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# We Can Make A Difference [8th grade]

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*Education Department*

*Understanding by Design Curriculum Units*

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*Trinity University*

*Year 2005*

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We Can Make A Difference

Lisa Sutherland  
Trinity University,

# UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

## Unit Cover Page

**Unit Title: We Can Make A Difference**

**Grade Level: 8**

**Subject/Topic Area(s): Reading/ short stories and current events**

**Designed By: Lisa Sutherland**

**Time Frame: 4 weeks**

**School District (One Designer): NEISD**

**School: Jackson Middle School**

**School Address and Phone: 4538 Vance Jackson San Antonio, Tx 78230 (210) 442-0550**

### **Brief Summary of Unit (Including curricular context and unit goals):**

In this unit students will be reading about a variety of injustices that exist both locally and around the world. Students will be uncovering the understanding that justice is not always a black and white issue and often has more than one perspective it can be seen from. Students will also see examples of individuals who have fought against injustice. Students will practice using their reading skills on both fiction and non-fiction pieces on this topic. Students will also participate in shared inquiry discussion and a debate wrestling with the ideas of justice.

In the culminating performance task, students choose an injustice that exists in their city to fight against. Students first research their local injustice and then create and implement an action plan appropriate to their chosen issue. For example, if students chose to fight the injustice of homelessness in San Antonio, then they could create a school-wide awareness campaign and clothing drive. They could find creative ways to encourage other students to bring in clothes and/or food and then donate their contributions to a local homeless shelter.

### Content Standard(s)

- ◆ 8.(8) Reading/variety of texts. The student reads widely for different purposes in varied sources.
- ◆ (11) Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.
- ◆ (13) Reading/inquiry/research. The student inquires and conducts research using a variety of sources.
- ◆ (10) Reading/comprehension. The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies.
- ◆ Social Studies 8.32 Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
  - (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution; and
  - (B) use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision.

## STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS

### *Understanding(s)* Students will understand that...

- Injustice exists everywhere
- Justice has more than one side
- Justice is not black and white, more of a continuum of gray
- Injustice calls for awareness and action

### Essential Question(s)

What is justice?

What can we do to fight injustice?

#### *Students will know...*

**K**

- Define key terms-justice, injustice, genocide, militia, rebel forces
- Background information on key places/cultures- China, Rwanda
- Text structure of different genres

#### *Students will be able to...*

**S**

Use basic comprehension strategies (e.g., activating prior knowledge, summarizing, predicting, clarifying, questioning)  
Researching current injustices through different media  
Read a variety of texts from different genres  
Make personal judgments and apply moral reasoning in response to various types of texts

## STAGE 2 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

**T**

### Performance Task

**Make a Difference-** you can make a difference in our city. You will use the knowledge you have gained about justice and perspective in this unit. Your job is to find an injustice that exist in your city and design a way to fight that injustice. As a class you will brainstorm injustices that exist in San Antonio. You will choose an injustice that you believe is worth fighting and one where you and your classmates can make a difference. You will research this injustice and design an action plan that will help combat your issue. For example, if you chose to fight the injustice of homelessness in San Antonio, then you could create a school-wide awareness campaign and clothing drive. You could find creative ways to encourage other students to bring in clothes and/or food and then donate their contributions to a local homeless shelter.

### Key Criteria:

Students will use criteria to brainstorm and decide on the best injustice for their class to fight against. Students will need to be able to pick out important information from researching their injustice. Students will need to accurately describe the local injustice of their choice in order to inform another who is not aware of this injustice. Students will need to creatively design an action plan to make others aware of this injustice and to begin to fight against it. They will need to consider the issue from at least two differing points of view. Two rubrics will be used to evaluate how effectively they decided on and battled against their injustice. One will evaluate them as a class on their decision process and brainstorming of an action plan and one will be more class specific and individualized to evaluate each member's contributions and ability as a class to implement their action plan within the school or city.

