

Lesson Plan 5: THE FIRST DEBATE ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Grade Level: 8-12

Overview:

What does it mean to be human? Is it right to conquer other people? What is a just war? These are just a few of the questions that were considered by the Council of the Indies in 1550 in the great public debate in Valladolid, Spain. In this lesson, the students will participate in a Moot Court Hearing to evaluate the major arguments used 500 years ago to answer these basic questions about human rights.

Objectives:

The students will:

- Participate in a Moot Court Hearing to consider the arguments used by Bartolome de Las Casas and Gines Sepulveda in the Council of Indies debate of 1550-1551.
- Write an editorial expressing their personal opinions about the decision reached by the judges in the Moot Court Hearing and the effects on their own lives.

Related National Standards:

History:

- Understands the significance of beliefs held by both Native Americans and Europeans (e.g., Native American beliefs about their origins in America, ideas of land use held by Native Americans and Europeans).
- Understands characteristics of Spanish conquest and settlement in the Americas (e.g., the social composition of early Spanish settlers in the Americas in terms of age, gender, class, and its consequences for Latin America; how Cortes and Pizarro were able to conquer the Aztec and Inca; the role of religious beliefs in perceptions the Aztec and Spanish held of one another; Spanish attempts at justification for their treatment of Native Americans).
- Compares political, social, economic, and religious systems of Africans, Europeans and Native Americans who converged in the western hemisphere after 1492.
- Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750.

- Understands the economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas between 1500 and 1750.
- Understands major global trends from 1450 to 1770.

Civics:

- Understands issues regarding personal, political, and economic rights.
- Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights.
- Understands the effects that significant world political developments have on the United States (e.g., the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions; rise of nationalism; World Wars I and II; decline of colonialism; terrorism; multiplication of nation-states and the proliferation of conflict within them; the emergence of regional organizations such as the European Union).

Materials:

Research materials

Procedure:

1) Begin by asking students to consider the following questions: What is a just war? What should be the relationships between different races and cultures? Is it right for one nation to get involved in the internal affairs of another nation? Is colonialism fair? Is it fair to treat races differently?

2) Explain to students that these questions gained prominence in the 1500s during the time of the Spanish Conquest as news about the methods used during the conquest and colonialism of the New World became known in Spain. The Council of the Indies called for a public debate on these questions at Valladolid, Spain in 1550-1551. The outcome of this debate had significant effects on the future course of world events... and still has effects in the world today as we continue to debate important questions about human rights.

3) Explain to students that in this lesson, they will be participating in a Moot Court hearing to review the arguments used in the Valladolid debate. A moot court hearing is like an appellate court or Supreme Court hearing. The purpose is to give a panel of judges the opportunity to hear the arguments and make a decision about the issues in the case. No witnesses are called and there is no argument about the basic facts in the case, for example, what happened during the Conquest. In this modified form of moot court hearing, the students' arguments do not have to be limited to the present laws in 1550 or be based on legal decisions that might have been made in similar cases. They can be based on the principles found in the Constitution or on any reasonable position that the students take.

4) Divide the class into three groups. One group will act as the panel of judges hearing the case. One group will present the arguments made by Sepulveda. One group will present the arguments made by Las Casas. To prepare for the hearing, each group should meet and select one or more spokespersons to speak for the group and a recorder to take notes. The group members will then research and prepare their arguments to present to the panel of judges. The students in the judges group should also research the issues in the case to prepare questions to ask the spokespersons for the other groups.

5) The procedure to be followed for a Moot Court Hearing is as follows:

- The chairperson of the panel of judges will open the hearing and make sure the procedures are followed. During the presentations of the arguments, the judges may interrupt at any time to ask questions.
- The spokespersons presenting the arguments of Sepulveda will have 15 minutes to present their arguments and respond to questions that the judges may ask.
- The spokespersons presenting the arguments of Las Casas will have 15 minutes to present their arguments and respond to questions that the judges may ask.
- Allow the judges to discuss the case among themselves and reach a decision. They should present their decision and explain it to the class.
- The class should then discuss the hearing, its procedures, the arguments they thought were the strongest, and whether they think the decision reached by the judges in the classroom today would be the same one as the one reached in 1551.

6) Conclude the lesson by asking the students to write an editorial about the decision reached in the moot court hearing. Questions they may consider include: Do they agree or disagree with the court decision? Why or why not? What effect do they think the decision in 1551 had on later events in the New World? What effect do they think the decision had on the development of human rights in the world? What effect has the decision had on the student's own life?

Assessment Recommendations:

Assess the student moot court presentations by evaluating how well the speakers communicate knowledge and supporting details about the Valladolid issues, structure their information in a logical sequence, use functional, precise and descriptive words appropriate for a moot court hearing, and skillfully use verbal and nonverbal delivery techniques to enhance their message. Assess the students' editorials about the decision reached in the moot court hearing to see how effectively they explain whether they agree or disagree with the class court decision and relate the Valladolid issues to history of human rights in the world and to their own lives.

Extension and/or Adaptation Ideas:

Ask the students to select a human rights question in the world today and write a research paper or speech to present orally to the class.

Recommended Online Resources:

<http://elvis.rowan.edu/%7Ekilroy/JEK/07/17.html>

<http://arcticcircle.uconn.edu/ArcticCircle/SEEJ/looking.html>

This teaching guide was developed by Oregon educator Susan Booth Larson for PBS television in conjunction with the PBS website for *Conquistadors* with Michael Wood. Reprinted by permission of Susan Booth Larson and PBS. *Conquistadors* website:

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/conquistadors/home.htm>