

Lesson Plan – Justice Not Charity

(Grades 9-12)

AIMS

- To learn and think critically about the issues of poverty and homelessness, including inequality, in a local and provincial context.
- To look at long-term, concrete ways to work toward more equitable distribution and the elimination of poverty

LESSON PLAN

1. Overview of poverty issues (see factsheet) (10 mins.)

Introduce some poverty facts about BC, and get the class involved in the following activity to demonstrate inequality.

Activity: Inequality String Demonstration

Aim: To provide a visual representation of the distribution of *wealth* in Canada

Steps:

1. Before class, cut 4 lengths of string according to the table below (i.e. 75cm, 17.4cm, 6.9cm, 1.3cm or scale up to make it more effective)
2. Call up 10 volunteers and ask who wants to be the richest in British Columbia – this pair represents the top 20% of the population in BC
3. Give them the longest string and get them each to hold one end and walk away from each other until it's completely stretched out (works best if it stretches across the whole classroom)
4. Assign or call on another pair and give them the next longest string
5. Work your way through the strings until there are none left
6. Emphasize that the last pair, the poorest 20% of the population in BC, have no string, which means no wealth; in fact, they are in debt an average of \$9000

Section of Population	Share (%) of wealth ¹
Top 20%	75
Second to top	17.4
Middle 20%	6.9
Second from bottom	1.3
Bottom 20%	-0.6 (average debt of \$9000)

¹ Data from Statistics Canada low income tables, 2006 (the latest year available).

7. Or do this demonstration with *income* inequality, rather than *wealth*. Note that the top 20% of the population receive almost 50% of the total earnings, and 10 times more than the bottom 20%.

Section of Population	Share (%) of income ²
Top 20%	44.6
Second to top	24.7
Middle 20%	16.2
Second from bottom	10.1
Bottom 20%	4.3

2. Solutions to poverty and homelessness: CHARITY vs. SOCIAL JUSTICE, including group activity (50 mins.)

Introduction: By charity we mean giving help to those who are in need – there is an immediate need, and we fill it. We do this in an altruistic way, not expecting anything in return. So for instance donating to a food bank, or supporting charitable organizations like UNICEF, or fundraising is another example.

By justice we mean: Fairness, equity; the fair distribution of advantages, assets and benefits among all members of a society. Examples: fair taxation of rich and poor (so the poor don't pay a higher percentage of their income in tax than the rich), equal access to high quality healthcare and education for everyone.

Talk through the following features of charity and justice using examples:

Charity	Justice
Short-term	Long-term
Effect	Cause
Personal	Structural
Dependent	Independent
Shame	Pride
No change	Systemic change
<i>e.g. Fish</i>	<i>e.g. Fishing rod</i>

Demonstrate further with this Model scenario: Lynn's Story

"Lynn has two children in school and has a minimum wage job. Each month, she only has enough money to cover rent and food. Her children are bullied at school because they never have new clothes and cannot take part in school activities with an extra fee. One month, she loses her glasses. She cannot afford to replace them

² Data from Statistics Canada low income tables, 2011 (the latest year available).

but cannot live without them. She buys them on her credit card but now has to try and pay it back including the high interest. Sacrifices have to be made and the children go to school hungry a few days a week.”

Ask the class to identify the issues, charity solutions and justice solutions. Here are some examples of answers:

Issues	Solutions	
	Charity	Justice
Glasses	Give to charity that provides glasses	Extend public health care
Food	Donate to foodbank	Raise minimum wage
Clothes	Give to charity that provides clothes	Raise minimum wage
School fees	Fundraise for school	Increase public education funding

Activity: Charity vs. Justice

Aim: To explore how we can eliminate the need for charity (because the supply can never meet the demand) through justice based solutions.

Equipment: 1-2 markers per group, one piece of paper.

