



# President for a Day Experience



[www.damaris.org/schools/conferences](http://www.damaris.org/schools/conferences)

## Module 4 Taking Action on Injustice Teacher's Notes

### ● Background Information

The purpose of this module is to help enable students to appreciate that these issues, and the forces that motivate reflection upon them, cannot be restricted to a classroom or an educational subject. The overall intention is to secure a chain of reflection that leads from worldview<sup>g</sup> and values to a consideration and understanding of a particular issue, towards a resolve to act differently and a view to effect a change in that issue. The issue of injustice is, of course, ubiquitous and in its very nature demanding of a moral consideration, begging to ask, 'What can be done?' and 'How might things be different?' As a consequence, it may well be helpful to ensure some practical outlets for engagement in these issues are made available to students at the end of the session. Beyond that though, the wider suggestion is made that much of what is learnt, in school or elsewhere, is in fact only truly valuable if it is applied outside the institution.

### ● Links to Conference

One of the explicit aims of the *President for a Day* conference is to enable students to understand that campaigning and participation in the democratic process can bring about change. Similarly, in the student feedback at the end of the conference they are asked specifically if they have been inspired to get more involved in campaigns to end world poverty. Very frequently students reply, 'yes', often giving particular examples. The conference itself highlights the way in which history, public opinion and governmental action has been stimulated by campaigning, and challenges students to consider how their attitudes, beliefs and worldview<sup>g</sup> might cause them to consider, or engage with, such activity themselves.

### ● Learning Objectives (from the National Framework for RE)

By the end of this module students will have:

- Investigated and studied the religious, philosophical, moral and spiritual aspects of a significant issue (global injustice)
- Reflected on, expressed and justified their own opinions in light of their study of global injustice
- Reflected on their own responsibilities in the light of their learning about their values and attitudes
- Related their own learning and belief structures to the wider world, with a view to personally engaging with it

### Lesson Plan

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|---|---------|
| • Introduce the module using the Opening Activity and share the learning objectives with the students | 15 mins |
| • Hand out the Stimulus Material and give students time to read it                                    | 5 mins  |
| • Have a class discussion using some or all of the Discussion Questions                               | 20 mins |
| • Use the Assessment of Learning activity and revisit the learning objectives                         | 20 mins |

See the general introductory notes for more information and ideas on how to run each part of the lesson. Remember that words marked like this<sup>g</sup> are listed in the Glossary.

**N.B.** This material is only to be used in conjunction with the *President for a Day Experience* in the same academic year as the school has had this conference.

## ● Opening Activity: Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Divide the students into an even number of small groups, perhaps five or six in each, and bring pairs of groups together to directly 'compete' against each other.

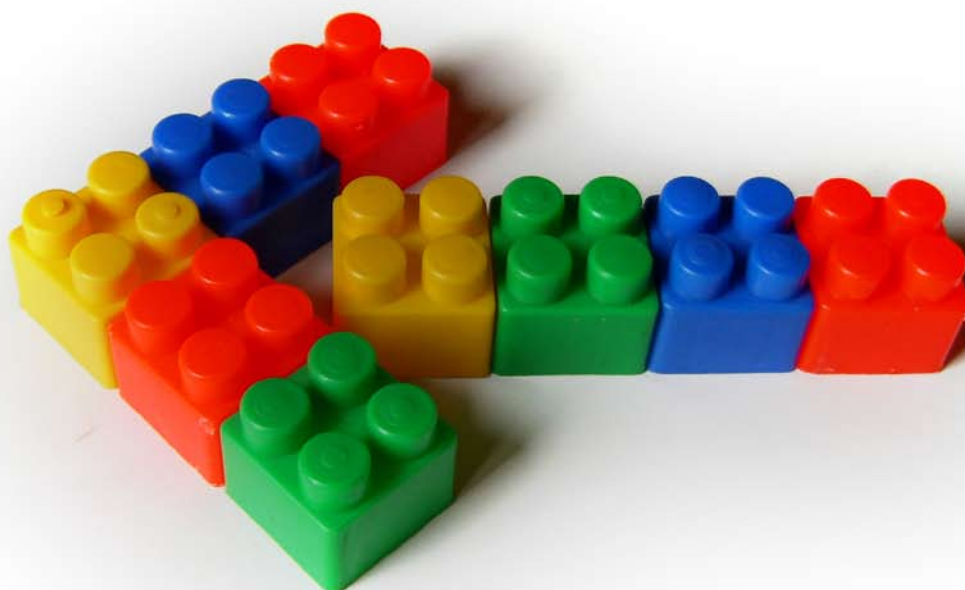
Produce a model, already made out of Lego or something similar (if resources are restricted then a particular arrangement of chairs or anything else readily available would suffice). The model should be relatively straightforward but, ideally, have a number of different attributes to it: geometric shape, size, colour etc.

Allow each group to select an individual as a 'communicator' – he/she will be the only person allowed to see the original model and their task will be to describe it to the other members of the group so that they can recreate it (the 'communicator' can have no physical involvement with the producing of the model at all).

The difference between the two groups will be that in one the 'communicator' will only be able to use words, describing verbally the detail of the original construction so that it might be reproduced by the group. The 'communicator' in the other group will be able to show the group what to do by recreating the original themselves, so that their group might copy.

Inevitably the group that has the benefit of the demonstration will find the task a lot easier and finish much quicker.

