

APPLYING HUMAN RIGHTS TO LITERATURE

The following questions help to put written material in a human rights perspective. Included are formal literature (e.g., poetry, fiction, non-fiction); educational texts (e.g., textbooks, manuals); media (e.g., print, electronic images, magazines, films, television); advertising (e.g., jingles, slogans), and commercial publications (e.g., promotional literature, pamphlets, logos, slogans).

Procedure

PART A: Questions

1. What human rights themes appear in this work?

- What rights are enjoyed?
- Are human rights in conflict?
- Are human rights denied? Who is responsible for this human rights abuse?
- Who acts to defend human rights? How? Why?
- Who does not act to defend human rights? Why not?
- What specific articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are involved?

2. If human rights are defended in this work, what action is taken?

- Does the act of defending a human right itself violate someone's human rights?
- Is the action effective?
- Is the action violent? Could a non-violent response have been possible?
- How might the outcome have been different if a different kind of action had been taken?
- Will the action make a long-term change in individual lives? In society?

3. What does this work say about human dignity?

- In what ways is human dignity affirmed? Undermined?
- Does any character especially embody human dignity?

4. What does this work say about individual responsibility for human rights? About the relationship between rights and responsibility?

5. What role do the following factors play in this work, especially as a means to bring about transformation:

- compassion?
- consensus?
- being able to express oneself?

- silence?
- collaboration with the perpetrator(s) or victimizer(s)?
- collaboration with the defender(s) of rights?
- having access to information and/or education?
- understanding of and/or empathy with people with different values or ways of life?

6. Does this work contrast the needs of the individual with the needs of the majority and/or society?

- What does this work say about the relationship between the individual and society? The individual and the state?

7. Are there similar human right issues in your country? your community? your neighborhood? your school or classroom?

- What rights are enjoyed?
- What rights are in conflict?
- What rights do you feel need protection?
- What specific articles of the UDHR are involved?

8. How can you act to defend rights in your community?

- To whom would you speak? What would you say?
- What kinds of actions would be effective and appropriate? Which would not?
- Is such action already being taken?
- Is it possible to form alliances to address these problems? With whom?
- **See Part IV, Taking Action for Human Rights, for more on community advocacy.**

PART B: Suggestions for Activities

1. Research one of the authors. Are there particular events, people, or places that may have shaped their opinions on human rights?

2. Have a film discussion group.

Source: Nancy Flowers, Human Rights Educators' Network, Amnesty International USA