### Other Evidence

- Shared Inquiry discussion on Matthew Kneale's *Stone*
- Write two journal entries describing times you felt you have been treated unjustly, compare a time when you chose to take action or change your attitude to a time when you did not
- Academic prompt- What injustice(s) occurred in Rwanda?
- Skills based assessment on author's purpose, point of view and using context clues to find the meaning of new words.
- Writing three reasons to support their side of the argument in the class debate over domestic violence

## STAGE 3- LEARNING PLAN

### Day 1 (45 minutes)

- Introduce the essential question, "What is justice?" using a concept attainment of examples of justice and non-examples (injustices). Discuss with class the difficulty in deciding if something is just. This is a first glance at understanding that justice is not always a black and white issue, but more a continuum of gray.
- As a class come up with a working definition and class example and non-example of justice. Do this by brainstorming as a class words that come to mind when we think of justice. What do we associate with this term and why? On butcher paper we will write out each class's definition and example and non-example (like the word scroll template used for vocabulary).
- Hook- put up picture of "Lady Justice" and using our definition of justice, why is the statue blindfolded and what do the scales represent? Why is this statue a universally known symbol of justice? Possibly ask students to create their own symbol of justice.

### Day 2

- In groups of 4/5 students work to classify scenarios, judging if the situation is just or unjust. Students will then take the two piles and work together to place the scenarios on a continuum working from the most just to the most unjust. Students will work to gain the understanding that justice is clearly defined and can be easily seen on a scale or continuum of gray. Working in groups will also help the students begin to see the injustices from more than one perspective and how one person can see something as just based on their personal experiences and another could see the same situation as completely unjust.
- Introduction to *Stone* by Matthew Kneale. Direct instruction addressing background using a power point to briefly introduce China and their views on the legal system and justice. Include pictures. Broaden their perspective on how justice is viewed in other countries. Not every country views criminals as innocent until proven guilty and not every individual has the right to due process.

### Day 3

- Begin reading *Stone* by Matthew Kneale. Teacher will read the first few pages aloud modeling taking directed notes. Ask students to be critical readers looking for examples of how China's culture is similar and different from our own. Students will continue to read the story on their own highlighting and note taking when applicable.

### Day 4

- Students will finish reading *Stone* independently and make a list of three initial questions they have about the story that they would like answered from our discussion.
- Students will complete their directed note taking comparing the Chinese culture with the United States'. As a class we will complete a Venn diagram that compares the two cultures.
- Students will do a skills based assessment as an exit slip on the story *Stone*. It will ask them to identify the author's purpose and deduced the meaning of words based on the context clues in a sentence. They will also be asked to write a paragraph describing the opposing point of view. What would this story be like had it been told from Eeyore's point of view?

### Day 5

- Discussion Day. Students' desk will be arranged in a circle. The students will be instructed that today they are participating in a shared inquiry discussion (a modified version of Socratic Seminar) over the short story *Stone*. Students will be familiar with this format by the third nine weeks. Students will be presented with their leaders' question, "Did Chloe do the right thing?" Students will write their initial response down independently, giving some textual evidence to support their answer. Students will then begin their shared inquiry discussion focused on this question. The question should lead the students to discuss if what was done to Eeyore was unjust. Some students might be able to see the crime from the mother's perspective, as if what she did was in fact justified on the other hand, some might argue that Eeyore's execution was a great example of injustice and what the mother did was wrong. One goal of our discussion will be to ask students to see the crime from both the mother's and Eeyore's perspective. This will again hit on the understanding that justice can be seen from many sides and it is not always black or white. After the discussion students will again to respond to the leader's question, "Did Chloe do the right thing?" this time stating if they changed their mind and why. They will be asked to support their answer with evidence from the class discussion, did someone give you a new perspective or persuade you to change your mind on the issue?
- Students will be graded on their participation in the shared inquiry discussion as well as their individual response to the leader's question.

### Day 6

- Injustice exists all around us. After students have read about an injustice in China I want students to reflect on injustices they see in their own lives.
- Journal prompt- students will be asked to reflect on their own lives. First, they will be asked to make a list of 3 or 4 times when they have felt unjustly treated. Then students will write about one incident when they were unjustly treated and they did nothing about it. A time they chose not to act, or speak out or even alter their attitude. Then they will describe a time they did decide to take action against their injustice. They can think of a time they did something about it, spoke out or simply changed their attitude. The teacher will first model a time when she felt unjustly treated and the ways in which she 1) didn't respond and 2) did something to speak out against the injustice.
- After students reflect they can volunteer to share a stories of injustices they feel in their lives and stories of action and inaction. The class can compare, through discussion, the differences between taking a stance against injustice and just sitting by and watching in occur. This will begin to uncover the idea that we all can take a stand and act to fight against injustices, no matter how small or large.

