



Social Justice 101

Objectives:

- To come to an understanding of key terminology surrounding social justice
- Specifically, to understand “solidarity” as foundational concept in social justice
- explore the concept of solidarity and what it means to be a part of a community

Introduction: (2 mins)

For Pueblito social justice is an important concept. We define social justice as the struggle to create a society where all members of a society, regardless of background or procedural justice, have basic human rights and equal access to the benefits of their society. In Pueblito’s work in Nicaragua and in Canada, this means having respect for the views of our partners and working toward a society that provides for everybody’s needs.

When we are trying to make a difference in the world, it is sometimes hard to know where to begin. We have found that there are two main ways to approach social justice; charity and solidarity. This activity will explore the difference between these two approaches and help to create a definition of both terms.

- What is Social Justice? Why bother with differentiating Charity and Solidarity? Are they mutually exclusive? What differences are important for us to be aware of?

a) Charity versus Solidarity (5-10 mins)

We will start with Charity – most students have some sort of definition in their mind of what this means. Ask the class and discuss:

1. What does Social Justice mean for you?
2. What is Charity?
3. What is solidarity?

(Record people’s initial impressions of the terms on chart paper.)

In my experience fewer students have a strong sense of what “solidarity” means. They may not be able to come up with images for this word. If this is the case, provide a definition for them as well as some examples.

“Solidarity is a union of interests, purposes, or sympathies among members of a group; fellowship of responsibilities and interests.” (Online Free Dictionary)

How does solidarity relate to ideas of social justice?

Could you provide an example of an issue that relates to the struggle of solidarity.

(Solidarity) is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.



– Catholic Social Teaching –

Another example: Donating food to a charity, or the poor (which is charity) versus asking and examining why the poor have no food (solidarity)... looks at why and all the factors.

b) Reading: The Fight for Solidarity during the Slave Trade. An excerpt from Canadian Author Lawrence Hill's novel *The Book of Negroes*. (20 mins)

- In different groups of three read excerpt from Lawrence Hill's *Book of Negroes* (takes about 5 minutes – decide as a group if you prefer to read out-loud as a group or quietly as individuals).
- The context may be slightly different but try to determine as a group which points resonate with the idea of solidarity, what issues does the protagonist have to deal with related to solidarity with the culture she lives in? Do you feel she lives in solidarity with the people of South Carolina? Why does or does she not live in solidarity with them.

b) Group Activity – Creating a *Role on the Wall* (10 mins)

- In your group draw a figure that represents the protagonist Aminata Dallo. Write words that describe how Aminata might be thinking and feeling on the inside of the figure.
- On the space surrounding the figure, have the students write words or phrases that describe the forces that act against Aminata.
- After everyone has had a chance to respond, discuss each word or phrase. What can our observations say about Aminata living in solidarity with the community?

c) Group Activity – Creating a *Familiar Role on the Wall* compared with Aminata's figure (10 mins)

- Each group creates a *role on the wall* with a person they know (or themselves) that has been through a situation that relates to the issues we have discussed from the reading.
- When they have completed this activity, students will share their figures and the situation they have created
- begin to think about these questions: how are the conflicts we experience in our lives similar to that of Aminata's? What does it tell us about our interactions with people struggling against poverty and oppression? How is this person (or persons) not living in solidarity with society? How so?

d) Group Activity – Using Hieroglyphics to Communicate a Reaction (10-15 mins)

Now that we have found similarities in a common struggle between Aminata and the character your group has created, answer the following questions:



How would you react to these situations? How would you challenge the situation?

How would you solve the problem?

Be sure to think about this in terms of living in solidarity.

With the sheet provided, in groups, create a statement using hieroglyphics to answer the above questions.

When students finish share with the class and discuss. (You can have the other groups guess what another groups hieroglyphic statement means).

e) Conclusion –Common Fight for Social Justice and Solidarity

- Students should have a better understanding of solidarity as a means to fight for social justice
- Students should ask questions about what it means for a community to live in solidarity
- Students should have ideas about how to continue their learning about solidarity and what they can do in to ensure they live in a just society

Tell students: After participating in the workshop, we hope you have learned a little more about social justice and solidarity. We hope you see that it is a common fight for us all, to live in a more just and safe society. We hope that you challenge situations that you feel are unjust and fight for more of an equal society. Thank you!

Facilitator's Notes:

This is a discussion-based workshop, and teachers should really let the students talk and share their opinions and understandings. Make students feel comfortable. Teachers should have a few quotes/definitions about solidarity to help students understand the concept. I found myself relating it to personal experiences at work for example, where there was miscommunication with a worker and a manager and then the boss had an issue (I find that relating solidarity to a situation where several parties are involved, and looking at the relationship between them really helps).

