

Lesson 4

Why do people become active citizens?

Why do people want to change society and how can they do it?

Learning objectives	To consider reasons why people accept responsibility for other people's suffering. To explore the role of NGOs in civil society.
Student tasks	Students work in groups to piece together a narrative. Students hypothesise on the reasons for socially motivated behaviour. Students consider the role of NGOs. In groups, students research the work of an NGO or a social campaigner. In groups, students present their findings.
Resources	Copies of the slips about Jelena Santic (student handout 6.4), already cut up. Resources to support student research. Resources for group presentations e.g. large sheets of paper, coloured pens.
Methods	Group work. Negotiation. Moral reasoning. Critical evaluation. Research. Group presentation.

Conceptual learning

Social action: Action taken by citizens or members of a community to tackle a social problem.

Citizen: Someone who has legal membership (citizenship) of a national community. Citizenship brings rights and duties, though people differ in the extent to which they feel responsibility for what happens in the community.

Active citizen: Someone who takes public action in response to a social or community problem.

Non-governmental organisation (NGO): An organisation set up and supported by citizens (not government) to tackle a social problem. NGOs are public, not secret, and work within the structures of a society to bring about change. They often address issues in which people's rights are not adequately protected or recognised by government. NGOs may work with governments or in opposition to them. Democratic societies have laws which allow NGOs to exist and have legal rights and protections.

Civil society: People and organisations who take social action, outside of the work done by the government, are said to be part of civil society. Civil society forms part of the link between individual citizens and governments.

The lesson

The teacher divides the class into groups of around four students. He/she then gives out the information about Jelena Santic (student handout 6.4). Ideally this should be cut into separate slips of paper. The teacher asks the group to share the slips randomly amongst the group members. Each group member takes it in turn to read out their slip to the other members of the group. The group then arranges the slips in an order which makes the best sense.

The teacher then asks the students to discuss the following questions as a group and, as far as possible, to arrive at a group answer. The teacher stresses that group members may disagree, but sharing ideas produces better answers. Individual students should write down their own answers. The teacher then discusses key issues with the class, suggested by the questions below.

Questions

- What do you think were the main reasons why Jelena Santic got involved in Group 484?
- From what you know about Jelena Santic, what words would you use to describe her?
- Why do you think Jelena Santic and Group 484 did not leave the work they wanted to do to the government?
- What kinds of need does Group 484 try to meet?
- What kind of society did Jelena Santic and Group 484 hope to build?
- How important do you think non-governmental organisations (like Group 484) are in society? What do you think they can achieve? Think about their role in relation to the work of governments, as well as in relation to meeting the needs (rights) of people.
- Think about your own society. What needs are you aware of which could be helped by active individuals or by NGOs taking responsibility?

To give an example, the teacher then reads the following quotation from an international report for 2003 on NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

“The NGO sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to make positive contributions to the process of building democracy and civil society. [...] There are currently 7 874 non-governmental organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the old and the new registration laws. [...]

The NGO sector showed that it was capable of conducting large public campaigns that advocated for change on issues vital to Bosnian society, including youth, gender equality, environment, minority rights protection, etc. Great numbers of NGOs continue to offer services in the fields of health care and social welfare, reconstruction, human rights protection, environmental protection, and minority protection.”²²

The teacher discusses this quotation with the students. First they should consider whether the areas of work mentioned in the report apply to their country as well. Then the teacher asks them to think of examples of the kinds of projects which could come under these different areas of work.

Questions

As a final piece of work in this unit, each group could take one of these areas and prepare a presentation about it, based on the lesson. Alternatively, if research facilities are available, the lives of other active citizens in the country could be researched and could form the subject of the group presentation. The students could also include international figures such as Mother Theresa and Nelson Mandela.

22. Source: USAID report entitled “2003 NGO Sustainability Index, Europe and Eurasia” pp. 42 and 43; www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex/2003/bosnia.pdf