### Day 7

- Hook- the students are shown pictures taken from the Rwandan genocide of 1994. The students are unfamiliar with this event and will be asked to make inferences in their groups, using the pictures to “guess” what might be occurring in these pictures. Where might this be? What looks familiar? What looks unfamiliar?
- Students will be given a background packet of information on Rwanda, the people, the genocide, the international response and life today. An outline will be given stating the background information of the two tribes and the oppression that existed in Rwanda that led up to the '94 genocide. A timeline will be given with events that occurred leading up to and through the genocide. Also included will be a map of East Africa and a brief description of the tribes and the differences between them, the Hutus and the Tutsis. Teacher will guide students through this new information through discussion and asking for students own initial questions on the topic.

### Day 8

- Students will then watch a section of an interview of Philip Gourevitch talking about his research and book on the Rwandan genocide, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families. Along with watching the interview students will be given a hard copy of the transcript to follow along with. This interview can be found at [www.globetrotter.brekeley.edu/people/Gourevitch/gourevitch-con0.html](http://www.globetrotter.brekeley.edu/people/Gourevitch/gourevitch-con0.html) the clip begins 25-30 minutes into the interview.
- Academic Prompt- What injustice(s) occurred in Rwanda?

### Day 9

- Hook- read the story “Make a Difference” by Brian Cavanaugh
- People who fight against injustice. Take a look at Paul Rusesabajna, a hotel manager who took a stand and risked his life to protect the innocent and stand up to those doing the killing. Paul was a hotel manager in Rwanda during the genocide and although he was a Hutu he was married to a Tutsi and had his family's life threatened. By using his powerful connections and his hotel as a refuge he is attributed to saving thousands of Tutsi's lives. Read a section of We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families that describes his story and heroic actions.

### Day 10

- Injustices closer to home. As a class students will read aloud “The Unforgiven” by Jennifer Gonnerman. This is an article from the *Mother Jones* magazine. It is the case of a wife who was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for murdering her husband who had physically abused her for the past fourteen years.
- Exit slip- students will be asked to identify the author’s purpose of this article, uncover the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by using context clues from the article as well as write a paragraph taking on another point of view other than the wife’s.

### Day 11

- Students will be asked to briefly summarize yesterday’s article with a partner nearby. Students will then participate in Four Corners where students will be asked to rate the degree to which they agree that the wife should be imprisoned for fifteen years for her crime. Students will go to one of four corners depending on their personal opinion of the question, “Do you think that Shelly’s sentence was just?” Strongly agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree and strongly disagree. Afterwards, students in each corner would discuss their reasons with others in their corner and present to the class the reason they think that the sentence was just or not, depending on their corner.
- Students will then be broken into two separate groups. Those who agree with the sentence and those who disagree. Each student will then be asked to write out three reasons why they agree or disagree with Shelly’s sentence. Then students will use a modified argument/counterargument format to conduct a class debate on the question of Shelly’s prison sentence being just. One student will moderate and each member of the class will be asked to speak at least once. Tickets will be given and taken as a symbol of their participation.

### Day 12

- Introduction to performance task. Show a clip from the movie *The Power of One*. This is a scene that speaks to the power one person has to make a difference. Read a few inspiring stories of people who did little things that made a big impact or change in their community. Several examples can be found at [www.justgive.org](http://www.justgive.org) under inspiring stories.
- Class is presented with performance task and given time to research current injustices that exist in San Antonio. Students, in pairs, will search through the City section of *The San Antonio Express News*, each pair locating one current injustice. They will cut out this article and individually complete a Who, What, When, Where, Why and How worksheet on their issue of injustice.

### Day 13

- Finish reading their injustice article and completing the newspaper worksheet.
- Students will receive a performance task packet designed to help guide them through their performance assessment.
- Class brainstorm of ideas of local injustices that we, as a class, could help to fight against.
- Decision making charts, narrowing down and choosing our class injustice by using a chart to prioritize by criteria the best injustice we can fight against. Three criteria for a good injustice to fight would be 1) a need in the city 2) impact we can have as a class 3) practicality and amount of possible success

### Day 14-18

Students will spend these five days working on and completing their performance task. Students will spend the first day or day and a half researching their chosen local injustice issue individually. Research guide is included in their performance packet. Students will then brainstorm and decide on an action plan for fighting their injustice. Students will then create and implement their action plan. See performance task box above.