a different animal species for which they will be the Ambassador. Ask students to research the history of the relationship between humans and their species. Students should prepare a short oral or multimedia presentation, indicating why their assigned species should be protected.

As a class, create a rubric or set of criteria for assessing students' animal ambassador presentations. Qualities to be considered could include quality of research, organization and presentation of material, demonstration of empathy with their species, and overall effectiveness of speech.

Conclude with a class discussion:

- Do you think advocating for animals is an important part of social justice? Why or why not?
- Can we draw any parallels between the attitudes we hold toward certain animals and the attitudes held toward groups of people?

Empathy Journal

Have students keep an Empathy Journal as an ongoing project throughout the course. Their first journal entry can be from the

point of view of their assigned animal, or one of the other animals present. Have students make regular entries in their Empathy Journal, where they are always writing subjectively but from someone else's point a view (e.g., based on case studies of social injustice examined in class).

An assessment instrument for marking journals (**Empathy Journal**) is provided at the end of this unit.

Introduction to Ethics and Ethical Reasoning

As homework, have students conduct research on the subject of ethics, and prepare to come to class to discuss the issue. Students' research could include definitions, why ethics are important, and how to consider behaviour from an ethical perspective.

Discuss as a class. Focus on the following:

- How are ethics and social justice related?
- What ethical considerations do you think are most important?
- How often do you consider ethics in your own actions and decisions? Is this a conscious or unconscious process?

Next, have students research a social justice issue or decision and analyse it with the following ethical considerations:

- dignity, value, and worth of life
- respect for rights of others (including freedom and well-being)
- implications (e.g., who benefits, who suffers; common good vs. self-interest)
- points of view
- intent (e.g., to improve the situation)
- priorities (whose needs are met before others')
- fairness.

Assist students in selecting an issue to analyse. For example, they may choose a current or historical court decision, a law, or cases they





UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

have heard about in the news. For further guidance, inform students that much of the course will focus on social justice and injustice based on the following characteristics:

- age
- marital or family status
- mental or physical ability
- political belief
- race and ethnicity
- religion and faith

- sex
- sexual orientation
- socioeconomic status.

Provide opportunities for students to share their work with others for feedback and discussion.

An assessment instrument for students' research presentations is included at the end of this unit (**Ethics Research Presentation**).





Assessment Instrument

Student Reflection: Ground Rules for Creating a Safe Space

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Excellent structure and organization, very clear, no grammatical errors • Purpose of the ground rules: demonstrates an excellent understanding of reasons for having ground rules • Basic values: clearly identifies a comprehensive and complete list of basic values (respect, dignity of all people, empathy, embracing diversity, equality, courage, fair-mindedness, willingness to act to prevent harm to others); may include additional values • Responding when harmful comments are expressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demonstrates an excellent understanding of when intervention is necessary – provides several specific ways to appropriately and effectively intervene, illustrated with clear examples |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Very good structure and organization, very clear, few grammatical errors • Purpose of the ground rules: demonstrates a very good understanding of reason for having ground rules • Basic values: clearly identifies a complete list of basic values (respect, dignity of all people, empathy, embracing diversity, equality, courage, fair-mindedness, willingness to act to prevent harm to others) • Responding when harmful comments are expressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demonstrates a very good understanding of when intervention is necessary – provides several specific ways to appropriately and effectively intervene, illustrated with examples |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Good structure and organization, clear, some grammatical errors • Purpose of the ground rules: demonstrates a good understanding of reasons for having ground rules • Basic values: identifies most of basic values (respect, dignity of all people, empathy, embracing diversity, equality, courage, fair-mindedness, willingness to act to prevent harm to others) • Responding when harmful comments are expressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demonstrates a good understanding of when intervention is necessary – provides some specific ways to appropriately intervene, illustrated with examples |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing: Poor structure and organization, lacks clarity, many grammatical errors • Purpose of the ground rules: demonstrates a superficial understanding of reasons for having ground rules • Basic values: identifies a few basic values (respect, dignity of all people, empathy, embracing diversity, equality, courage, fair-mindedness, willingness to act to prevent harm to others) • Responding when harmful comments are expressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demonstrates a minimal understanding of when intervention is necessary – provides few and less appropriately and effectively ways to intervene, provides poor examples |





UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

1

- Writing: Very poor structure and organization, lacks clarity, very many grammatical errors
- Purpose of the ground rules: does not demonstrate an understanding of reason for having ground rules
- Basic values: fails to identify basic values (respect, dignity of all people, empathy, embracing diversity, equality, courage, fair-mindedness, willingness to act to prevent harm to others)
- Responding when harmful comments are expressed:
 - demonstrates little or no understanding of when intervention is necessary
 - does not provide ways to appropriately and effectively intervene, does not provide examples





Assessment Instrument

Empathy Journal

| | |
|----------|---|
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes personalized, innovative, and thoughtful responses that demonstrate a high degree of empathy with the subject (i.e., the person from whose point of view journal entry is being written) • provides specific evidence that demonstrates close familiarity with and understanding of issues related to the victimization or marginalization of the subject • interprets and analyses solutions related to achieving justice for the subject • shows evidence of reflecting on and revising initial responses |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes personal and thoughtful responses that demonstrate clear empathy with the subject • provides specific evidence that demonstrates familiarity with and understanding of issues related to the victimization or marginalization of the subject • interprets and analyses some solutions related to achieving justice for the subject • usually shows evidence of reflecting on and revising initial responses |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes personal and generally thoughtful responses that demonstrate empathy with the subject • provides some specific evidence that demonstrates familiarity with and understanding of issues related to the victimization or marginalization of the subject • sometimes interprets and analyses solutions related to achieving justice for the subject • may show evidence of reflecting on and revising initial responses |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes personal and sometimes thoughtful responses that may demonstrate empathy with the subject • may provide some evidence that demonstrates familiarity with and understanding of issues related to the victimization or marginalization of the subject • may attempt to interpret and analyse solutions related to achieving justice for the subject • may show evidence of reflecting on initial responses, but rarely revises them |
| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes responses that may demonstrate empathy with the subject; responses may not be personal in nature • limited evidence that demonstrates familiarity with and understanding of issues related to the victimization or marginalization of the subject • little or no attempt to interpret and analyse solutions related to achieving justice for the subject • generally does not revisit initial responses • errors in writing seriously impede understanding and expression |





Assessment Instrument

Ethics Research Presentation

Name _____

Topic _____

| Criteria | Self-Assessment | Teacher Assessment | Teacher Comments |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| • cites relevant research from a variety of credible sources | | | |
| • includes a clear and focussed introduction that states the issue in social justice terms | | | |
| • demonstrates clear and well discussed understanding of ethics | | | |
| • demonstrates understanding of concepts of dignity, value, and worth of life | | | |
| • demonstrates respect for rights of others (including freedom and well-being) | | | |
| • understands implications of the decision or action (e.g., who benefits, who suffers; common good vs. self-interest) | | | |
| • offers alternate and opposing points of view | | | |
| • demonstrates positive intent (e.g., to improve the situation) | | | |
| • discusses the concept of fairness as it pertains to this issue | | | |
| • demonstrates a personal connection to the topic or issue, as applicable | | | |
| • oral/visual presentation is clear, logical, and effective, using terms accurately | | | |
| Additional teacher comments: | | | |
| | | | |

Key: 5–Outstanding, 4–Very Good, 3–Satisfactory, 2–Partially Evident, 1–Weak

