

**Title: Science-fiction or Real Life? Exploring Human Rights Through Dystopian Literature**

**Theme:** Human Rights

**Featured Photos:**

“Blue Sky Sign”



(China) Blue Sky Sign: The ultimate irony- a giant LED screen on Tiananmen Square ...The LED screen shows the blue sky on the Tiananmen Square at dangerous levels of air pollution on January 23, 2013 in Beijing, China. [credit: Feng Li]

“Refugee Camp”



(Iraq) Refugee camp: Following the Iraq war, hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled into Turkey where they were held by the Turkish army in a massive makeshift refugee camp (Isikveren Squatter refugee camp). At the end of the first Persian Gulf War in April 1991 the Kurdish people of northern Iraq rose up against Saddam Hussein but the insurrection was quickly and brutally suppressed by the Iraqi Republican Guard and fearing for their lives hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled from Northern Iraq into the mountains bordering Turkey where they were held by the Turkish army in a massive makeshift refugee camp near Isikveren. There was no food no sanitation no fuel and the situation soon grew into a grave humanitarian crisis. April 17, 1991. [credit: Roger Hutchings]

“Garbage Cows”



(Ivory Coast) Garbage Cows: Watched over by a billboard depicting former President Gbagbo, cows graze on garbage in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Animals eat in front of a placard of Ivory Cost President Laurent Gbagbo in the city of Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Dec. 7, 2010. [credit: Schalk van Zuydam]

**Overview:**

In the activities included below, students will closely examine images related to the Human Rights theme. Students will make connections to informational and literary texts that expand their understanding of global issues and their rights as

citizens of the world. The activities included ask students to reference specific literary and informational texts, however, all activities may be adapted to fit with a number of different texts that touch on the same topics and issues.

**Grade level(s):** 6-8

**Subject(s):** English Language Arts

**Corresponding National Standards:** [English Language Arts Common Core Standards](#)

Reading Literature

- Standard 1: Cite evidence to support what the text says explicitly; draw inferences from the text
- Standard 2: Determine the theme or central idea of a text
- Standard 9: Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal and a historical account of the same topic

Reading Informational Text

- Standard 1: Cite evidence to support what the text says explicitly; draw inferences from the text
- Standard 2: Determine the central idea of a text and analyze its development
- Standard 3: Analyze interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text
- Standard 8: Trace and evaluate the argument and claims in a text

Writing

- Standard 1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content
- Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing

**Corresponding Global Competency Skills:** List which global competency skills are addressed in the study guide (<https://asiasociety.org/education/what-global-competence>)

- Investigate the World
- Recognize Perspectives
- Communicate Ideas
- Take Action

**Essential Questions:**

- What are human rights?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?
- How should we balance human rights and nature's rights?
- Can human rights be sustained if nature's rights are violated or destroyed?
- In what ways are art and literature related?

## Activities

### Activity One:

Overview:

In this activity, students will examine an image using the "See, Think, Wonder" protocol from facinghistory.org. Students will then connect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Finally, students will create an educational art piece in which they highlight one article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and explain how it may have been violated

based on what they see in the image.

Suggested Time Frame: One 60-minute class period.

Materials:

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), United Nations, 1948
- [Adapted Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (optional)
- Color copy of “Refugee Camp” or Digital projector to display image in full color
- Art supplies such as markers, color pencils, pens, scissors, and tape
- Educational Art Piece: Student Planning Sheet (PDF included)
- [See, Think, Wonder Protocol](#), Facing History and Ourselves

Teacher Steps:

1. Distribute a color copy of the image to students or project the image for students to view. Next, pose the following questions in order. Distribute three sticky notes to each student for them to record their thoughts for each question. If you do not have sticky notes, students can record their thoughts on notebook paper.
  - See: What do you see in the image? What catches your eye or stands out?
  - Think: What do you think is happening in the picture? What specific details from the picture make you say that?
  - Wonder: What does this image make you wonder about? What broader questions does this image raise? Can you make a connection to our unit essential questions surrounding human rights?

*Differentiation: Consider providing sentence starters for students who may struggle with this image analysis activity. Sentence starters such as:*

- “In the image, I see....,”
- “...catches my eye in the image.”
- “I think the picture is about .... because I see..., which tells me ...”
- “I wonder why/how/what...?” “This relates to our unit because...”

After each round of questioning, consider having a student leader read out the sticky notes from their table group or from a section of the class. This will help students who may have missed the point on the question and help get them back on track for the next round of questioning.

2. Instruct students to take out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights document that they previously analyzed in class. Tell students to review the 30 articles of the documents. Instruct students to consider the rights that may have been violated based on what they see in the image. Students should highlight at least three of the articles.

