

Exercise 3.2. – The strings

Educational objective	The purpose of this exercise is to present a global perspective of our common origin and common home as an introduction to human rights education. All people share the same origin, the same earth and they have the same rights regardless of where they live or in what situation. This exercise visualises large figures to make them more apprehensible for children.
Note on method	This exercise stands out in so far as it gives a model of a lecture by the teacher, rather than group work.
Resources	Two pieces of string, 4.8 and 6.7 metres long, preferably a world map or a globe.

Procedure

1. The teacher shows the students the 4.8 metre string and lets them guess how long it is. When the students have agreed that it is 4.8 metres long, she asks them how many millimetres this is.
2. 4 800 millimetres can symbolise the history of our earth, since it is supposed to be 4 800 million years old.
3. The teacher goes back to the creation of the planet and goes through the main events of the earth's history, 1 millimetre being 1 million years. How long have human beings been on this earth? She/he shows them the last 1-2 millimetres and compares it to the rest of the string. Maybe human beings are not that important? Perhaps we should be very careful to take care of the planet we live on?
4. The teacher tells the students a little bit about the history of man. As far as we know human beings originated in Africa. In the beginning, we were all Africans! Then man migrated from Africa and eventually populated the whole earth. Today we are many countries and many different groups, speaking many different languages and having different religions and cultures, but originally we were all the same.
5. The teacher shows the students the second string. How long is it? Today we are 6.7 billion people on earth.⁴ Thus 1 millimetre on the string corresponds to 1 million people. She shows the size of some of the larger countries on the string. What is the size of our country? Some people seem to divide the world into "our people" and "foreigners". The string shows us that most people are "foreigners"! But we all share this planet as our home and we have to learn how to live together on it. The countries of the world, through the United Nations Organisation, have decided that even if we are different and live in different places, we all have the same rights.

Extension

From this introduction the teacher can go on to discuss environmental questions, human rights in general, prejudice and stereotypes (see the chapter "Perceiving others"), geographical questions and international relations.

⁴ The teacher should update this figure if necessary and adapt the length of the string accordingly; 6.7 billion was true at the time this book went to print (2008).