

“I Have the Right Club”

Program Outline

Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia

About the Gulag Museum:

In this former Stalinist labor camp, a principal place of confinement for political prisoners, the Gulag Museum at Perm-36 seeks to tell the history of political repression and totalitarianism in the former Soviet Union in order to prevent its recurrence — there and elsewhere. It is the first Stalinist labor camp to be opened as a museum in Russia.

Program Overview:

The “I Have the Right Club” workshop offers Russian youth a forum for engagement on difficult issues facing their society today. Students discuss broad human rights concepts such as “freedom” vs. “lack of freedom,” and identify their role in promoting their idea of freedom.

Age/Grade Range: 15-16 years old

Time Frame: 1 hour

Materials:

- Flip chart
- Markers and pens
- String or clothesline
- Construction paper
- Flash cards or writing paper

Objectives:

The workshop aims to help students:

- Learn broad human rights concepts through discussion on difficult human rights issues facing Russian society today.
- Collectively engage in a discussion on personal definitions of human rights issues (e.g. freedom and the notion of freedom).

Review Dialogue Agreements:

The workshop begins with a review the following dialogue rules that guide the code of conduct and communication for all workshop participants:

- The truth doesn’t belong to you, nor does it belong to anyone else.
- You have the right to your own opinion, but facts can be used by everyone.
- Don’t say “You are wrong.” Instead, say “I don’t agree with you.”
- Your arguments should be based on facts.
- If you want to disagree with someone, make sure you first understand their argument.
- Don’t turn your argument into a speech: if you can’t make your point in three minutes, something is wrong with your argument.
- During a discussion on Topic A, don’t discuss Topic B.
- Don’t be afraid if your argument seems very simple. Simple arguments are often productive.
- Pay attention to other participants’ opinions. Don’t miss even one – the one that seems the most dull or strange could greatly impact the discussion.

- To be an active participant, make your points here during the discussion, not afterwards in the hallway.
- State your argument at the beginning and/or at the end of your speech.
- Everybody has the right to not talk.

Introduction

Participants sit in a circle and pass a marker around. The facilitator invites each person who is holding the marker to introduce themselves in 20 seconds or less, in an informal manner. The marker is then passed on to the next person, until everyone has introduced themselves.

Discussion of Expectations

Each participant receives a set of paper cut outs in the shape of a shirt, pair of pants, and boots. Participants are given to take two minutes to write down their initial impressions for the workshop in the shirt cut-out; their expectations for the workshop in the pants cut-out; and what they do not want to have happen during the workshop in the boots cut-out. Participants then each pin their responses on a clothesline strung across the front of the room and share aloud with the entire group what they have written.

Discussion on Freedom

Participants are given two flash cards or pieces of writing paper. On the first card, students draw or write down their answer to the question: “What does freedom mean to me?” On the second card, they draw or write down the answer to: “What does lack of freedom mean to me?” Participants hand their pieces of paper to the facilitator, who pastes them together on a large poster board. The facilitator then asks the group for reactions to the responses; if a participant has questions about a particular response, the facilitator asks the author of the response to explain further.

After participants discuss the responses generally, the facilitator uses the responses to pose more specific questions about freedom in participants’ specific context, such as “Is freedom in modern Russia an opportunity or a danger?” and “Should freedom be curtailed to protect citizens against terrorism?”

Final Activity

Dividing the class into three groups, each group receives a flipchart and marker. The groups take five minutes to discuss and write poetry about the concepts of freedom discussed, using the format below:

- 1 noun
- 2 adjectives
- 3 verbs
- 1 phrase or line from a song
- Any final point or comment

At the end of the workshop, all participants respond to the final question: “Our Museum is unfinished. How can we finish it?”