Steps:

1. Separate into groups of 4-5 depending on size of class.
2. Ask groups to split their paper into 2 and write on the top of one side CHARITY and on the other JUSTICE
3. Give each group a scenario (see Appendix below for some examples or come up with your own based on your local context)
4. Allow them time to read it and identify the issues
5. Ask them to come up with charitable solutions (e.g., giving food to Food Banks).
6. Then ask them to come up with justice-based solutions that solve the same problem, i.e. that address the ROOT CAUSE of the problem (e.g., increasing welfare rates so that people can afford what they need to pay for food)
7. As a class, discuss the solutions. Include facts about poverty (e.g., the costs of eating healthy food each month), and policy-based solutions (see factsheet)

3. Group Activity: COLLECTIVE ACTION (15 mins.)

Introduction: “We’ve learned about the difference between charitable and justice based solutions to homelessness and poverty. And we’ve also learned about how poverty and inequality affect us all and how important it is that we work together to reduce their impact in BC.”

But now what? What can we do? Where do we go from here?

Aim: Demonstrates effectiveness of collective action.

Steps:

1. Introduce 7 justice demands:
 - a. Raise welfare rates
 - b. Increase minimum wage
 - c. Address groups with most needs
 - d. Build more social housing
 - e. Universal child care
 - f. Better access to education
 - g. Promote health of all
2. Ask for one volunteer. Teacher plays local MLA while volunteer attempts to talk to her/him about all the demands. Teacher ignores her/him and walks away.
3. Separate class into 7 groups
4. Assign each group a demand.
5. On the count of 3, everyone shouts their demands at the same time.
6. Teacher/local MLA cannot understand what the groups want.
7. Explain that all demands are included in a poverty reduction plan. Get everyone to shout “we need a poverty reduction plan!” on the count of 3.
8. Local MLA relents – “ok, we need a poverty reduction plan!”

4. Conclusion

Reiterate the fact that BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada and that charity solutions can never meet the demands of poverty. Tell students that BC is now one of the last places in Canada without a poverty reduction plan, which provides a comprehensive set of justice-based solutions to the issue of poverty.

Resources

- [“We also need to teach our kids to be active citizens,”](#) Trish Garner, *The Province*, Dec. 10, 2013
- [“Housing and food are still out of reach for too many people in British Columbia,”](#) Trish Garner, *The Province*, Feb. 29, 2012
- [“Give to charities, but also advocate for justice for the poor,”](#) Trish Garner, *The Province*, Dec. 6, 2011
- For more background information, see [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's At School page](#) for lots of great links and reports, including the Child Poverty Report Card 2012, The Cost of Eating in BC, and the Cost of Poverty in BC.

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

- Explain further what a poverty reduction plan is:
 - Show *The Time is Now: A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC* slideshow: [The Time is Now on vimeo.com](#)
 - A slideshow about poverty in BC and what we can do about it by the CCPA. Features interviews with a parent struggling to make ends meet by working two jobs, and with people working on health, immigration and family well-being issues. Narrated by Seth Klein, Director of CCPA's BC Office. It's from 2009 so some of it is dated but you could pick short segments.
 - Discuss poverty reduction plans in other places in Canada
 - Start here to learn more: [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition's Learn More page](#)
 - Show *Cost of Poverty in BC* video: [Cost of Poverty in BC on YouTube](#)
 - "Think we can't afford to end poverty? Actually we can't afford not to." This video from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows how much we pay for the negative consequences of poverty in health care funding, criminal justice costs and lost productivity. It turns out that it's about double the amount a poverty reduction plan would be.
- Show *Poor No More*, a documentary feature film on working poverty in Canada (BCTF has copies)
- Have students read the blog written by MLA Jagrup Brar who attempted to live on income assistance in January 2012: [mlaonwelfare.com](#)
- Have students compare the cost of living to current income assistance rates

Take Action

- Join the call for a poverty reduction plan and email the Premier at [bcpovertyreduction.ca](#)
- Organize [How To Make Your FoodBank Drive Better](#) in your school
- Spread the word: Present to your Parent Advisory Council on the need for a poverty reduction plan; talk to friends and family; share on social media
- Write an article for the local newspaper or respond to one with a letter to the editor (that's the most read section of the paper)
- Volunteer with a local community organization involved with political advocacy on behalf of low-income people
- Get involved in **End Poverty Day** on October 17, a high school day of action to raise awareness about the issues of poverty and the need for a poverty reduction plan. Register your school with trish@bcpovertyreduction.ca for more information and resources

- BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada at 10.7% - that's almost half a million British Columbians struggling to get by. BC has been the worst for the last 13 years.
- BC's child poverty rate, at 11.3%, is the highest in Canada, and has been one of the highest for the last ten years.
- Inequality in BC is increasing at a faster rate than most other places in Canada. In the last 10 years, the average household income of the top 1% in BC has increased by 36% while median incomes have stagnated.
- The majority of poor people in BC are working – they have a job but they still can't make ends meet.
- Almost half of BC's poor children (43%) live in families where at least one parent has a full-time, full-year job.
- In a typical month last year, over 90,000 people in BC used food banks: 1 in 3 of them were children and 1 in 7 were Aboriginal.
- The minimum wage of \$10.25 an hour does not put a worker above the poverty line in Vancouver and other large cities in BC.
- Income assistance (or welfare as it's commonly called) is \$610 a month for a single person in the "expected to work" category and \$906 a month for a person with a disability. These rates have not been increased since 2007.
- Poverty is concentrated in specific populations, such as Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, recent immigrants and refugees, single-mother households and single senior women.
- There are approximately 2600 homeless people in Metro Vancouver and an estimated 11,750 homeless people across BC.
- BC's government used to build between 1000-1500 social housing units a year but it only built 280 in the 5 years from 2005-2010.
- The consequences of poverty cost the province \$8-9 billion while a poverty reduction plan costs \$4-5 billion.

1. Mr. and Mrs. Kiambang emigrated to Canada 3 years ago from Malaysia. Their son is one and a half years old. Their job training and experience in Malaysia is not recognized in Canada so Mrs. Kiambang works part-time as a cashier at the local grocery store and Mr. Kiambang works full time in a fish packaging plant. Their son's childcare costs \$1200 per month and rent is \$1250 leaving them with little left over for food and other basic necessities. When Mr. Kiambang's hours are reduced he has to take on another full time job making minimum wage as a night security person in a downtown residential high-rise. He rarely spends time at home and when he is there he is exhausted and not able to participate in family life.
2. A secondary school's computer lab is out of date and the computers are unable to run current software programs that students and staff need. Without them, students cannot participate fully in meeting the requirements of the school curriculum.
3. Jerry hurt his back 6 years ago and has been unable to work in his profession as a carpenter. Jerry receives disability benefits, adding up to \$906 dollars per month. Six months ago, the rent on his apartment increased and he was unable to pay, so he got evicted. He is 'sleeping rough', living on the street.
4. Liz has a young child with a disability. She shares custody with her child's father and is living on welfare. Because of the additional costs associated with her child's disability she often is unable to afford food, especially towards the end of the month.
5. Alan is a father of two and is separated from his children's mother. He has been addicted to drugs – but he is working hard at recovery and has been clean for 6 months. He receives \$610 dollars per month in welfare payments. It is hard to focus on recovery without having enough food, money to get around, and a basic social life, and he is tempted to numb himself through drug use.

6. Hailey is a Grade 9 student of Aboriginal ancestry who has moved to the city from a band school. She arrives mid-semester and is not successful in her courses at her school. She often arrives late and is usually sleepy and hungry. She never has a binder, pencil or textbooks.

7. Lynn has two children in school and has a minimum wage job. Each month, she only has enough money to cover rent and food. Her children are bullied at school because they never have new clothes and cannot take part in school activities with an extra fee. One month, she loses her glasses. She cannot afford to replace them but cannot live without them. She buys them on her credit card but now has to try and pay it back including the high interest. Sacrifices have to be made and the children go to school hungry a few days a week.

8. Brad is a Grade 8 student who carries all his books and supplies in his backpack. (His backpack is of poor quality and easily tears). He is unable to afford the non-refundable locker fees. He is able to store some of his stuff in one of his teacher's classrooms as she has provided space for him to do this.

9. Leanne, Laura and their two kids live in an apartment. Their apartment building has recently been sold and the new owner plans to renovate and then increase the rent. Leanne has a full-time minimum-wage job and Laura stays home looking after their young kids but they cannot afford the higher rent. They try to find another place within their price range but have no luck. They end up staying with friends while they look for a new home. It was supposed to be temporary but they've been there for a few months now.

10. Cassidy loves sports, however she is unable to afford the gym locker fee or the cost of the PE gear required for this mandatory course. She is frustrated that she is unable to participate in some of the gym activities and often has to do worksheets in the library for her gym credits.