At the end of the process have a discussion around why one set of groups found the task easier than the others. Explore the limitations of mere description, however effectively done, and assess the benefits of demonstration and actual engagement. This could lead into a discussion around different learning styles but, in particular, the purpose of the exercise in the context of this module will be to introduce the idea of the greater effectiveness of action over words.



## ● Stimulus Material

'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.'

*Karl Marx [1818-1883, German political philosopher], Theses on Feuerbach (1845), Thesis 11.*

'Surely the principles of Christianity lead to action as well as meditation.'

*William Pitt [British Prime Minister challenging William Wilberforce, as a Christian, to get involved in the campaign to abolish the slave trade], in Amazing Grace (Momentum Pictures, 2007, certificate PG).*

'Trust only movement. Life happens at the level of events, not of words.'

*Alfred Adler [1870-1937, Austrian psychologist], (attributed).*

'Action is eloquence.'

*William Shakespeare, Coriolanus, Act III, scene ii.*

'All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.'

*Edmund Burke [1729-1797, Irish political philosopher], (attributed).*

'I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts.'

*John Locke [1632-1704, English philosopher], An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Volume 1.*

'We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.'

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer [1906-1945, German Pastor and Theologian, executed for his part in a plot to assassinate Hitler], Daring Thoughts, Christian History, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1991).*

'Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.'

*"James", chapter 2 verse 17, The Bible (New International Version).*

## ● Discussion Questions & Hints

1 How can individuals make a difference to issues as big as injustice in the world?

**Teacher's Hints:**

*Through this question, try and generate an attitude of possibility as a variety of different approaches are raised. In particular, you might expect to highlight the difference that can be made as consumers (fair-trade and associated issues), citizens (participation in the democratic process), campaigners (direct engagement through organisations concerned with the issues) as well as through charity support. In addition, the different things that can be offered to help make a difference could be highlighted; not only money but time, commitment, passion, interest, advocacy etc.*

2 What do you think an individual needs to have, or be, in order to be able to make a significant difference in these areas?

**Teacher's Hints:**

*Try here to get away from practical answers, such as wealth or practical skills and talents, and move onto the issues of motivation. What things might give an individual the enthusiasm to get involved in this way? In doing this you will quickly get onto issues of belief, value, morality and spirituality.*

3 Clearly a number of the quotes in the material provided, like the motivation of the founders of the Jubilee 2000 campaign highlighted in the conference, make the link between individual religious faith and the motivation to take action against injustice. If someone had no particular religious or spiritual beliefs, what might it be that would encourage them to similarly get involved?

**Teacher's Hints:**

*As well as underlining and providing an opportunity to explore specifically spiritual motivations for social action, this question makes a serious attempt to understand and appreciate other sources for such commitment. When some suggestions have been offered it may be appropriate to encourage the students to think whether the non-religious motivations echo, or parallel, the religious ones (e.g. we ought to work for the fair treatment of all because we are all human beings), or if they are distinctive in any way.*

4 A number of the quotes given are from philosophers and authors who are well known for thinking and writing. They seem to suggest, however, that actually doing things is far more important, and without that action much wisdom, cleverness and education is pretty useless. Do you agree with this, and how great do you think is the danger of talking and thinking too much and doing too little?

**Teacher's Hints:**

*This question gives the opportunity, if there is time, to explore some of the particular quotes and their background and then to consider the underlying principles. It is often easier to talk about things than do them, not only with regard to these big issues but in every area of life, including relatively mundane issues with which the students will be very familiar. Ultimately, this discussion will probably come back to the significance of motivation.*

5 What can you do to make a difference?

**Teacher's Hints:**

*This picks up the general discussion held in question 1 but personalises it. It may be an opportunity to highlight some of the particular suggestions or projects that you have identified as potentially suitable follow-up activities in the context of the school: specific charity appeals, awareness campaigns, leading assemblies, organising special events, sponsoring particular trips, doing additional research etc.*

## ● Assessment of Learning

This exercise is designed to reflect upon the experience of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as an example of an individual who took specific, brave, sacrificial action against powerful injustice, because of what he believed.

Although it will probably be necessary to briefly run over the details of Bonhoeffer's story [cf. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4906502.stm> ], this isn't intended to be a research project or a detailed historical recreation, but an improvisation around one man's experience, highlighting the general issues that this module has raised.

Invite the students to imagine themselves as the defence lawyer in Bonhoeffer's trial for his involvement in the plot to assassinate Hitler. They are to write and deliver a closing speech summing up the justifications for his actions, what he was trying to achieve and his motivations for doing so – in passionate style, as befitting the closing scene of a Hollywood courtroom drama!

Depending on the time you have and the numbers in the group, you could either get each student to write a speech or, possibly in smaller groups, have one or two students speak and the others cross-examining them on the basis of the importance of order and the rule of law, a proper respect for authority, an unauthorised use of force and violence etc.

At the end of the session, reflect together on how Bonhoeffer is now universally regarded as 'good', even a saint (his statue can now be found above the West Door of Westminster Abbey). Is that because of what he did or what he believed? Would he say the two could be separated?

In addition, try to get behind the specific story of Bonhoeffer to ask how the students themselves felt about the case they were presenting. Did they understand where his motivation came from or did they consider him to be a uniquely brave individual? Could they ever imagine taking a similar stand, and if so, on what basis?

### Feedback

**We would really value your feedback on this set of supplementary material. When you have used a module, please send us your comments on how the lesson went and any suggestions of changes you would recommend. You can send these directly to us using the details below – or you might find it easier to have one teacher collate feedback from a series of lessons and send it to us all at once.**

#### Details to send feedback to:

**Email to:** office@damaris.org

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