Also, during some lessons, we found that we didn't have enough time for all of the activities, so after they did the first Role on the Wall and discussion, if there is very little time left, we just did activity c orally very briefly (4 mins) and went right into the last activity (d). I think that the last activity is a very important one, and really gets the students thinking about what they could do and how they could challenge these difficult situations. Students also respond well to the story and understand what's going on (It helps if mid-way during the reading you ask the students if they know what's going on or have someone explain the story). Overall we had a great response to this workshop, and the students produced some wonderful works for us (and wonderful solutions in the last activity).



Excerpt from Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*

The Charles Town Library Society kept its books and maps in a room on Union Street. The Keeper of the books sat at a desk at the entrance. He glanced at me quickly and turned away, as if from something distasteful.

"Ah yes, Mr Lindo," he said. "I'm afraid we don't allow Negroes here."

"Mr. Jackson, don't you have a brother in the indigo trade?"

The library man carefully closed a book on his desk. "I'm sure nobody will object this one time, Mr. Lindo."

"Good. We need some books by Voltaire, and your most recent maps of the world."

The keeper led us to a table at the far end of the room, brought us two of Voltaire's books and some rolled maps, and left us alone.

"Keep that fan going," Lindo said.

"He's not watching."

"Use it anyway," he said, "it's hot in here."

While I fanned him, Solomon Lindo untied a string around a large scroll.

"I have never seen so many books," I said, looking around and wishing that women and Negroes were allowed in the library.

"They have a thousand books," Mr. Lindo muttered, "and I paid for half of them."

"Where are we?" I asked, pointing at the map.

"This is British North America," he said, indicating a mass of land. On the edge of the land, right up against a huge swath of blue named the Atlantic Ocean, Lindo put his finger by a dot, beside which was the name Charles Town.

"And here," he said, "is Africa." Across the blue sea, I saw a strangely shaped mass, wider at the top, curving in at the middle and narrowing at the bottom.

"How do you know?"

"You can make out the letters if you look carefully. See here? A-F-R-I-C-A."

"This is my land? Who says it has that strange shape?"

"The cartographers who make the maps. The traders who sail the worlds. The British and the French and the Dutch and the others who go to Africa, sailing up and down the coast, mapping the shape of the continent."

On the map I paused over some squiggles in the form of baseless triangles. Lindo said they were meant to indicate mountains. I saw a lion and an elephant sketched in the middle of the land called Africa. I saw that it was mostly surrounded by seas. But the map told me nothing of where I came from. Nothing of Bayo, Segu, or the Joliba. Not a single thing that I recognized from my homeland.



“Here on this side of the water, in British North America,” I said, pointing, “it says Charles Town. I can see where we are. But there are no towns written on Africa. Only these places along the water. Cape Verde. Cape Mesurado. Cape Palmas. How are we to know where the villages are?”

“The villages are unknown to the people who made this map. Look here in the corner. It says 1690. This is a copy of a map first made seventy-three years ago. They knew even less back then.”

I felt cheated. Now that I could read so well, I had been excited by the prospect of finding my own village on a map. But these were no villages – not mine or anybody else's.

“Is there nothing more?” I asked.

Solomon Lindo looked at his watch, and said had time for one more map.

Mapp of Africa, the second one said, corrected with the latest and the best observations. I checked the date. 1729. Perhaps it would be better than the first. The map showed land in the shape of a mushroom with the stem shoved to the right. Near the top, I saw the words Desert of Barbary or Zaara, and below that, Negroland, and below that, along the winding, curving coasts, sections named Slave Coast, Gold Coast, Ivory Coast and Grain Coast. There were tiny words scribbled where the land met the water, but inland was mostly sketchings of elephants, lions and bare-breasted women. In one corner of the map, I saw a sketch of an African child lying beside a lion under a tree. I had never seen such a ridiculous thing. No child would be foolish enough to sleep with a lion. In another corner of the map, I studied sketch of a man with a long-tailed animal sitting on his shoulder.

“What's that?” I asked.

“It's a monkey,” Lindo said.

This “Mapp of Africa” was not my homeland. It was a white man's fantasy.

“There is some lack of detail,” Lindo said, “but now you see the shape of Africa.”

I said I had seen enough. After all the books I had read, and all that I had learned about the ways of the white people in South Carolina, I now felt, more than ever before, that these people didn't know me at all. They knew how to bring shipped to my land. They knew how to take me from it. But they had no idea at all what my land looked like or who lived there or how we lived.

As we walked home, I felt a sense of despair. Not only had I lost my son and husband, but it seemed that I would never find my way home. I did not want to take the route of runaway slaves, escaping to the Indians or the Spanish in the south. Hiding in swamps and forests would get me no closer to Africa. My only choice was to keep listening, learning and reading.