*Differentiation: Students learning the English language or students who struggle with reading comprehension may benefit from reading an [adapted version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). This more concise explanation of each right may help students to more easily connect to the image.*

3. Next, give students background information on the image, including the title “Refugee Camp”:

*At the end of the first Persian Gulf War in April 1991, the Kurdish people of northern Iraq rose up against Saddam Hussein, but the uprising was quickly and brutally suppressed by the Iraqi Republican Guard.*

*Fearing for their lives, hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled from northern Iraq into the mountains bordering Turkey where they were held by the Turkish army in a massive makeshift refugee camp near Isikveren. There was no food, no sanitation, and no fuel. The situation soon grew into a grave humanitarian crisis. April 17, 1991. [adapted from Roger Hutchings]*

4. Tell students that they will be tasked with creating an educational art piece in which they connect the image to the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This will be the assessment of their learning for this activity.
5. Distribute the project planning form. Read the instructions as a class and discuss the requirements. Touch explicitly on the message or theme of the art piece. Remind students that in literature, theme refers to the author's message. Explain that they, too, will have to convey a theme through their art piece. After discussing as a class, provide students time to complete the project planning sheet.

*Sample connections to the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:*

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

- Even though they were given asylum, the Kurds were subject to terrible conditions. There was no food, sanitation, or fuel and they were forced to live in degrading conditions.

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

- This right was violated in many ways. To begin with, the Kurds were not treated equally

*Differentiation: For students who may struggle with making the connection to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consider filling in one row of the graphic organizer of the project planning sheet with an example article and analysis.*

6. Instruct students to begin creating their educational art piece. Students may use portions of the image or the image in whole. They may also include other images, representations, or figures to help communicate their message. Circulate around the room or invite students to conference with you one-on-one to ensure all students are connecting to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

7. Close out the activity by asking students to reflect on the following questions:

- What are human rights? What is our responsibility as global citizens when we see violations of human rights in the world?
- How did using the image in your educational art piece enhance your message/theme? In other words, what power do images hold?

Consider using a digital platform for students to share their thoughts. If you do not have access to technology, have students record their thoughts on a sticky note.

8. Extension: Consider the following question: What violations of human rights do you see in our world today? When you have identified a violation, investigate it further. Collect facts, statistics, and information about the issue. Finally, create a media piece in which you share the information about the issue and advocate for change. This may be in the form of an educational art piece, video advertisement, commercial, or other medium.

## Activity 2

### Overview:

In this activity, students will examine the image titled “Blue Sky Sign” and determine what is happening in the image. Next, students will connect the image to themes found in dystopian literature. In this activity, students will make explicit connections to Bradbury’s “There Will Come Soft Rains,” a short story that grapples with the man vs. nature conflict. The activity can be adapted, however, to fit with other texts with similar conflicts and themes.

Suggested Time Frame: One 60-minute class period.

### Materials:

- [“There Will Come Soft Rains,”](#) Ray Bradbury
- Color copies of “Blue Sky Sign” OVERBook Image or digital projector to display image
- [S-I-T Protocol](#), facinghistory.org
- “Blue Sky Sign” and “There Will Come Soft Rains” Student Handout (PDF included)

### Teacher Steps:

1. Distribute the student activity handout titled “Blue Sky Sign” and “There Will Come Soft Rains.”
2. Project or distribute copies of the “Blue Sky Sign” image. Instruct students to examine the image and then record the following three observations on their student handout using the S-I-T Protocol from facinghistory.org.
  - a. One surprising element or part of the image
  - b. One interesting element or part of the image
  - c. One troubling element or part of the image

Give students the opportunity to share their responses to the S-I-T protocol in small groups or as a class discussion. Address misunderstanding of the image as needed and then share background information: *The LED screen is located in Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, China. The screen depicts a bright, clear blue sky, while the square itself is filled with dangerous levels of air pollution on January 23, 2013.*

3. Instruct students to look at “Step 2” of their student activity handout. During this portion of the activity, students will consider the theme of the “Blue Sky Sign” image. Remind students that *theme* is the lesson or message that an author or artist conveys through his or her work. Instruct students to discuss the possible themes of the image. Require students to cite evidence from the image to support their analyses.

*Differentiation: For students who may struggle with theme, consider asking scaffolded questions such as, “What is happening in the image? How do you know that? Why do you think the artist chose to show... and not..? What message or lesson might the artist be trying to teach you?”*

4. Instruct students to take out their copy of the short story “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury. Students should have previously conducted a close reading of this text in which they analyzed elements of plot and theme. Tell students that they will be making connections between the text and the image in today’s class.

