



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

# “The humanitarian perspective – Is there only one way?”

## Subject

Humanitarian Education , Citizenship  
Education, Social Studies, Ethics

## Learning Outcome

- to explore some of the reasons why we need rules to live and work with people
- to explore the concepts of ‘human dignity,’ ‘bystander,’ ‘social pressure,’ ‘dilemma’ and ‘humanitarian act’
- to explore the effects of a bystander’s decision to act or not (bystanders dilemma).

## Key ideas

- One of the core issues of social cohesion and inclusion, of a culture of non-violence and peace that will also be examined throughout Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Fundamental Principles, the International humanitarian Law and humanitarian values is this: Do we need rules?
- The concepts of ‘human dignity,’ ‘bystander,’ ‘dilemma,’ ‘social pressure’ and ‘humanitarian act’ are central to the process of exploring humanitarian law and taking Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values to action through humanitarian education.
- Everybody can, e. g. in times of violence, act to protect the lives or dignity of people they might not know or whom they would not ordinarily be inclined to help or protect.
- Some of the questions that arise in humanitarian contexts might have no single right answer or indeed any easy answers. One of the aims of humanitarian education

is to identify such questions and to explore them so that individuals are encouraged to make a decision based on their RCRC Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values stemming from the students individual values.

## Introduction and preparation

This lesson sets the tone with an open discussion in which you and the students explore difficult questions together. There are no ‘right answers’ at this stage, and students are not expected to be well informed on the subject.

- Read the “7-4-7” paper as background information (Appendix)
- Print the written instructions “cards” (Appendix) and organize a flip chart for the “ice breaker” exercise
- Print out the “brave shopkeeper” story (Appendix)

## Learning activities

The lesson is organized around a story about an ordinary man who, on his own, and in a situation of violence, acted to protect the life and human dignity of people whom he did not know or whom he would not ordinarily have been inclined to help or protect. He acted despite physical and material risk to himself. Most humanitarian acts create dilemmas; in fact, many of them are performed on impulse.

This lesson enables students to define the basic concepts around which humanitarian education initiatives based on International humanitarian law are organized: ‘human dignity,’ ‘bystander,’ ‘social pressure,’ ‘dilemma,’ and ‘humanitarian act’.

Total time:

**70**  
mins

Age Range:

**10-17**  
year olds  
adoptable



**WORLD'S  
LARGEST  
LESSON**

This lesson plan is part of a wider collection of learning materials from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. You can find these materials on the [Humanitarian Education Learning Portal \(HELP\) here](#) – you will need to register for a free account – and learn more about [Humanitarian Education here](#).

World's Largest Lesson is a collaborative education project to support the announcement of the United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The project is living proof of the importance of Global Goal 17 "Partnerships for the Goals" and would not have been possible without the help of all of our partners working with us and with each other.

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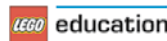
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## 1. Ice breakers: chairs

10  
mins

### STUDENT RESOURCES

Find an open space for students; when they come in, seat them in chairs. Give each student a different instruction. Should there be several doors or no window, make clear what you mean by “window” and “door.” Use the cards from the resources (Appendix).

Students should carry out the instructions immediately. They may speak to one another, but must keep the written instructions to themselves. The exercise ends when it is clear that some kind of agreement has been reached, or when – after seven or eight minutes – it becomes obvious that there is a stalemate.

Discuss what was said, done, seen, heard, felt and thought. In brief, find out what happened.

List the results on a flip chart. Probably, your list will look something like this: “(lack of ) communication, listening, understanding others’ needs, seeing big picture, compromise, consensus, different goals, interpretation of instructions.”

The key idea in this exercise is the need for common rules and the need of skills and the “will” to act accordingly. The rules are clearly communicated and agreed upon. Students are introduced to one of the core issues of the humanitarian perspective: Do we need rules for living together in peace time, in conflicts or even in war?

Establish the rules for the discussion:

- listen carefully to others and wait until they have finished before you speak;
- feel free to disagree with the views expressed by others, but treat your fellow students and their opinions with respect.

**Notes:** One possible solution might be a wide circle of chairs between the door and the window.

## 2. Explore the story

15  
mins

### STUDENT RESOURCES

Students are divided into small groups. Each group reads and discusses the story, first amongst themselves and then all together. Remind students that this is an account of something that actually happened.

Possible questions for the small group discussion

- When and where did the events in the story take place?
- Whose life or human dignity is at risk in this situation and how?
- Who were the bystanders and what choices did they make? Why?
- What obstacles did the rescuer face? What was he risking? What pressures and risks were involved?
- What were the immediate results of the bystanders’ actions? And later?

- Do you have any examples, from school, your neighbourhood or your family, in which somebody did something to protect someone's life or human dignity?
- What would you have done in a similar situation?

### 3. Mind Map

20  
mins

Ask students, working in the same small groups as before, to define the concepts of 'human dignity,' 'bystander,' 'social pressure,' 'humanitarian act' and 'dilemma' based on the previous discussion. Each group should tackle two concepts and at least two groups should define the same concepts. The groups' spokespersons then present their preliminary definitions. Other groups can pose questions and comment on these definitions.

Meanwhile, you should be noting the key words on a flip chart, creating a mind map. Based on the mind map, students are asked to create common definitions.

(Optional) If there is time, students can write these common definitions on a flip chart and give illustrations.

**Note:** Here are some key definitions:

- **Human dignity:** (self) respect.
- A **bystander** is someone who is aware of an incident, without being involved, where the life or human dignity of others is in danger. The bystander has to decide whether to act or not, because doing either may put him or her – or the people he or she is trying to protect – at risk, physically or materially. Either choice can have complex and long-term consequences for all involved.
- **Social pressure** is the influence exerted by family, friends or other groups of people that puts pressure on an individual to behave in a particular manner.
- A **dilemma** is a situation that requires a choice between options that are or seem equally unfavourable or mutually exclusive.
- A **humanitarian act** is an act carried out to protect someone whose life or human dignity is in danger, especially someone whom one would not ordinarily be inclined to help or protect. Such acts are likely to involve personal or material risk.

### 4. The “humanitarian perspective” and the time for action

25  
mins

- Based on the outcomes of the previous exercise (concepts of 'human dignity,' 'bystander,' 'social pressure,' 'dilemma' and 'humanitarian act'), students elaborate during a group discussion what exactly the indicators or criteria of the “humanitarian perspective” are.
- The following questions could help to reflect and to take action
- What is the essence of the humanitarian perspective and how you could describe it as a “lens” through which they look at problems faced by people today.
- Students should put them in the shoes of a bystander as they definitely are: From a bystanders

perspective, what kind of dilemmas would appear to them and which decision on the dilemma based on their individual values inspired by the RCRC Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values the students would make?

- and what it would mean for the individual lives of the students and of their communities as well if they look through this lens on the Sustainable Development Goals and the world around them? What kind of action it would require?
- Each student could draft and commit him/herself to a vision and to objectives, write his commitment on a piece of paper and put them in a “time capsule” and draft a project plan for action to achieve the vision and objectives.
- Post the project plan on the “Humanitarian Education Learning Portal” (HELP community) to get connected with peers across the globe.

Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps.  
Heroes evolve; they aren't born. Very often the rescuers make only a small commitment at the start – to hide someone for a day or two. But once they had taken that step, they began to see themselves differently, as someone who helps.  
*Ervin Staub, The Roots of Evil*

### Further Resources

- Humanitarian Education Learning Portal (HELP Community) on the RCRC Learning platform
- Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC), IFRCs flagship initiative on the promotion of a culture of non-violence and peace (CNV+P), Toolkit
- You can find 3 more exemplar lesson plans (attached) and each of these sessions is 60 minutes' long and connect with the SDGs as follow:
  - “Car park” directly addresses SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and can be related to SDGs 1, 3, 4 and/or 8 (i.e., no poverty, good health, quality education, good jobs and economic growth)
  - “Gender box” directly addresses SDG 5 (gender equality)
  - “Something fishy on the island” directly addresses SDG 16 (peace and justice) and can be related to SDGs 2 and 13 (i.e., no hunger, climate action).

From Fundamental Principles...

7 Fundamental Principles	Fundamental Principles components	Related humanitarian values	7 Personal skills
<b>Humanity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alleviate and prevent suffering</li> <li>Protect life and health</li> <li>Assure respect for and protection of the individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active goodwill and care</li> <li>Human dignity and well-being</li> <li>Mutual understanding and peace</li> </ul>	
<b>Impartiality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-discrimination</li> <li>Actions are solely guided by needs, proportional to the degree of suffering and prioritised on the basis of urgency</li> <li>No individual action or decision on the basis of prejudice or personal preference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equality</li> <li>Respect for diversity</li> <li>Objectivity and openness</li> </ul>	
<b>Neutrality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No taking sides in armed conflicts</li> <li>No engagement in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confidence (trust)</li> <li>Self-control and discipline</li> <li>Freedom of action and objectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathy</li> <li>Active listening</li> <li>Critical thinking and non-judgement</li> </ul>
<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not letting political, economic, social, religious, financial, public pressure interfere or dictate RCRC line/action</li> <li>Auxiliary to public authorities</li> <li>Maintain autonomy to be able to act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sovereignty</li> <li>Co-operation</li> <li>Freedom of action and confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-violent communication</li> <li>Collaborative negotiation and mediation</li> </ul>
<b>Voluntary service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freely accepted commitment</li> <li>No desire for gain</li> <li>Selflessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spirit of altruism and generosity</li> <li>Spirit of service</li> <li>Spirit of responsibility and discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal resilience</li> <li>Inner peace</li> </ul>
<b>Unity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One National Society per country</li> <li>Open to all</li> <li>Active in entire country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harmony and cohesion</li> <li>Diversity and pluralism</li> <li>Confidence</li> </ul>	
<b>Universality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universal vocation</li> <li>Equality of National Societies</li> <li>Solidarity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Openness to all in the world</li> <li>Co-operation</li> <li>Mutual assistance</li> </ul>	

Analysis by IFRC, Principles and Values department, Beeckman K. based on Pictet, J. *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross. Commentary*. Geneva, 1979, available at: [www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/405669/Pictet%20Commentary.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/405669/Pictet%20Commentary.pdf)

# Ice breaker: Chairs



# Brave shopkeeper

There is a corner of a road in Bangkok where fighting among groups of boys sometimes occurred. One day, a group of boys from the mechanics school picked on a boy from another school and chased him down the road. The poor boy ran for his survival and no passer-by tried to help him. He reached the little shop at the corner of the road. The boys giving chase were everyday customers at this shop. The shopkeeper saw what was happening. The boy knocked on his door. Quickly, the vendor opened the back door of his shop to let the boy slip in. He let the boy hide in his shop.

**Source:** Achara Permpool, teacher from Thailand.



**Source:** Tanchanok Taksiri, Thai student