As a class, revisit the text by reviewing the plot and theme of the “There Will Come Soft Rains.” Possible themes for “There Will Come Soft Rains” include:

- a. Nature will outlast and man (and his creations).
- b. Technology will be the downfall of humanity.
- c. Man may intervene and alter nature, but in the end, nature will always prevail.

6. Instruct students to move on to Step 3 of the handout. Invite students to consider how the text “There Will Come Soft Rains” may relate to the image “Blue Sky Sign.” Students should draw the connection that the image and the text share similar themes about technology and nature.

*Differentiation: For students who may struggle to see the connection, consider providing sentence starters such as: “There Will Come Soft Rains may relate to the image because they have similar ....” Or “One thing the text and the image have in common is...”*

7. Instruct students move on to step 4. Explain to students that they will next synthesis their analysis of the connection between the image and the short story. Students should read the prompt listed under Step 4 and respond in a complete paragraph that includes reference to both the image and the text.

- Sample response:

The image titled “Blue Sky Sign” and Ray Bradbury’s short story “There Will Come Soft Rains” share common themes. Those common themes are (1) that nature will always outlast man and (2) technology will be the downfall of humanity. In the image, there is a bright and beautiful outdoor mountain scene on a digital billboard. It looks like the ideal environment. There is just one problem. The digital billboard is in a square that is filled with air pollution. The pollution is so bad that people are wearing masks. The air pollution is something that is man-made through different technologies that have been created. This sends the message that technology may eventually destroy humanity. This same theme is found in “There Will Come Soft Rains.” In that text, the house and all of its technology try to help the humans that live there, but there are no humans left. They have been killed by some devastating blast, likely an atomic bomb, which is also manmade. This shows that the technology created by humans can be wonderful, but may ultimately lead to humanity’s demise. It is clear that the image and the text share common themes.

8. For assessment, instruct students to reflect on one of the essential questions and include evidence from today’s activity in that reflection.

- Can human rights be sustained if nature’s rights are violated or destroyed? Explain your thoughts using evidence from the “Blue Sky Sign” image and “There Will Come Soft Rains.”

Sample Response: Human rights cannot be sustained if nature’s rights are violated. For example, human rights such as the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and of one’s family (Article 25) could be lost if we violate nature’s rights and destroy the environment. Good examples of this can be found in the “Blue Sky Sign” image and “There Will Come Soft Rains.” In the image, the people are wearing masks because of severe air pollution, which has been made by man. The right to a healthy standard of living is clearly in violation in the image. In “There Will Come Soft Rains,” humans have lost all rights entirely because they have been destroyed by their own technology. The man-made technology has destroyed the environment and humans alike. The image and the text both demonstrate that human rights cannot be sustained if we ignore or violate nature’s rights.

## 9. Extension:

- Further investigate the relationship between man, technology, and nature. How does man use technology for good? What are the tradeoffs of technology use? How does innovation and new technology impact the environment? Create an info graphic displaying data about man’s use of technology, and the impact of technology on the environment.
- Examine the “Blue Sky” image again. Think back to class discussions on situational irony [*when there is incongruity/a mismatch between what is expected to happen and what actually happens*]. Explain the ways in which the “Blue Sky” image may be considered ironic. Next, search for another photograph or art piece that conveys situational irony in a similar way. Explain how the image/art is ironic. If you are unable to find an art piece such as this, create your own.

## Activity 3

### Overview:

In this activity, students will conduct a close reading of an informational text that provides background information human rights violations of Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo. Next, students will examine the “Garbage Cows” image and determine what is happening in the image. Finally, students will be informed or identify that the man in the image is Ivory Coast President Gbagbo and will then reflect on how this historical context changes their interpretation of an image.

Suggested Time Frame: One 60-minute class period

### Materials:

- [“ICC Judges to Decide Whether to Release Laurent Gbagbo”](#) article, Aljazeera News
- “Garbage Cows” OVERBook Image
- Sticky notes
- [Think, Pair, Share](#) protocol

### Teacher Steps:

1. Tell students that today they will continue to investigate violations of human rights around the world. Orient students on the geographic location in which the article takes place, Ivory Coast, by pointing it out on a world map.
2. Distribute copies of the “ICC Judges to Decide Whether to Release Laurent Gbagbo” article.
3. Instruct students to complete a **close reading** of the text in which they complete the following:
  - a. Annotate the text
    - Underline important ideas
    - Circle unknown words - look them up in a dictionary
    - ? - Write questions in the margins
    - ! - Surprising information
    - Write comments and connections to unit themes and essential questions in the margins
  - b. Summarize each subsection of text
    - Answer the 5Ws and H questions - Who, what, when, where, why, and how
  - c. Create an objective summary of the text as a whole by reviewing the summaries of each subsection, and looking for trends and repeated information to determine the central idea of

the text. Guidelines for objective summary:

- State the central idea of the text as a whole.
- Omit excessive supporting details.
- Omit personal opinion and bias.
- 2- 3 sentences maximum.

*Differentiation: Some students who experience difficulty in reading comprehension may struggle to complete the text annotations. Consider minimizing the number of annotations required of those students or, if it is better for the student, eliminating the annotations altogether. Instruct these students to focus on the summaries of each subsection and determining the central idea of the text as a whole. Consider pulling students for a small group read aloud in order to scaffold student comprehension through guided discussion and intentional questioning.*

*Differentiation: Students who excel in reading comprehension may find the summaries of each subsection of text repetitive and unnecessary in determining the central idea of the text. Allow these students to try summarizing the text as a whole without summarizing individual subsections.*

Upon finishing the annotations and summaries, have students share out as a whole class. Students should have identified the central idea of the text in their summaries: Mr. Gbagbo was the president of the Ivory Coast. While he was in office, he repeatedly violated human rights and committed crimes against humanity. He faced trial for his crimes and was not released.

Tell students that they will revisit the information learned in the article again later in this activity.

4. Next, introduce the “Garbage Cows” image by providing students with a paper copy, or projecting it digitally. Present a **small portion/zoomed in quadrant** of the image. Save the quadrant of the image with the billboard and picture of President Gbagbo for last.

Ask students to examine the first quadrant of the image and answer the following questions:

- Observe: What do you see in the image?
- Reflect: What do you think is going on? What parts of the image make you think that?
- Question: Generate three questions that you have about the zoomed-in portion of the image.

5. Next, present the second quadrant of the image (not the image in its entirety). Have students repeat the same observe-reflect-question analysis as before to see how their understanding of the image has changed.

- Observe: What do you see in the image?
- Reflect: What do you think is going on now that you have a broader view of the image? What parts of the image make you think that?
- Question: Generate two questions that you have about the image.

6. Present the third quadrant of the image (not the image in its entirety). Have students repeat the same observe-reflect-question analysis as before to see how their understanding of the image has changed.

- Observe: What do you see in the image?
- Reflect: What do you think is going on now that you have a broader view of the image? What parts of the image make you think that?

- Question: Generate two questions that you have about the image.
7. Then, present the image in its entirety (this should now reveal that President Gbagbo is on the billboard and that the image is of an Ivory Coast town). Instruct students to repeat the observe-reflect-question analysis now that they have the whole image.
    - Observe: What do you see in the image?
    - Reflect: What do you think is going on now that you have the entire image? What parts of the image make you think that?
    - Question: Generate two questions that you still have about the image.

Explanation: When students finally are given the opportunity to examine the quadrant of the image that contains the billboard, many will likely struggle with the French text included on the billboard. Consider providing students with the translation of the text in the image. The billboard reads: “President Gbagbo: 100% for the Ivory Coast.”

8. After students have examined the image and determined what was going on, instruct them to think back to the informational text read at the start of class. Point out that the President Gbagbo smiling on the billboard in the image is the *same* President Gbagbo convicted of crimes against humanity in the article.
9. Instruct students to consider how this historical context knowledge may change their interpretation of the image. In other words, now that they know the historical context of the image (that the image is of an Ivory Coast town and there have been many human rights violations in that region), how do they now feel differently about what is happening in the image?
10. Have students conduct a Think, Pair, Share in which they discuss their interpretation of the image, now that they have the knowledge of the informational text to which they can make connections.
11. As an assessment, instruct students to record their interpretation of the image on a sticky note. Require students to explain their interpretation using evidence from the informational text and the “Garbage Cows” image.
12. Extension: In this activity, students learned about what could happen when someone in a position of leadership abuses his or her power, or fails to act on behalf of their citizens. Invite students to investigate their own local leaders. Instruct students to examine political platforms and agendas and to evaluate the extent to which their leaders are acting on behalf of *all* of their citizens. While local leaders are likely not engaging in violations of human rights, students can work to identify possible abuses of power or failure to represent constituents.

## Bibliography

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- Li, F. (n.d.). *Blue Sky Sign [Photograph found in Beijing]*. In *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot*. Goff Books. (Originally photographed 2013, January 23)
- “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is in the public domain and may be accessed [here](#).
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